

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

F. B. Meyer, B.A.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE, AND IN

(Psalm 59:9, 17)

“Unholy phantoms from the deep arise,
And gather through the gloom before mine eyes;
But all shall vanish at the dawning ray
When the day breaks the shadows flee away.
He maketh all things good unto his own,
For them in every darkness light is strewn;
He will make good the gloom of this my day
Till that day break and shadows flee away.”

- S. J. Stone

IN The Hebrew the difference between the words “**wait**” and “**sing**,” as appearing in this passage, is very slight. They are spelt, indeed, alike, with the exception of a single letter. The parallelism, therefore, between these two verses is very marked.

9. “**Because of his strength will I wait upon thee:**

For God is my defence.”

17. “**Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing:**

For God is my defence.”

The inscription indicates the occasion on which this Psalm, one of the oldest, was written. “*A Psalm of David: when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.*” The allusions of the Psalm substantiate this title, especially that of the sixth and fourteenth verses, in which the Psalmist compares the troop of soldiers, bitten with their master’s spleen, who encamped around his house, belching out their curses and threats, to the vicious curs of an Eastern city, that prowl the streets by day and night, clearing them of their offal and refuse, and filling the night with their uproar.

“They return at evening; they make a noise like a dog,

And go round about the city:

Behold, they belch out with their mouth.”

But meanwhile David is in his house, waiting upon God, and singing aloud of his mercy in the morning.

I. THE EVENTS WHICH LED UP TO THIS ASSAULT ON DAVID'S HOUSE

As the victorious army returned home from the valley of Elah, the whole land went forth in greeting. The reapers stayed their labours in the field; and the vineyards were depleted of the women that plucked the grapes, and the men that trod them in the presses. From village to town the contagious enthusiasm spread; and the women came forth out of all the cities of Israel, with song and dance, with timbrels and tabrets, to meet King Saul. To the song of victory there came this refrain, which was strikingly discordant to the soul of the king:

**“Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands.”**

In that hour the first jealous thought awoke in Saul's heart; the pitted speck became visible in the goodly fruit of his character, which was destined to rot and ruin all. Happy had he been if he had trodden the hell-spark beneath his feet, or extinguished it in seas of prayer. But he nursed it till, to change the simile, the trickling stream undermined the sea-wall, and became a raging turbid flood.

“Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he eyed David from that day and forward.”

But Saul was more than jealous. He deliberately set himself to thwart God's purpose. Samuel had distinctly told him that the Lord had rent the kingdom of Israel from him, and had given it to a neighbour of his that was better than himself. And, without doubt, as he saw the stripling return with Goliath's head in his hand, and as he heard the song of the Israelite women, the dread certainty suggested itself to him that this was the Divinely designated king.

“What though he be,” said Saul to himself, as Herod in after days, “I am king, and will see to it that this prediction at least shall not come true. A dead man cannot reign; and there are many ways short of direct murder by which a man's life can be taken. But this is what it must come to.”

He supposed that if only he could take David's life, God's purpose would miscarry, and Samuel's predictions be falsified. He is not the last man that has descended into the arena to match himself with God, and been crushed in the attempt.

No student of history is likely to forget the cry of Julian the Apostate, which mirrors the experience of thousands more, “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!”

Saul's murderous passion sought to fulfil itself in many ways.

On the following day, as David essayed to soothe him with his harp, he twice hurled his javelin at the minstrel, in the hope that if it pinned him to the wall the act might be imputed to insanity; but on each occasion the weapon sped harmlessly past, to quiver in the wall behind, instead of in that young heart.

Next, Saul gave him an important military commission, and made him his captain over a thousand, in the vain hope that this sudden elevation into the slippery place of worldly prominence and power might turn his head dizzy, and lead him to some traitorous deed, for which death would be the obvious penalty. But David behaved himself wisely in all his ways, avoiding every pitfall, eluding every snare; so that the king, who watched closely for his falling, became more than ever convinced that he was God's ward, and stood in awe of him.

Then he offered the young soldier the hand of his eldest daughter in marriage, and treacherously withdrew the offer as the time of the nuptials approached - the intention being to arouse his ardent spirit to retaliate, and so to become liable to the charge of treason; but all his efforts failed to arouse even a transient impulse for revenge. Again, by the lure of his second daughter, Michal, as prize to be won by the evidence of one hundred Philistines having been slain, he sought to involve his rival in frays out of which only a miracle could bring him unhurt. But David returned unscathed with double the number required; and the love of the people grew.

Thwarted thus far, the God-forsaken monarch, driven by the awful fury of his jealousy, spake to Jonathan and to all his servants that they should rid him of David's tormenting presence: but of course this plot failed; for Jonathan delighted much in David, whilst all Israel and Judah loved him, for he went out and came in before them.

Jonathan indeed stood in the breach to turn away his father's anger, and elicited from him the promise that his friend should not be put to death. But his pleadings and reasonings had only a temporary effect; for shortly after, as the young minstrel endeavored to charm away the spirit of melancholy, the javelin again quivered past him from the royal hand, and would have transfixed him to the wall, but for his lithe agility. It was the evening, and David fled to his young wife and home. And Saul, intent on murder, "**sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning.**" These were the men whom he characterized so vividly, as we have seen.

Michal's quick wit saved her husband's life. She let him down through the window, and he went and escaped; whilst an image, covered with a quilt and placed in the bed, led Saul's emissaries to suppose that he was sick. There was no real occasion, however, for her to resort to either teraphim or deceit, to secure his safety from her father's murderous rage; for when, shortly after, the king proposed to snatch his prey from the midst of the sacred college, and from the very presence of Samuel, three sets of messengers were rendered powerless by the Divine afflatus, and an arrest was put on Saul himself, who was prostrated before the mighty impression of God's Spirit, and lay helpless on the earth (I Samuel 19:24).

That must have been a marvellous experience for David. To the eye of sense there was absolutely nothing to prevent the king's messengers, or the king himself, from taking him. But by faith he knew that he was being kept within the curtains of an impalpable pavilion, and that he was hidden beneath an invisible wing. As the air, itself invisible, fills the diving bell and saves the inmates from the inrushing water; as a stream of electricity poured over a heap of jewels protects them from the hand of the plunderer; as the raying forth of Christ's majesty flung his captors to the ground so did the Presence of God environ and protect both Samuel and David. And thus our God will still do for each of his persecuted ones.

**“In the secret of his tabernacle shall He hide them,
He shall set me up upon a rock.”**

II. DAVID’S COMPOSURE AMID THE ASSAULTS OF HIS FOES

This hunted man is a lesson for men and angels. Saul is his inveterate foe; traps and snares are laid for him on all sides. Sometimes the sun shines on his golden locks, but more often the skies are thick with cloud and storm. Now the women of Israel welcome him; and again he is torn from his wife, and driven forth from his home to go whither he may. Yet all the while his heart is tranquil and reposeful yea, it actually breaks forth into praise, as the closing verses of this psalm prove.

What was the secret of his serenity? It lay, first, in the conviction of what God was.

- God was his strength that was God within him;
- God was his high tower that was God without and around him.
- He was God-possessed and God-encompassed. God dwelt in him, and he in God;
- There was no demand for which He was not sufficient, no peril which He could not keep at bay.

What a blessed conception is here! You are too weak for some great task which has been entrusted to your care. In your judgment it would task the energies of the best and wisest you know; but lo! it has been placed in your hands. **“O Lord,”** you cry, **“wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh; and I am the least in my father’s house.”**

Then the Spirit of God reveals God as strength, that He may be so received into the heart as to become the principle of a new and heaven-born energy, which shall rise superior to every difficulty, and breast the mightiest waves that would beat the swimmer back. Listen to the laughter of the apostle’s soul, as he surveys herculean tasks on the one hand, and enormous opposing obstacles on the other, and says with unhesitating assurance, **“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”**

O weakest of the weak, remember Jesus Christ, and take Him to be the strength of thy life; be strong, yea be strong, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
Or turn to the other conception.

See those fugitive soldiers, hotly pursued by their enemies as clouds before the Biscay gale; on yonder cliff is perched a fortress, whose mighty walls and towers, if only they can be reached, will ensure protection. Breathlessly they scale the ascent, rush across the drawbridge, let down the portcullis, and fling themselves on the sward, and know that they are safe. God is all that to the soul which has learnt to put Him between itself and everything. We have not even to flee to God, for that implies that we have been allured out of Him; but we are to abide in Him, to stand fast in the liberty wherewith He has made us free; to reckon that, whatever Satan may say and however he may rage, we are absolutely secure so long as we abide in God.

When we realize these things, and add the further conception with which the Psalm closes, that God is the fount of mercy: when we dare to believe that there is mercy in Saul's hate, mercy in the difficulties of our lot, mercy in the clouds that veil our sky and the flints that line our path, mercy in the sharpest, bitterest experiences then we can sing, we can say with David:

**“I will sing of Thy power;
Yea, I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning,
For Thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble.”**

It lay, next, in his attitude towards God. **“O my strength, will I sing for God is my defence.”** The word so translated is used in the Hebrew of the shepherd watching his flock, of the watchman on the tower, of the sentry passing to and fro upon his beat. Is this our habitual attitude? Too many direct their prayer, but do not look up the ladder for the descending angels, laden with the heavenly answer. Many a ship passes in the night, touching at our wharf with the precious freight which we have been praying for; but we are not there to receive it. Many a relieving force comes up the pass with glittering spears and flashing helmets; but our gates are closed. Many a dove comes to our window from the weltering waste of waters; but we are too immersed in other things to notice its light tap. We pray, but we do not wait; we ask, but we do not expect to receive; we knock, but we are gone before the door is opened.

This lesson is for us to learn to reckon on God; to tarry for the vision; to wait till Samuel comes; to believe that He who taught us to trust cannot deceive our trust; to be sure that none of them that wait on Him can be ashamed; to appropriate by faith; and to know that we have the petitions we desired, nay, to do more, to take them and count them ours, though we have no responsive emotion, no sense of possession this is waiting upon God: this will keep us calm and still, though dreaded evils frown around our homestead; this will change our waiting into song.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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