

JUSTIFICATION

The Inheritance of Mephibosheth

Saul was the son of Kish and the first King of the United Kingdom. His family dwelt in obscurity until his coronation as the monarch of Israel. When Samuel indicated that he was God's choice, Saul was astonished and replied —

Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel: and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou to me? (I Sam. 9:21).

Under the leadership of Saul, however, the Israelites came to enjoy both wealth and power. Successful military campaigns were waged against Ammon, Philistia, Edom, Zobah, Moab and Amalek. The spoils of war and the tribute money of subject nations produced a measure of wealth hitherto unknown among the people of the Lord.

Then the scriptures record the sad spectacle of Saul's desertion of God. Through the window of inspiration we behold his tragic transformation into a debauched and degenerate monster

slaughtered upon the slopes of Mt. Gilboa. His headless torso suspended in shame upon the wall of Bethshan and his confiscated armor was contemptuously displayed in the house of Ashtaroth.

When news of this disaster was dispatched from Jezreel a nurse fled with Mephibosheth the royal grandson of the house of Jonathan. Her haste to escape resulted in an accident that rendered the five year old boy a permanent cripple in both feet (II Sam. 4:4).

The victory of the Philistines over Saul was only a temporary setback to the progress of God's people. Soon David reigned in Jerusalem and the borders of Israel were extended to Edom and the Euphrates (II Sam. 8). At this point of unparalleled prosperity David sought to show kindness to the house of Jonathan. Generosity was to be extended, not upon any condition of merit or worth, but only by relationship to the royal name. Mephibosheth was summoned into the presence of the King. His disability had rendered him incapable of valor in battle or service of distinction. He fell on his face before the King fearing perhaps the sword of punishment and vengeance.

To his utter amazement he was granted a place of distinction at the royal table and all of the lands of King Saul (II Sam. 9:7). In his own eyes this young man was but a "dead dog" but in the eyes of David he was a joint heir to the prosperity of Israel.

Please note, dear reader, how similar this is to the fate of every Christian. We are joint heirs with Jesus by virtue of the fact that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16-17). Our inheritance is not bequeathed by means of our merit but by our relationship to the royal blood.

The name "Mephibosheth" means "destroyer of shame." Suddenly his crippled feet were forgotten and his personal inadequacy seemed insignificant. All that pertained to Saul became his own in an instant of time and he took a place of honor at the table of the King.

Was Abel Righteous?

Virtually all of my Christian life I have carried about a certain mental image of "Righteous Abel." I saw him as a flawless and diligent young man who always had an attentive ear for God and who obeyed the voice of God without question or equivocation. Now, I am not so sure. As a matter fact I have a growing conviction that that might not have been the case at all.

The turning point in my own thinking came while considering Hebrews 11:4 in the New International Version. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. . . ." From the human point of view there is a vast difference between being "commended" as righteous, and actually being righteous.

Let me illustrate this difference with the familiar parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal was not righteous at all. He had, as a matter of fact, just returned from a far country where he had wasted his substance in riotous living. His father, however, looked into his heart and saw such a beautiful and repentant attitude that he was willing to forgive his sins. He put a gold ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and clothed him in the finest robes and prepared for him a feast. In a fashion, his father considered him as righteous in spite of his unrighteousness.

This whole concept seemed so utterly void of justice that the elder brother remained out in the field smouldering with anger.

Is it not possible that Abel may have been like the prodigal? We have very little information about his life but the Scriptures do unequivocally affirm that there is "none righteous, no not one." All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Our only chance to be accepted by God is to somehow get God to overlook our sins and to impute righteousness unto us that we do not deserve. The vehicle which enables this to occur is "faith." Apparently Abel grasped this fact and Cain did not.

As a matter of fact, the whole system was so utterly unacceptable to Cain that like the elder brother of the prodigal he was "wroth" and his "countenance fell." The Scriptures teach that he then "talked" with his brother. The Hebrew word translated as "talk" is *amar*. This is a general word which is used with great latitude. It could mean anything from answering to challenging and therefore does not supply us with any accurate means for determining the nature of their discussion. The fact, however, that Cain murdered his brother subsequent to this conversation has led to the speculation that it was a heated religious debate.

Be that as it may, there is certainly a direct association between God's acceptance of Abel and his murder by Cain. The human mind rebels at the concept of grace, especially if we consider the recipient of grace as inferior to ourselves. Older brothers naturally tend to look at younger brothers in this way. Older brothers are usually bigger, stronger, smarter, and more capable. Sometimes they are even more responsible and obedient. That's why when Joseph gets a coat of many colors without having earned it they feel like doing away with him.

These and other considerations lead me to believe that though God considered Abel righteous on the basis of his faith, he may have not been righteous from the human point of view at all. Especially from the perspective of his brother Cain.

Nevertheless, Abel still speaks. Down through the long corridors of time he reminds us that righteousness in the eyes of God is not earned as a result of merit, but it is imputed on the basis of faith.