

1 Samuel - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Things New and Old: Volume 25, Victory of Christ, and Its Effects on Those Who Believe, The

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"He loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle."—1 Sam. 18:3, 4.

David, as many know, was a remarkable type of Jesus, especially as the rejected One; and Solomon typified Jesus as the reigning One.

David was spoken of as a man after God's own heart; and, if an erring mortal man was thus described, how much more truly could it be said of Jesus! of whom, after thirty years of stranger-ship, temptation, and tears, in this death-stricken world, the voice from the excellent glory declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." So exactly was He after God's own heart, that He could say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father;" and the Holy Ghost, when speaking of Him, says, He was God "manifest in the flesh."

David also had been anointed according to the will of God. Having been divinely chosen from among the people, Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren. (1 Sam. 16:12, 13.) He was God's king, and destined to sit in royal majesty upon the holy hill of Zion. And was not Jesus Jehovah's elect Servant? Was He not anointed with the Holy Ghost? Did not the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, in bodily shape, as a dove, and abide upon Him, because He was the true Messiah? And was it not the angel Gabriel, in connection with His coming into the world, who said, "the Lord shall give unto him the throne of his father, David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end?" (Luke 1:31-33.)

David was also a shepherd. (1 Sam. 17:15.) We are told that God "chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young, he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them according to the skillfulness of his hands." (Psalm 78:70-72.) And cannot we perceive a greater than David here? Does it not strikingly remind us of Him who said, "I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.....My sheep hear my voice," &c.? Surely none but He who is the great and chief Shepherd of the sheep could say, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock, and one shepherd." And again, "Feed my lambs..... Feed my sheep." (John 10; 21) What a Shepherd and Bishop of souls He is!

But though David was at this time the king of Jehovah's choice, and destined to rule His people, Israel, yet we find him despised and rejected of men. His quieting the troubled spirit of Saul by the melodious tone of the harp-strings which he touched, recalls to our minds the state of many in Christendom, who think of Jesus merely as an object of interest, and admire the sweet sound of gospel truth, instead of receiving the Lord Jesus! as their Savior from coming wrath, and His blood as that which can alone purge their consciences,, and make them fit for God's holy presence. To see the Savior's miracles, to behold His inimitable ways, and listen to His marvelous utterances, were to many who thronged Him only like a pleasant song to interest and quiet the natural mind.

If Jesus came unto His own, and His own received Him not; if, too, it is recorded that "neither did his brethren believe on him;" and if others ascribed His mighty power to Satanic influence, we read that David was so despised by his brethren that they ascribed his devotedness to the God of Israel to pride and naughtiness of heart. (Ver. 28.)

But David was an obedient son, who did his father's will, and that, too, in ministering to his brethren, and seeking their welfare. "Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp of thy brethren: and carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge." (Vers. 17, 18.) And does not this recall Him to our minds whose "meat was to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work"? Truly He could say, "I do always those things that please him;" and at the close He bowed His head in death, with, "It is finished;" "I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And if David's heart was set on the welfare of his brethren, how incomparably more was it true of Jesus, who "came forth from the Father," and "came unto his own," who "came to seek and to save that which was lost!"

And yet further, for if David in his mission to his brethren found them "dismayed, and greatly afraid," because of the mighty power of their great adversary, did not Jesus find His own people not only under the Roman yoke, but under the Winding and terrible power of Satan, who had the power of death? In no period of Bible history do we find more recorded of the activity of demons, than when our Lord came to His people Israel. And if David longed for their deliverance, how much more did He who was afflicted in all their afflictions, and died for that nation, yearn over them!

The life of faith, too, was strikingly beheld in the ways of David. Though despised by his brethren, whose blessing he was seeking, tempted, too, to rely on the competency of human weapons, which he so sternly refused, and in privacy and retirement his trusting in Jehovah his God, again give us precious shadows of Him who was the Leader and Completer of faith; who, from Bethlehem to Calvary, trod every step in unfeigned dependence, unwavering faith, and perfect obedience to the Father. Though "being in the form of God.... and found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him" &c. It is most blessed to trace the Son of man, always perfect in the ways of faith, and thus overcoming the tempter, and the malice of those who threatened to destroy Him; even as David, in his tiny measure, could speak of the divine power by which, in the quietude of caring for the sheep, he had been able to slay both the lion and the bear. (Vers. 34, 35.)

It was when visiting his brethren, and caring for them, according to his father's will, that he witnessed the threatening attitude of their mighty adversary, and beheld their helplessness and fear; but they knew not that the hour for the accomplishment of their deliverance was at hand. To all appearance, they were about to be completely swallowed up, and there was none to help. The armies of Israel had been defied, and the name of the Lord of hosts had been blasphemed. It would be, therefore, for the glory of Jehovah, as well as for the salvation of His helpless people, that deliverance should be wrought, and that they should be rescued from oppression and death. David was their Savior. He could trust God; he could face death, go, as it were, into its very jaws, and triumph over this invincible Goliath; thus did he dimly foreshadow Him, who, in an after age, could say, in the immediate prospect of the death of the cross, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [hades], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalm 16) The stripling, David, went forth, facing death and him (typically speaking) who had the power of death, in the fullest confidence in Jehovah of victory. (Vers. 46, 47.) There stood David, having not even a sword in his hand, with the five smooth stones out of the brook in a shepherd's bag; and there he faced the giant Goliath, with his drawn sword, armed with his coat of mail, and covered with greaves of brass, and a target of brass, with a man bearing a shield before him. It was a moment of breathless silence for spectators. The ruddy and anointed David was, to man's eye, rushing into death itself; but his faith is in Jehovah, who can do everything. Jehovah can deliver me, said the anointed and beloved of God. The time was at hand: the awful moment arrives, and the giant is felled to the earth by one of David's little stones; yes, the stone, guided by divine power, sinks into his forehead, and he lies dead upon his face to the earth. "Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, [putting the giant under his feet] and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith." "And what can more strikingly illustrate the victory which Jesus has obtained for us through death itself, over death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage? (Heb. 2:14, 15.) "How truly the believer can now say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Yes, Jesus overcame Satan by his own weapons, for it was through death that He abolished death, and overcame him that had the power of death. It was by His own power He trampled upon the mighty foe, as Man, in resurrection, and was righteously glorified at God's right hand, as having glorified God on the earth, and that even as to our sins, and wrought this marvelous victory over death and Satan. Happy are they who can therefore say, "We triumph in Thy triumphs, Lord," who, pondering the cost to Him of our deliverance, not only from the guilt of sins, by His precious blood, but also from death and Satan, in Him who rose from among the dead, find never-failing springs of joy and rejoicing in our almighty Conqueror. So truly has the Lord Jesus "abolished death" for those who believe in His name, that it is not necessary that we should die; on the contrary, we are told that "we shall not all sleep," that when Jesus comes some will be "alive and remain," and will then be changed, and caught up (without dying) to meet the Lord in the air, and so be forever with the Lord. Thus Jesus gives us victory, all the blessedness of the victory which He hath obtained for us—not merely victory through the blood of the Lamb, but victory in Him who in resurrection has triumphed over death and Satan for us. What a victory!

Now let us look at the effects on souls who know something of the value of this victory which hath been obtained for us. No doubt this typical instruction really applies to Israel, and not to the church; but we use it now as illustrating its effects on us who believe the gospel of the grace of God.

First, let us notice that the good news of the work which the Lord's anointed had accomplished for them filled those who believed it with thankfulness and courage. Their former fears and dismay had now entirely fled. When they saw what a victory had been obtained for them, they "arose and shouted;" they were strengthened also to fight the battle of the Lord—they "pursued the Philistines," and found themselves more than conquerors through Him that loved them; for "they spoiled their tents." And so now, when the soul first believes what Christ has accomplished for him by His death and rising again from among the dead, he is ready to shout for joy, as many do; he can scarcely express the happiness he feels at this marvelous salvation. He takes sides with the Savior, and not with the world; and he also finds, not only that he is delivered from coming wrath by Christ, but that he is blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. He counts over his spoil—his many blessings. But this is the effect of knowing something of the value of the Savior's work. This is very blessed; but we have not only salvation, but a Savior; not only redemption, but a Redeemer.

Hence others are taken up not only with the work, but with the person who did it. The eyes of some were fixed on David. They saw him with the head of Goliath in his hand, and they heard his own words concerning it. Like the disciples, they not only saw the risen Savior, and heard His own testimony to the value of that work, saying, "Peace be unto you," when He showed them His hands and His side, but their eyes were fixed on Himself. It was not only the work done for them, giving them perfect and everlasting victory—most blessed as it was—but they went further, they were occupied with the Person who had done it. It was this which had such power on their hearts, for "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."

Now Jonathan was one of those who had gazed on David, the mighty conqueror, with the head of Goliath in his hand, and he had listened to his own words concerning it. Now mark the effect of being occupied with the person who did the work. We are told that Jonathan "loved him as his own soul;" yes, he "delighted much in David;" and we read again, "because he loved him as his own soul." It was a joyous moment. But that is not all. His heart being taken up with David, he felt that nothing less became him than to strip himself of his robe, and garment, and sword, as well as his bow and girdle, and give to David. Observe, this is not giving up bad things, but giving the best things to David; not being stripped of God, but stripping ourselves for our true David, that we have here.

And now, dear christian reader, we would affectionately ask, whether the Person of Christ, or His work, most engages your attention? Do His personal excellences and worth so fill our souls, that we have been constrained to live unto Him? We believe that no part of divine truth needs more pressing on the consciences of believers at this time, than personal intercourse and occupation with Christ Himself; for then we shall surely be constrained to yield ourselves and all we have to Him. There is such a disposition in the present day to hold the highest doctrines of divine grace with a low and worldly walk, that stripping ourselves for the honor and glory of our precious Savior has, we fear, but little place, even to what it had some years ago. Was it not the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord which enabled the apostle Paul to strip himself of all he had ever prized and gloried in? It is this surely that our Lord demands. Did He not knock at the Laodicean church, and show Himself ready to sup with any who would open the door to Him? Happy are they who are thus taken up with Christ Himself. Such become knit to Him, drawn out in love to Him, strip themselves for Him, and, looking up, say, Come, Lord Jesus! H. H. S.

“But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”—1 Sam. 30:6.

TRIALS and perplexities of no ordinary kind pressed at this moment on the anointed successor of Saul. He was an exile from his country, driven hither and thither in search of that safety which the jealousy of the king denied; and now, in addition to all the sources of disquiet which had distressed him so long, that city which had been given by Achish for an abode for himself and his companions had been treacherously burnt with fire, and all the inhabitants thereof, with their substance, carried away captive. We need not marvel much, that at such a discovery “David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.” But all this was not sufficient; yet deeper woe and fear were to be meted out to him, who, by his more exalted position, was exposed to the fiercest blasts of adversity. Let us read the next verse. “And David was greatly distressed; for all the people spake of atoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

Well was it for him that he had such a refuge to fly to in this day of sore calamity. When earthly help and consolation failed, when those devoted followers who had shared his wanderings and dangers, in so many a perilous hour, rose up in the bitterness of their wounded affections, and “spake of stoning” their leader, whither should he turn for aid if not to the Lord his God? But while we rejoice that the chosen monarch had it thus in his power to draw help and courage from a source of infinite supply, would it not be wise for us to search out and learn the lesson which this narrative is assuredly fitted to impart? “All things were written for our learning,” we are told in the Scriptures; shall we not, then, endeavor to extract from the passage before us some of its treasure of instruction?

Are we not all of us, wherever we may be placed, and whatever may be our individual circumstances subject to many a trial—some arising from outward events, some from inward causes; some, perhaps, brought upon us by the failings of others, while some owe their sole origin to the perverse inclinations of our own rebellious hearts? The life of the Christian whatsoever may be the aspect it assumes in the eyes of his surrounding companions, is always, and of necessity must always continue to be, a continual warfare; and as such it will ever be fraught with occasions of trial, of fear, perchance of danger. Then who would not welcome with thankfulness aught that could bestow calmness and faith to pursue the path unflinchingly, whatever may betide? And how can we gain this aid otherwise than by following the example set us by the psalmist king?

The sorrows of this probationary scene are very varied, they differ in their nature as do the individuals who undergo them; but whatever they may be, it is no easy, no pleasant task to endure their proving’s. Sometimes they are permitted to arise so thickly, and to press so heavily, that the sufferer is well nigh ready to exclaim, “Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me.” Then is the time for the exercise of faith; then is the season for the poor tried one to place his sole dependence on his heavenly Friend; to feel and know that amidst all these assaults, the hand of almighty power is underneath. Then may the believer encourage himself in the Lord his God! Perchance, hope may be inclined to droop and fold her wings, to refuse to buffet any longer with the storm; still let the oppressed spirit draw comfort from the remembrance that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.”

There is something inexpressibly cheering in the remembrance, that the eye of omniscient love is watching over us, wherever we may be; that even the very hairs of our “head are all numbered.” Forgetfulness of this is very productive of discouragement. If we could but realize livingly that the Almighty is ceaselessly regarding us for good, that that blessed Saviour, whose sacrifice purchased our redemption, is still our never-slumbering Advocate with the Father, how hopefully, how confidently should we pass along our daily walk! how calmly should we say, “The Lord is on my side: I will not fear”! how constantly and entirely should we encourage ourselves in the Lord our God!