

The Parable of the Cedar and the Two Eagles

Ezekiel 17.

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(R. L. Allan)

Discipline preserves us for future blessing, but it does not exalt us in this present world.

Connected with this thought, let us read this parable.

This cedar is Judah, or the house of David; the two eagles are the king of Babylon and the king of Egypt.

This cedar had incurred the discipline of the Lord, and the Lord used the king of Babylon, one of the eagles, as the rod of His hand, for correction. Under this rod, the house of David would be humbled, but preserved — for correction is for purifying, not for destruction. Discipline plants us in "a fruitful field," and by "great waters;" but we grow there, for the present, only as "a willow tree," as "a spreading vine of low stature," as this parable has it; "base," but kept and sheltered. (Ver. 5, 6, 14.)

Jehoiachin, who was of this cedar, found this to be so. He humbled himself under this eagle, the king of Babylon, the Lord's rod for correction, and he was preserved, though "base," for a season. For thirty-six years he was hid in Babylon; but he was then exalted, proving that he had been planted in "a fruitful field," though, for so long a season, he was but "a willow tree." (See 2 Kings 24, 25)

But another eagle comes near this cedar; and this cedar, the house of David, in the person of Zedekiah, who succeeded Jehoiachin, solicits him, "bends her roots towards him, and shoots forth her branches towards him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation." (See verse 7.)

Zedekiah seeks the king of Egypt, "that he might give him horses and much people," (verse 15) might flourish again under his shadow, refusing to be any longer "a willow tree." But this was rebellion against the Lord's rod, and the Lord revisits it as rebellion against Himself; and He enquires, shall such a cedar prosper? and He answers, he shall not prosper. Zedekiah shall know not merely the *discipline* but the *judgment* of the Lord. (Ver. 19, 20.) What a picture this is! what a moral may be read in it!

Happy is it when the soul bows to the hand of God, accepting the punishment of our sins. It is the place of blessing. Israel's blessing began there. When they stripped off their ornaments, and sought the Lord outside the camp, they were in the way to a blessing. (Ex. 33) And so, after they had failed in the kingdom, as they had failed in the wilderness, their blessing lay in Babylon as before it lay outside the camp. They must accept the punishment of their sins and go there.

It is thus with us individually. We must be broken in order to be blest. Discipline will keep us for future exaltation, but leave us "base" in this world. It is a "fruitful field" to the soul. But these are terms we do not particularly like. We would rather "bend our roots" towards that which may help us in the world. But that way, which is our own way, will end, as with Zedekiah, in shame and ruin. (See 2 Kings 25) Accepting the judgment of God, submitting under His mighty hand, will end, as with Jehoiachin, in blessing and exaltation.

Such is the parable of the cedar and the two eagles in Ezek. 17. But the close of that chapter, after the parable, must also be looked at. (See Ezek. 17: 22, 24.)

The prophet here looks forward to the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, the cedar of this parable in his day, the heir of the house of David; and this passage presents Him as taking His place as humbled and broken with the nation of Israel or the throne of David, and from thence, according to God, receiving His exaltation and kingdom.

But though broken, this was neither in *conscience* nor in *relationship*. He could not have been humbled, or broken, or convicted in *conscience* (as we are to be), for He was stainless and spotless, with neither corruption within, nor blemish without. He could not have been broken in *relationship*, as the house of David was, because he was no more federally represented by that fallen house, than as Son of man He was federally represented or headed in Adam. But He was broken in *circumstances* — for the ends of the glory of God, and the blessing of His people, the Lord Jesus was, by His own will, broken in *circumstances*. The heir of the throne was a carpenter. The Lord of the earth and its fulness had not where to lay His head. He was "a tender twig," a "low tree," a "dry tree." This is the Jesus of Isaiah 53 of whom it is said, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him." But this "tender twig" shall, in due season, be planted, as this passage tells us, "upon an high mountain and eminent." It shall "bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar, and under it shall dwell all fowls of every wing, in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell."

And this is the *millennial* Jesus, as the other was the *Nazarene* Jesus. The "tender twig" of our prophet is the Nazarene Jesus; the "goodly cedar" with its boughs and fruit is the millennial Jesus. But it is the same Jesus who thus vindicates, and illustrates, and glorifies all the thoughts and principles, and truth of God. As the prophet closes this chapter, giving us the moral of the whole action: "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it."

And surely this is very much the common moral of all God's dealings with us in this scene of proud revolt. And I may say again, as at the beginning, His discipline preserves us for future blessing and exaltation, but it does not make us great in this present world.

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." But in contrast with this, just for another moment look at the history of another famous tree that was once set in the soil of this world. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, whom we have seen in this parable as one of the two eagles, was also a celebrated tree. His branch spread in its day, as the branch of this millennial Jesus will do by-and-by in "the world to come." (See Dan. 4) But Nebuchadnezzar had not previously been "a tender twig," a "low tree," a "dry tree." Accordingly, he exalts himself and meets the judgment of God. His leaves are scattered, his fruit shaken off, his branches cut down. He is left as "a stump in the earth." And then, being broken and humbled under God's mighty hand, God blesses, and exalts him, in His own way, at the latter end — that we may again learn God's way, to make us "tender twigs" ere we become "goodly cedars."