

## Friendship

It is written in the Psalms: "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." That is the all-sufficient reason for the warm friendship which existed between David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and Jonathan, of whom we have read this morning in our Old Testament portion. The friendship of these two servants of God, David and Jonathan, is proverbial. Of David we know quite a lot. Of Jonathan we know but little, but sufficient to endear him to us as a delightful Bible character as much as he was endeared to David in person.

Apart from the allusions in the historical books, Jonathan is not mentioned in the Scriptures, though doubtless Paul had him in mind when he wrote to the Hebrews concerning those servants of God who "put to flight the armies of the alien." Jonathan, like those actually mentioned by name, was one of those who "obtained a good report through faith." His close companionship with David suggests a train of thought on the general subject of friendship. What a delightful subject to contemplate!

It was one of the first pronouncements that God made concerning man: "It is not good that the man should be alone." Now whilst, of course, those words primarily apply to his need for a wife, they have a much wider application than that. They express a truth concerning man's and woman's need. We are essentially social creatures. We need friends. We need companions. Loneliness is depressing. It encourages inhibitions, it develops a cramped outlook and it leads to introversion, that is, turning everything into oneself, looking at everything in life from one's own point of view. Those traits of character are undesirable in the servants of God. They need friends that they may express themselves as God would have them do, friends whom they may love and who may love them.

What is friendship? Well, it is primarily the association of kindred spirits. Unlike family relationships, which obviously so far as parents and children are concerned are without choice, friendship implies selection, choice, confidence and trust. One makes friends voluntarily. It speaks of common interests, of sympathy, of high regard, of respect; otherwise you do not become friendly. A real and true friend is one that will share our sorrows and our joys, who will remain loyal in prosperity and in adversity, who will confess his friendship when our reputation, perhaps, is attacked or the shadows of suspicion darken our path; then a friend remains staunch and true. He will from time to time tell us kindly of our faults for our good, but he will never mention them to others. That would be unfriendly. He would never think of doing that.

A true friend is one who loves us in spite of our failings, magnanimously conceding that none is perfect. This is pure and cordial friendship. It is rare and precious, but it is well worth cultivating. Its rewards are enormous. Shakespeare's worldly wisdom had a strong Scriptural support when he said: "Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, grapple them to thy heart with hoops of steel."

Now these observations on friendship are well illustrated in the Scriptures by proverbs, by precepts and by actual examples. So we read: "A friend loveth at all

times," not just when things go well. Again, "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel." And yet again: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." They are well meant and for our good.

The case of David and Jonathan is a model of sincere and genuine friendship. It is difficult to find among men such devotion and unselfishness as these two lovable characters showed towards each other. Well, what was it that moved from Jonathan to do so much for David and David to receive so much from Jonathan? It could only be their mutual

interest in the things of God and their admiration for the pure and holy character of each other. The record implies that Jonathan was the elder, probably by some years. 'After all, he was an officer in Saul's army when David was but a shepherd boy minding the sheep, "the stripling" he is called in the record. Jonathan successfully smote the Philistines in faith and courage. Those were the outstanding characteristics of his public life and they commended him to Saul and to the people and David would be aware of it too.

We read in the 13th chapter something about Jonathan's exploits and how they revealed his faith. 1 Samuel 13.1: "Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Beth-el, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent. And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines, And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal."

Jonathan had secured a great victory but Saul took the credit to himself, and moreover, in the discomfiture of the Philistines Saul and the people could see the possible menace of an enemy who would seek revenge. But that was not Jonathan's outlook. His was one of complete faith and trust in God, that the victory had come at God's hand.

Jonathan's bravery was not shared by Saul and his army, hence Saul's ill-advised usurping of the priest's office in offering a burnt offering, for which Samuel reproved him. But that did not deter Jonathan, and so we have read that fascinating record in to-days chapter of how Jonathan essayed a second time to discomfit the Philistines.

1 Samuel 14:1 "Now it came to pass upon a day that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines garrison, that is on the other side. But he told not his father." He went forward in faith, verse 6: "Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."

Jonathan sought and was given a sign comparable to the sign that was given to Gideon, This was no evidence of lack of faith; on the contrary; it was a desire for reassurance of his faith. We have many illustrations of it in the Scriptures. Abraham,

for instance: "whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" Abraham did not question God's promise but being human he wished for an assurance. How could he really know that that would be so? And God gave him the sign. Gideon too, in regard to the fleece, we know the incident well. And here is Jonathan in company with other servants of God seeking and being given a sign to reassure him. In verse 12 we read; "and the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armour bearer and said, Come up to us , and we will shew you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armour bearer, Come up after me (the sign had been granted) for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel." "The Lord hath delivered them" and so we read in verse 23; "So the Lord saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Beth-aven."

We see the similarity of Jonathans exploits to those of Gideon, Jephthah and Samson who are especially included by Paul in his hero-roll in Hebrews 11, which shows that it was unbounded faith that was the underlying motive and incentive in all that he did. The God of Israel, the only true and wise God, was challenged by these Canaanitish nations, the heathen, and these men of God from time to time in their generation took up the challenge. We have read in our chapter this morning how it brought Jonathan temporarily into trouble. It was no accident that Jonathan should not be aware of what his father had adjured the people. Jonathan had set the victory in motion. Up to then Israel were not even properly armed, but when all the Philistines smote one another and fled they left all their arms behind and that gave Israel the opportunity

to arm themselves, and off they went. Saul then took it for granted that the victory was his, and in order that it might be great and complete and redound to his glory he said the people were not even to stop and have anything to eat; they were to wait until the evening. In those -days the king's word was law. Well, it was Saul's vanity that moved him to such an unwise adjuration. There was nothing wrong in what Jonathan did, in partaking of a little food. It was a pity they all did not do so, as a mark of celebrating the great victory that God had given them. But it just illustrates how the innocent often suffer with the guilty and how "one sinner destroyeth much good." But; there was work for Jonathan still to do and God protected him, and through the hands of the people - though they themselves were still guilty in partaking of food with the blood through them Jonathan was spared in order that he might carry out much further work in the service of God.

Well, Jonathan, we may rest assured, took no part in the later war with Amalek about which we shall be reading in a day or two, nor does it seem that he was present in the army of 'Israel when Goliath challenged them and challenged the Lord God of Israel. It was then left to David, the shepherd boy, to follow Jonathan's example in vindicating the Truth in the earth. So, comparable to Jonathan, David takes his place: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" Well, we all know the sequel to that incident.

After the victory over Goliath Saul said to Abner, the captain of the host: "Enquire thou whose son the stripling is." And David was brought before Saul and Jonathan was then present. So we read in chapter 17.57: "As David returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the

head of the Philistine in his hand. And Saul said to him, Whose son art thou, thou young man? And David, answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the bethlehemite. And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." There was the basis of the friendship.

We do not know for certain, of course, that Jonathan's previous bravery was known to David but it is a very fair assumption that it was and that it moved him to take his place among the valiant men in Saul's army. Certainly it was the basis of this undying affection. So we read in chapter 18:3, "Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul." And thus began a friendship which lasted throughout Jonathan's life, a friendship which, humanly speaking, began in a most unpromising way and had everything against it. After all, Jonathan was the heir-apparent to the throne. He was the older of the two. Yet he was to be supplanted by his friend, and he knew it.

David became a fugitive from the irascible temper of Jonathan's bad father. Jonathan might well have shown bitterness that David, the younger, should outpace him in glory and honour. That would have been human. But no, he did not do that at all. Love, confidence, loyalty, devotion to his friend triumphed over all these obstacles and the friendship was cemented. Now we read in Chapter 19:1. "Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David," but Jonathan did his best by various means to avoid Saul's intention coming to pass. Chapter 20:1, "David fled from Naioth in Remah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? What is mine iniquity? And what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me." That shows what confidence Saul had in Jonathan, no doubt because he was a very successful warrior, and Jonathan used that confidence of his father to protect his friend David. Many similar illustrations could be given.

Most pathetic of all is David's final reference to the friendship in that eloquent elegy uttered on the death of Jonathan. We read it in 2 Samuel 1:25-27 "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" How unutterably sad!

Here we have, then, a powerful scriptural example of friendship between two noble servants of God. We notice how it portrays fidelity, loyalty, unselfishness, trust, tenderness and sincerity, and it sets - as all the Scriptures are intended to do - a wonderful example to the servants of God of true companionship as it should exist among them. We say again, we all need friends, every one of us, wise and true friends of the Jonathan and David type. It is written, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." What better influence can there be in our lives, than that which comes from the association with faithful, good, earnest and sincere brethren and sisters of the Lord?

But the perfect friendship - as with David and Jonathan so far as anything could be perfect in human relations - must, of course, be mutual and reciprocal. If we would have friends of the right sort we must ourselves first be sure that we are a suitable friend for others to cultivate as far as we are concerned. That means then that, like Jonathan and David, we must develop first faith and uprightness of life in ourselves. We must strive to be wise that other wise men and women will desire to walk with us. That forms the companionship. The magnet and the steel principle must characterise our friendships, though who is the magnet and who is the steel in any particular friendship is a matter best never settled. Each reacts on the other for good. Perhaps if there be any difference it is possibly the older in years and in experience who is the magnet for the younger.

Now in writing to Timothy Paul gave some sound advice to his son in the faith on the matter of companions. Let us look at that. 2 Timothy 2:22. Paul, says there; "Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Those are the characteristics of those whom Paul would have to be companions for Timothy. They are the companions to cultivate, those who will help by their example, their wisdom", their nobility, their courage, their zeal. These qualities that Paul here names in this passage to Timothy are as the ointment and the perfume in friendship which rejoices the heart.

But let our friendships be of a practical nature. We must apply these principles in our lives. Clearly, if we are to make the right friends, there are friendships to avoid. So James says, "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of .the world is the enemy of God." No servant of God, then, can make friendships with the world. Obviously the reason is that there can be no mutual interests, no common basis. If we are tempted to make friends with the world it shows that there is something radically wrong with our own outlook, something has gone wrong within us and with our faith. You know it is said 'Birds, of a feather flock together', and if we find company and pleasure outside the Truth it means surely that our own interests within the Truth are flagging, that we are getting a wrong perspective, that, the things that matter in life are being put on one side and we are developing tastes which are not in accordance with the will of God. That surely is the warning to us in relation to our friendships. We must find them within the Truth itself!

But where and how are we to enjoy the good companionship of each other? Well, much, depends on circumstances. There is not much room at all in the Truth for close social life. If we are doing our duties faithfully we have not got a lot of time for it. By the time we have earned our daily bread and done our daily readings and attended to the things of the Truth in all the practical matters that are upon us, there is not a great deal of time left for social intercourse, but nevertheless there is some and that should be used to the fullest advantage to the spiritual benefit of each other.

Not, all have the same opportunities as we have. There are some in isolation to whom the problem is very real. They cannot make friends. They must not make friends outside and there is no one within reach, within miles, with whom they can be friendly in the Truth. That is where our duty shows us that we must pray for them and help them in the

various ways that are at our disposal. Here is one aspect of our fraternal meetings which is invaluable to such brethren and sisters. Those meetings which form a kind of rallying ground where the servants of God can become acquainted with one another and can manifest hospitality and can learn of the needs and circumstances of those who come from afar. There is the work of those who prepare and send out the weekly exhortations. That is a friendly act of the warmest kind to our dear brethren and sisters who are in isolation. And the brethren who prepare those addresses which are thus taken down can feel that they are taking part in that, and see that they prepare their addresses well and properly in order that our brethren and sisters, wherever they may be throughout the world, get the maximum of benefit.

Then there are our own particular opportunities, the many meetings that we hold. Let us try to look at the meetings from this point of view. They serve many purposes. Of course, we come primarily to educate one another. We come to a Bible Class for Bible study, but it is not only for that. There is much more in it than that. The meeting is opened with hymn and prayer. That is united worship. Then we meditate upon the Scriptures. Our very presence is a help to one another, a friendly act. And when the meeting is over it is the opportunity to have friendly intercourse the one with the other on the things of the Truth. Many maybe are not able to see the brethren and sisters at any other time than just when they come to the meetings. What an opportunity, then, for us all to exert our maximum influence in the right direction!

Do not let us meet in cliques; just have our special friends and that is all. All the brethren and sisters need friends, as we do, so let our circle be as large as it can possibly be. Sometimes we are criticised for the noise and commotion at the beginning of the meetings and at the end of the meetings. Well, perhaps there is another way of even looking at that. I am not saying that we should be noisy, especially on Sunday mornings, but if it is an evidence of the real, pure, unalloyed joy of the brethren and sisters in meeting one another and the enthusiasm at seeing one another's face, the desire to foster the spirit of love and happiness in each other's company, then do not let us get irritated because it turns out in the end to be a little bit noisy and perhaps boisterous. There is a reason for it. That is, of course, provided the brethren and sisters are talking about the right things.

That is friendship it seems to me, as it should exist between the brethren and sisters of Christ. It can go further than that. Some have facilities which others have not. Home life can be shared, arrangements made for pleasant evenings around the Word, brethren and sisters will share their pleasures as friends, outings maybe in the summer, joint holidays, fireside talks in the winter, not just on a social basis but on the basis of being companions of them that fear God and that keep His precepts.

Above all, let us cultivate the friendship of Christ. Jesus has said; "Henceforth I call you not servants" - that is, as it were, an inferior position – "but I have called you friends." A friend of Christ! The youngest brother and sister present here and the oldest can feel a sense of friendship with Christ if they are striving to develop the true principles of friendship about which we have spoken and of which the case of David and Jonathan is a beautiful example. "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." All that goes to make up pure and noble friendship finds expression without measure in Christ. Our love for him can be unalloyed. It is written: "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." That is Christ, "Lo, I am with you always,

even unto the end of the world." His sympathy, his understanding, his love is inexhaustible, and he knows our difficulties. He does not expect perfection, but he does ask us to serve him to the best of our ability.

As for his words, they may wound sometimes, but as we have already quoted, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." As for his love, it is quite unquenchable. "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end." His tokens of friendship are self-evident, "I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Just as God said of Abraham, His friend; "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do? For I know him, that he will command .. his household .." So Christ has confided in us, giving us his last message as a personal message to us, his friends, telling us beforehand what he is doing and what it is leading to, that day of happy reunion when the friends will gather together.

So then these are the thoughts that arise as we think of friendship. We come to the Table and we are brought to that wonderful statement of the Lord himself; "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Christ has given his life. He could give no more. No passage of time will efface from the memory of Christ that of his friends. When he returns he will know them all and summon them to himself.

What are we, then, to think of Christ? Can we say, in the words of the Song of Solomon; "His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

One final, thought. It is said, 'A man is known by the company he keeps.' Let it be said of us, when our contemporaries observe our manner of life, that we have "been with Jesus." He is here this morning with us in spirit. Soon he will appear in person to honour and to glorify his friends. When he comes there is to be a most joyful sitting down at his table in his kingdom. You know, we honour our friends with a place at our table and we serve them. It is a mark of human friendship and it is carried into the Divine circle.

So if we are faithful the time will come when we shall be invited to sit at the Lord's own table and then he will say to us, in the words of the Song of Solomon:

"Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

(1967, HA)