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THE REWARD OF SACRIFICE

by

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Back of the theme of the Fellowcraft degree, is the life story of a man who triumphed over severe handicaps and continual persecution, to emerge as the leader and saviour of his people, in a crisis which he alone, of all his race, was peculiarly fitted to meet and solve. To a determined man resistance and opposition results in greater determination and skill, in finding ways and means for surmounting that opposition, and if it is to formidable to overcome, he will look for and find some method to get around it.

History as recorded in the Volume of the Sacred Law, the 11th Chapter of Judges, tells us of a renowned Gilliadiatish General, named Jephtha, a mighty warrior and leader of men, who in time of great danger to his people, was called by them to lead the armies against the Ephraimites, who threatened to destroy their cities and enslave the inhabitants.

Where did Jephtha acquire his skill as a soldier and leader of men? Who was Jephtha and what was the background from which he gained that skill and ability? Jephtha was an illegitimate son and thereby greatly handicapped in his childhood and youth, because of the hatred of his brothers, the legitimate heirs of his Father, by the time he had grown to manhood this hatred had grown so strong that

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the Father was forced by his sons to drive Jephtha out of the home, to fare for himself as best he could. Without home or land or cattle to keep him, he and the band of men he gathered around him, turned to hunting in the hills for their food, and when need arose they raided the storehouses of the people of the valleys.

Time after time soldiers were sent into the hills to capture and destroy this band of outlaws, but owing to their better knowledge of the country, acquired from years of living in the open, Jephtha and his men were able to escape capture. The soldiers were never able to catch them and had to report failure after each attempt.

This continual hunting and being hunted, resulted in Jephtha and his men becoming skilled warriors. Keen of sight and hearing - strong of body and swift in their movements. Jephtha married and had one daughter whom he loved more than life itself, and while he was more or less an outlaw in the eyes of the authorities, he was a deeply religious man and highly regarded by a great many of the people of Israel

The long threatened invasion by the Ephraimites was now about to become a reality and in all Israel there was no man in whom the authorities had sufficient faith to entrust the leadership of the armies.

The people urged the rulers to send for Jephtha, and finally in desperation they did so, promising him not only freedom but honour if he would but save them from destruction. Jephtha came, re-organized the fighting forces

and went out to battle. As I have already told you, Jephtha was a religious man and fully realized his dependence upon the Great Creator. He made a vow to God to sacrifice the first living thing which came to meet him on his return from the war, if God would only give him Victory over the enemy. History also tells that he first tried all lenient means to appease them but the Ephraimites thinking it showed fear and weakness to try to settle their differences amicably, were determined to fight.

The army crossed the Jordan into Isreal's territory, where Jephtha and his men awaited them, history tells that the Ephraimites were defeated, put to flight and when they tried to flee back to their own country, they found that Jephtha had placed soldiers at the fords with instructions to destroy any of the enemy who attempted to cross.

The armies in ancient times were small when compared with those of today, so when we read in the Scriptures that forty and two thousand were slain, it does not mean 42,000 but 2, 040. In any event the victory was complete. The man who had been an outcast and an outlaw, became the hero of the people. By his energy and determination and faith in God, he had been able to overcome the obstacles in his path, and was now acclaimed as the greatest leader in the land.

The lesson is there for each of us to contemplate and to apply to our efforts to solve the problems of our daily lives. It lies wholly in our willingness and courage to tackle these problems with the same spirit and determination that Jephtha did in his day. We all have handicaps or problems or shortcomings, which if we really wanted to badly enough, we could overcome or correct, and we would do well to study and think about this man Jephtha. Bearing in mind that his success was not wholly due to his own efforts, but through his faith in God and his dependence upon Him for guidance and strength, he was able to overcome his difficulties and succeed against tremendous odds.

The final chapter in Jephtha's life is sadness. He paid a very high price, personally, for the support which God gave him against the enemy. You will recall when he asked God to give him victory over the Ephraimites, he promised to sacrifice the first living thing which came to meet him on his return from the war. How his heart must have ached, when nearing his home, his lovely daughter ran to greet him with joy and thanksgiving for his safe return. The great victory turned to bitter sorrow, for this man who had suffered so much from his people, and now because of victory, was compelled to suffer again in keeping his promise to God.

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To achieve success in any endeavour we must be prepared to sacrifice time, comfort and sometimes even friends and happiness. The boy born with a silver spoon in his mouth very often does not amount to much, things come too easy for him, where-as the boy who is born into a family where hardship and want is the daily portion, and where he has to struggle and strive to gain knowledge, skill and education, so often rises to leadership and real usefulness in the battle of life. The great musicians spend hours every day in practice - champions in every line of sport must adhere to rigid discipline and exercise, or lose the crown. We as Freemasons, need to exercise too if we are to measure up to the standards we have set for ourselves.

The junior officers, who some day hope to sit in the East and rule the lodge, must be willing to sacrifice some of their time and pleasure, to acquire skill in performance of the duties of the office which they hold.

Study of the words of the ritual is not enough, but study and practice of the proper expression of those words, so that the candidate may clearly grasp

the import of the lesson taught, should be the real aim of every officer. He should determine that the first rung of the ladder which he expects to climb to the Master's chair, will be regular attendance, and the next punctuality. The practice of these two virtues will not only be useful to him in his progress through Freemasonry, but will extend to every department of his daily life, and prove to be a vital force toward success in whatever vocation he may be engaged. Another important rung in the ladder is an active interest in the business of the Lodge, giving thought and consideration to the problems which arise from time to time, and accepting duties which may not always be just as pleasant as he would like. By calling now and then on those Brethren who do not attend regularly for some reason or other, and after determining the cause endeavour to correct or eliminate it.

This Masonic duty is not limited to the Officers, nor to any committee, but should be practiced, in some degree, by every member of the fraternity. The real pleasure resulting from a friendly visit to a Brother who is ill, or who has possibly just lost interest, is ample reward for the effort it may take to drop in and chat for a few moments. We all profess to admire the excellent principles of Freemasonry. We enjoy being associated with a Fraternity whose branches are spread over the four divisions of the globe and whose efforts is promoting goodwill, tolerance and benevolence toward those less fortunate, has contributed so much to the advancement of civilization in the years that have gone.

We must not overlook the fact that all these accomplishments, of which we are likely to boast, all of these fine acts of kindness, mercy and helpfulness, to which we point with pride when we talk of the fine record of Freemasonry, are made up of thousands of small individual acts performed by our Brethren everywhere. They are the sum of the practical application of our teachings in the lives of the ordinary Brother Masons, like you and I.

If this good work is to go on, if Freemasonry is to continue as one of the greatest influences for freedom, decency and stability in the world, then you and I and thousands of other Brethren like us, must practice the doing of these little kindnesses which help go much materially in making life more pleasant for those around us. Let us do the little things cheerfully and well, and sooner or later we will become experienced enough to enable the Grand Geometrician to rely on us for greater things. He, in His great wisdom knows our limitations much better than we ourselves know them and when by constant practice we have become proficient in solving the problems of living our personal lives according to His plan, then He will entrust us a more important part of His ultimate plan for a world of peace and goodwill among men.
