

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

(I Samuel 22; Psalm 34)

For good ye are and bad, and like to coins
Some true, some light; but every one of you
Stamp'd with the image of the king."

- Tennyson

LEAVING Gath, with a very thankful heart for God's delivering mercy, David hastily recrossed the frontier, and found himself again in the kingdom of Saul. His life, however, was in great jeopardy, and he did not dare to expose himself to the royal jealousy. To return to court was impossible; and he did not care to incur the risk of involving his relatives in his troubles by seeking shelter at Bethlehem. There was apparently no alternative but to adopt the life of a fugitive and wanderer amid the hills of Judah, with which his shepherd life had made him so familiar.

Two miles up the valley of Elah from Gath there is a labyrinth of hills and valleys, deeply honey-combed with caves; one of these, near the ancient Canaanitish city of Adullam, and called after it, afforded David for a considerable period the shelter of which he was in search.

It is described as a dark vault, the entrance of which is a low window in the perpendicular face of the cliff; and its position made it possible for him to cross from one country to another, as occasion required. Thither fled his whole family, dreading, no doubt, the violence of Saul's hatred; and thither also came every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, and he became captain over them.

We need not now enlarge on David's filial love, which traversed the entire distance from Adullam to Moab to secure an asylum for his father and mother, who were probably too aged to stand the hardships and dangers of his fugitive life.

Suffice it to say that his petition was readily granted by the king of Moab, perhaps on account of some pride in the Moabite blood that flowed in the veins of the young Hebrew warrior. But that double journey, first to secure the shelter, and then to escort the aged couple thither, evinces a pleasing trait in David's character. There was no lack of obedience to the first commandment with promise. It is, however, with the cave and the more motley group of his adherents that we have now to do.

I. THE CAVE AND ITS LESSONS

There can be no doubt that the Holy Ghost, in the minute narration of these experiences in David's life, desires us to trace an analogy between his history and that of the Lord Jesus, in His present rejection and banishment from the throne of the world. The parallel is as minute as it is instructive.

A rejected king was on the throne.

Though anointed by Samuel, Saul by disobedience had forfeited his right to reign; and had, so to speak, nullified the effect of the sacred unction as we may do also. The sentence of deposition had been pronounced, and was awaiting execution at the appropriate moment.

Similarly, the dark fallen spirit, Satan, was once an anointed cherub, set on the holy mountain of God, and perfect in his ways from the day that he was created, till unrighteousness was found in him. Not improbably he derives the title which our Lord gave him of "**prince of this world**" from his original appointment as God's vice-regent and representative; but in his fall he forfeited his glorious position, and man was created as his substitute to take his place.

"What is man? . . . Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands." That power is not yet exercised by man; "**we see not yet all things put under him**"; but it will be in the person of the Son of Man, who is already "**crowned with glory and honour.**"

In the meanwhile, Satan still holds the throne of the world. He has many a time cast his javelin at the King after God's own heart. In the Temptation and in Gethsemane he would fain have pinned Him to the wall. All through the present age he has been doing his worst to exterminate the incipient hidden Kingdom of Jesus, though he knows that God has destined it to take the place of his own. But all his attempts must fail. As Saul fell on the field of Gilboa, so the prince of darkness shall be finally cast into the bottomless pit.

David's kingdom was hidden.

It was a true kingdom, though in mystery, veiled in the darkness of Adullam's Cave, and concealed in the labyrinth of valleys and hills. He had fallen into the ground to die, that he might not abide alone, but bring forth much fruit.

It is a mysterious process through which the little seed-corn passes in the winter, when it surrenders itself to the destructive forces that lie in wait in the red mould, and seize on its tender fabric.

"Exposed to wintry winds, trodden under the feet of those who drive the rake and harrow over it; buried out of sight and left alone, as if cast out by God and man to endure the slow process of a daily dissolution; then melted by rains and heats until its form is marred, and it seems useless to either God or man."

Such was the experience of David: and it was also the experience of that Divine King, Who fell into the mystery of forsakenness on the Cross, and the mystery of rejection in the grave; and whose person and kingdom are now altogether hidden from the world of men.

The day is not far distant when the Lord, who is hidden until the time of the restitution of all things, shall be manifested with his saints, and take to Himself his great power and reign.

- The pearl which He won from the ocean-caves shall be worn on his brow;
- The treasure for which He bought the field of the world shall be spread forth for the admiration of the universe;
- The army which He has constituted from such unpromising materials shall follow Him on white horses in radiant array.

In the meanwhile, his kingdom is “**in mystery.**”

David and his followers were in separation.

Driven without the camp of Israel, they had no alternative. With the feasts and pageants, the counsels and decisions, the home-politics and foreign wars of Saul, they had no immediate connection; though the Cave of Adullam could not but exert an important indirect influence on the whole realm.

The lot of an exile, the path of the wanderer and stranger, were meted out to David and those who were willing to share his lot. His way to the throne lay through multiplied difficulties and sorrows; and although he must have prized the freer air, the sense of liberty, the deliverance from the heartless and godless etiquette of the palace, there must have been a perpetual sadness and loneliness in his soul.

The true King of men is still outside human politics and society.

We cannot have Him and them. Those who desire to be his subjects, and to share the rewards and glories of those coming days, when He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, must go out to Him without the camp, willing to forsake all that they have, and be counted the off-scouring of all things.

David was content to await God's time.

Whatever provocation Saul gave, he never retaliated. However easy the opportunity of gaining an advantage over his vindictive pursuer, he never availed himself of it. He was prepared to wait God's time, and to receive supreme power in God's way.

He quieted himself as a weaned child.

His perpetual refrain is recorded in his own words: “**My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.**”

It was as though he sat down in patience and submission till God made his foes the footstool of his feet, and set him as his king on his holy hill of Zion. It is thus, through these passing centuries, that our Saviour is waiting. Now is the time of the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ; here is the patience of the saints; whilst the eager expectation and yearning of the whole creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For by hope were we saved; but hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

II. THE CAVE AND ITS INMATES

The tidings of David's return to Judah, and of his retreat in the shelter of the cave, spread swiftly and mysteriously throughout the whole land; and those who were sorely pressed by misery, poverty, and bitterness of soul began to flock around him.

The young leader soon found himself at the head of four hundred men, a very motley crew! For the few who were loyal to him, there were preponderating multitudes who were full of their own grievances, and eager only for their redress.

The sacred historian says that their faces were like the faces of lions, and that they were as swift as roes upon the mountains; but their tempers were probably turbulent and fierce, requiring all the grace and tact and statesmanship of which the young ruler was capable, to reduce them to discipline and order. It was surely no small feat so to organize such materials, that they became the nucleus of the greatest army of their time, and carried the standard of Israel to the fullest limits it ever reached.

We must not think of David at this time of his career as a bandit or freebooter chief; but rather as improvising a frontier guard to defend the land against the Amalekites and Philistines, who were perpetually raiding it at the time of harvest, sweeping away the results of the farmers toils. Thus he became the benefactor and defender of his people, though exiled from them. In the common talk of the time his men and he were described as a wall to the great sheep masters and agriculturists of southern Judah, "**both by night and day**" (I Samuel 25:16).

It is impossible not to turn from David to Him, who, though cast out from the scheme of this world and its prince, is ever gathering around His standard the poor and outcast, the leper and sinner, the blind and bruised and broken-hearted, those who are in distress, in debt, and discontented, and making them into soldiers, that shall win the world for Himself.

Did these wild, rough soldiers find a new center for their life in David? We have found a new object in the Lord Jesus, for whom to live is life indeed, and for whom to die is gain.

Did this new center draw them away from attachment and association with the decadent kingdom of Saul? Our oneness with the living Saviour has made us unworldly by making us other-worldly. We have cast in our lot with Him, and become citizens of the new Jerusalem, and are glad to confess ourselves strangers and pilgrims.

Did they put off the manners and customs of their old life, and allow the shuttle of love and devotion to weave the fabric of a new character? We have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him.

Did they love David for removing their discontent, alleviating their distress, and relieving them from the disorder and anxiety of their existence? Much more should we love Him, who has done more for us than even David did for his poor followers. He has paid our debts with His precious Blood; relieved us from our creditors by meeting them Himself; clothed us in his perfect beauty; allayed our sorrows; calmed and stilled our souls.

Did the attachment between David and his followers grow with the years, cementing them in a fellowship which was the result of sharing common dangers the bivouac fire by night, the toilsome march by day, the brush with the foe? What an incentive to us to seek a fellowship with our blessed Lord, that shall grow closer for every day of trial we share with Him!

III. THE CAVE AND ITS SONG

Many allusions connect the thirty-fourth Psalm with the Cave of Adullam.

It was there that the little host needed the encamping angel; there that the young lions roared, as they ranged the wilds in search of food; there also that God's care was perpetually laid under requisition to keep the bones of the fugitives lest they should be broken by falling down the crags (vv. 7, 10, 20).

We can imagine the leader one evening when the anxieties and fatigues of the day were over, gathering his troop around him with the words, "**Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.**"

Then, in quick succession, the three exhortations:

"Oh, magnify the Lord with me . . . Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good . . . Oh, fear the Lord, ye his saints."

Then, perhaps, from all their voices came the full chorus, "**The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate.**"

The soul which is living a separated life, with sin judged, forsaken, and forgiven, behind it, may count on these four:

Deliverance even in the midst of difficulties and perplexities which have been caused by its own misdeeds (4, 7, 17, 19).

Enlightenment for what the dawn is to the weary watcher, that God will be to the soul that has long groped in the dark, if only the face is turned towards his (5).

Perfect Provision so that it shall lack nothing which it really needs (10).

The Sense of God's nighness nearer than the nearest, more real than the presence or absence of any (18).

If, in that cave, with so many things to distract him, compelled to spend every hour in the presence of his men, David was able to realize the presence of God, how much more possible it must be for us! And when once that is realized, all the conditions of the best life are fulfilled.

What makes the difference between the dull and grey of winter and the beauty of the spring? Is it not that the sun is nigh, and nature knows it, and assimilates his glorious color?

So backslider! broken heart! contrite spirit! do not look back on past failure and shortcoming, nor stand in dread of recurring sin; but look up and away to the face of Jesus.

Do not, I pray you, live on the dying, but on the living side. Dwell in the secret place of the Most High. Abide in the house of the Lord all the days of your life. Enter with boldness the Holiest, to remain there. Ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to realize the constant presence of God. Say to yourself many a time each day, even when you do not feel it, "**Thou art nigh; Thou art here.**"

Make your home in the sense of God's nearness. Oh, taste and see the sweetness of such a life.

It was thus that Jesus thought of his Father; and it is thus that you will realize the happiest, strongest experiences possible to the saints. "**The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.**"

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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