

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DAVID'S SELF-RESTRAINT (I Samuel 24 and 26; and Psalm 42:1)

“Wait! for the day is breaking,
Though the dull night be long;
Wait! God is not forsaking
Thy heart. Be strong! be strong!

“Wait! ‘tis the key to pleasure
And to the peace of God;
Oh, tarry thou his leisure
Thy soul shall bear no load.”

- C. Townsend

AS David reviewed his life, and recorded his experiences, he was well aware of the innumerable evils that had encompassed him, of the horrible pit and miry clay out of which he had been brought up, and of the many who had sought in vain to destroy his soul; but from all he had been delivered. He dared not attribute his deliverance to the quickness of his ingenuity, or the agility of his movements; but to God, and God only. Mark his record of God's dealings with him, as he stands on the eminence of the years and looks down and back

**“He inclined unto me, and heard my cry;
He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay;
He set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings;
He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.”**

And if we further inquire what his attitude was, during all these long and sad experiences, he answers:

“I waited patiently for the Lord.”

In a recent chapter we saw how David waited on the Lord; but there is a clear distinction between this and waiting for the Lord, though in practice they are generally conjoined.

- We wait on the Lord by prayer and supplication, looking for the indication of his will;
- We wait for the Lord by patience and submission, looking for the interposition of his hand.

It is very needful to learn this lesson of silence, patience, resignation; and it is interesting to remark in the two incidents before us how perfectly David had acquired it, and had learnt to wait for the Lord.

THE BASIS OF WAITING FOR GOD

There must be a promise to justify us, or some definite committal of God, on which we can rest as the unmistakable revelation of his purpose. In their last interview, in the wood of Ziph, Jonathan had given this to his friend. He had spoken like a messenger from God. How those words rang in the weary heart that had drunk them in as the parched land drinks water! **“Fear not,”** he had said, **“for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee.”** He had even said that this, too, was Saul’s conviction: **“That also Saul my father knoweth.”**

Besides this, he was conscious of faculty and God-given power; of ability to grasp the helm of the distracted kingdom, and guide the sorely-tossed bark into calmer waters.

As all these corroborations of the original promise came into his heart, he became convinced that God had a great purpose in his life; and settled it in his own mind that he would wait patiently for the Lord to do as He had said, and that he would not lift his finger to secure the kingdom for himself. The Lord had promised, then He would perform. Whenever the moment came for him to sit on the throne as the acknowledged king of his people, it should be from first to last the Divine gift, and the Divine performance. There should be nothing to hinder God from saying:

**“I have set my king
Upon my holy hill of Zion.”**

TWO NOTABLE INCIDENTS

Engedi. One afternoon, when Saul, with three thousand men, was in hot pursuit of David, amid the wild and tangled rocks of Engedi, a strange incident put him completely in David’s power. It was a time of breathless heat; the sunbeams were striking like swords into the deep wadys and ravines, and every living thing, except perhaps the little lizards, had crept away into shelter. For the same reason, or because they desired to elude pursuit, David and his men were in the inmost recesses of an immense cavern. Into that very cave Saul came. His men had gone forward; the intense solitude and silence within and without threw him off his guard; he lingered a little in the entrance.

These caves, says Dr. Thomson, are dark as midnight, and the keenest eyes cannot see five paces inward; but one who has been long within, and is looking towards the entrance, can observe with perfect distinctness all that takes place in that direction. The blinding glare of the sunshine on the limestone cliffs made Saul more than ever unable to detect the forms that lined the cave, whilst they could perfectly well watch his every movement. How little did the king realize the intense interest with which he was being watched by six hundred pairs of eyes, and the peril to which he was exposed! The whole band was thrilled with excitement.

Now was the opportunity for David to end their wanderings and hardships by one thrust of the spear. They whispered "Seize your opportunity! Could it have fallen out more fortunately? Here is the man who has repeatedly tried to take your life, and is here with that avowed intent. Surely the law of God itself exonerates us in taking the life of those who would take ours! God Himself has undoubtedly brought him here that you should avenge your wrongs, and save further ones."

With great difficulty and to have been able to do such a thing showed the immense power he exerted over these wild strong men - David restrained them, and curbed his own passion, that tore like fire through every vein, and contented himself with creeping near, and cutting off the skirt of the king's robe, to prove to him afterwards how completely he had been in his power. But even then, after Saul had gone forth, and David's men crowded round, full of sullen remonstrance at his weakness, he was struck with remorse, and he said to them:

"The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD."

Hachilah. Previously at this spot David had been nearly trapped. This time the tables were turned. Once more Saul, probably instigated by a malign influence, that we shall consider in our next chapter, was in pursuit of his rival, **"having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him."**

Having ascertained by means of scouts the exact situation of the royal camp, David went to inspect it in person from an overhanging cliff. On the outskirts, the wagons made a rude barricade, within these were the soldiers quarters, and in the innermost circle Saul and Abner were posted; but the watches were badly kept, and no precaution was taken against a sudden attack.

A sudden inspiration seized David, and he proposed to Abishai and Ahimelech the Hittite, that they should visit the camp by night. Abishai gladly volunteered to accompany him, and guided by the clear moonlight they crept down the hill, crossed the ravine, picked their way through the wagons and the sleeping ranks of the soldiers, stood for a moment whispering over the prostrate form of the king, bore off his spear and water-bottle from Saul's head, and then **"gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it; neither did any awake, because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them."**

Thus, again, Saul had been in his power; but he had restrained himself. Abishai could not read him nor understand his secret. To him it seemed a most natural and lawful act for David to take the life of the man who was so infatuated for his destruction.

Nay, if David were at all squeamish about killing him with his own hand, surely he could have no objection against Abishai doing it, since he was not personally concerned in the feud. In that whispered colloquy over the sleeping monarch, Abishai had suggested that God had delivered his enemy into his chieftain's hand, and had offered to smite him with his own spear with a stroke so deadly, so instant in its effect, that there would be neither sigh nor groan to awake Abner or his body-guard. But David would not have it.

“No,” he said, “I will be no party to this deed. None can smite the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless. When his appointed death-hour comes, God will take him, either by some natural process in the palace, or amid the going down of the battle. But my hand shall not curtail his days: I will wait God’s time.”

On each of these occasions David acted with the magnanimity that became a hero and a saint. He would take no mean advantage of his adversary. He would not retaliate or avenge his wrong. He refused to admit the specious argument that opportunity meant permission, and that license meant liberty. He quieted the impetuous fever of his soul, resisted the subtle temptation of the adversary, and elected to await the slow unfolding of the Divine purpose.

THE BEHAVIOUR THAT WAITING FOR GOD INDUCES

It Restrains from Crime. Bitter indeed had David’s remorse been, if he had listened to his comrades and put forth his hand against Saul’s life. It would have robbed his harp of all its music. There would then have been some justification for Shimei’s cursing words on that dark after-day in his life; but as it was, though they cut him to the quick, they met with no answering response from his conscience. As he searched his heart in the sight of God, he knew that Absalom’s rebellion and seizure of his throne could not be, as Shimei suggested, a requital in kind for his dealings with Saul. True, months were still to pass, full of anxiety and suspense, before the coronation shouts rang through the streets of Hebron; but they were forgotten as snow dissolves in the river; and then there was nothing to regret, no gnawing conscience, no death’s head at the bottom of his cup of joy. Be still, O heart! wait for God; this will keep thee from acts and words, which, if allowed, would shadow thy whole after life.

It inspires Courage. What an intrepid spirit this was that dared to cry after the king and hold up the skirt of his robe; that challenged the two bravest men of his little army to a feat, from which one of them shrank! Ah! the man who is living in the Divine purpose has the secret of quenchless courage. He knows that no weapon formed against him shall prosper, and that every tongue that shall rise against him in judgment shall be condemned. He fears nothing, except to do wrong, and to grieve God. If in following the prepared path he suddenly comes on the brink of a precipice, down which he must cast himself, he does not hesitate to do so; knowing that the angels will swoop beneath, and bear him up, so that he shall not dash his foot against a stone.

It gives great Rest. Surely it was out of such experiences as these that David wrote the 37th Psalm, which, though it belongs to a later period, forever embalms the conclusions of this. The mellow wisdom of old age gathers up the maxims that were wrought out in the fires of early manhood.

**“Fret not thyself because of evildoers;
Neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity:
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.”**

The exhortations of this exquisite psalm, to trust in the Lord, to delight in the Lord, to roll the way of life on the Lord, to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, and especially the repeated injunction not to fret, are all bathed in new meaning when read in the light of these memorable incidents in David's life.

Live on the Divine purpose. Be not eager for thyself, but only that God's work should be done. It is certain that He will take care of thy interests, if thou carest for his. Calm thyself as a weaned child; rest thee; sit thee still and trust God is working out the plan of thy life; thou canst not hurry Him; it will only expend the energy of thy soul to no purpose, if thou allowest its fever to consume thee; in his own time, the best time, He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

It induces Penitence in others. When David gave such unmistakable evidences of his self-restraint, continued loyalty, and surviving affection, in spite of all that had been done to quench it; when he so clearly established his innocence, and showed the baselessness of the charges made against him; when he appealed, with such reverence and sincerity from the calumnies and misrepresentations of earth to the decisions of the Divine Judge the miserable monarch lifted up his voice and wept, and confessed that he had "**played the fool, and erred exceedingly.**"

Saul recognized David's nobility; the old chivalrous nature which had so captivated the nation in earlier days flashed out with an expiring flicker; and he went so far as to admit that he would be king. Nothing but such forbearance on David's part could have brought him so near repentance.

It is thus that we may win men still.

We win most when we appear to have yielded most; and gain advantages by refusing to take them wrongfully. The man who can wait for God, is a man of power, and others will acknowledge it and bend beneath his sceptre. To be under authority to God's lofty principle is to have soldiers under us, who go and come at our will, and do our bidding.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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