

SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

AS OCCASION SERVES

(I Samuel 10:7)

“There lies no desert in the land of life;
For e’en that tract that barrenest doth seem,
Laboured of thee in faith and hope, shall teem
With heavenly harvests, and rich gatherings rife.”

- Kemble

CIRCUMSTANCES led up to Samuel’s secret designation of Saul as king; and circumstances, so special and significant as to carry on their brow the Divine impression, were destined to corroborate the momentous act. With unerring accuracy the old prophet anticipated them, and with unfailing precision each of them took place. **“All those signs came to pass that day.”**

(1) First, by Rachel’s tomb, in the border of Benjamin, two men met him to say that the asses had been found, and that his father had left the care of the asses, and was taking thought for his son, saying, **“What shall I do for my son?”**

This was a very significant evidence of the Divine will and choice. It indicated that he was to be henceforth relieved of the care of the farm and the field, to devote himself to other and higher work. Asses could be found without his interposition. Others could attend to them and their like, but for him the kingdom was waiting, and the hearts of men were being prepared. The home-ties, the love of father and family, would always have a claim, but he must leave to others the care of the estates at Gibeah.

This sign is still of inestimable value to those who feel called to give themselves wholly to direct service for God. If it be the case that they are needed at home, to provide for the maintenance of aged parents or sisters, of wife or child, they have no right to withdraw from that sacred duty that holy obligation until God gives them an honourable discharge. The message to all such most certainly is that which the Apostle gave in a time of great unsettlement to the Corinthian disciples. **“Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God”** (I Corinthians 7:20, 24).

When God has given a call, as clear and unmistakable as that which Saul received at the lips of Samuel, let the recipient wait trustfully and patiently for his hand to slacken the hold of circumstances. Without long delay the message will come in one form or another: **“The asses are found.”**

Any circumstance of that kind will be an unmistakable assurance that the Lord's voice has been speaking to the heart, and that his cloud is beckoning us to follow.

(2) Next, as he went forward, filled with bewilderment and awe, near the oak, or terebinth, of Tabor (the situation of which is absolutely unknown), Saul met three men going on a sacred pilgrimage to Bethel, which, from the days of Abraham and Jacob, had been hallowed by the most sacred associations.

These men were carrying, as Samuel said they would, their votive-offerings to the shrine three kids, three loaves, and a skin of wine. First they saluted him with the invariable Eastern greeting, Peace be unto thee; and presented him with two of the loaves, as though obeying an inner conviction which was pressed home on them by the Divine Spirit, that he whom they had encountered was no ordinary wayfarer, but one who might share their homage even with Almighty God.

What significance lay hid in this act also! Did it not imply that God would compel the respect and reverence of the nation to arise towards the king whom He had chosen, and that there should be no lack of the supplies which were required to sustain his royal state? Was it not an assurance that he need not be anxious about what he should eat or drink, or how he should be clothed, since, if he sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all things besides would certainly be added?

This, too, will befall each servant of God who steps out on the path of obedience. He may be leaving a well-established business and giving up some lucrative source of income; he may seem to be stepping from the boat on to the heaving, changeful waters; he may be blamed, as Moses was no doubt blamed, for casting himself and those dependent on him on to the trackless, inhospitable desert; but if he will be only true to God's call, he will have no reason to repent, his bread shall be given him, and his water shall be sure, the manna will fall where the cloud broods over head; first the ravens, then the widow woman, and then the angels will be commanded to provide bread that he may eat; God will care for his body in life, and in death will bury it with his own hands, as in the case of Moses, or by the hands of devout men, as when Stephen was carried to his grave amid great lamentations.

On one occasion in the Lord's life, He gave a memorable lesson on this matter to his Apostles.

The tax-collector had come to Peter with a demand which Peter could not meet, and he came to the Master with it. Doubtless, if the fisherman had still been plying his craft, there would have been no need for anxiety out of the produce of his labour he would have been well able to meet the application; but, as it was, there was no money in his purse or house available for the purpose.

“Go thou to the sea,” said the Master, **“and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a shekel; that take and give unto them for Me and thee.”**

It was in obedience to the Saviour's call that Peter had given up his own means of livelihood; and the Lord recognized that the responsibility of providing for the needs, that would otherwise have been met by his toil, was incumbent on Himself. He identified Himself in the common need when He said, "**for Me and thee.**"

If you go forth on Christ's errands, He will not be unrighteous to forget; you may surely trust Him to pay the taxes, and all other legitimate dues. Do not set your hope on "**the uncertainty of riches,**" or on the doles of the wealthy, but on God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

(3) Finally, Saul came to Gibeah "*the hill of God.*" There was a garrison of Philistines there; but other commentators, thinking it unlikely that Samuel would announce to Saul a fact, which must have been so well known to him, have preferred to employ the other meaning of the word translated garrison, and have rendered the sentence, where the "erection, column, or monument," of the Philistines stands, probably reared by them to commemorate some famous victory.

Hard by this spot, and probably almost within sight of his home, Saul encountered a band of young men connected with the prophetic school which Samuel had established. They were coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a timbrel, a pipe, and a harp. The afflatus of prophetic fervour and ecstasy was upon them, and as Saul beheld their holy rapture he fell under its spell. So great a change had passed over him during his brief absence from his home, that he had now a sympathy with these divine raptures which he had never known before. Chords within his soul, which had never vibrated before, began to answer in strange unison. Yearnings after God, susceptibility to spiritual impressions, the sense of the unseen and eternal, filled his soul. "**The Spirit of God came mightily upon him, and he prophesied among them.**"

This remarkable assertion need not astonish us. It is by no means uncommon to find men temporarily and spasmodically affected by strong religious impressions, who are not permanently and savingly delivered from their former worldly or selfish manner of life. It is possible to be enlightened, to taste of the heavenly gift, to be a partaker of the Holy Ghost, to be solemnized by the powers of the world to come, and yet fall away. A land may have drunk of the rain and been moistened with the gentle dew, and yet bear thorns and thistles. Seed may spring up quickly where there is no depth of earth, and yet wither away. Simon was deeply wrought on by all he saw and felt during Philip's visit to Samaria, but the Apostle declared that he was still "**in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.**"

But what to Saul was only a transient and superficial influence may become, in each of us, a permanent possession.

The Spirit of God may come on us to fill us, and abide, as He did with those on whom He came in the early days of the Church. In successive waves of power and grace He may come on us, so that we may not only be filled suddenly and mightily for special work, but be constantly sensible of the holy infillings, as were the first converts in the highlands of Asia Minor, so that we may be permanently full, as was Stephen. (Compare Acts 4: 8; 13:52; 6:5; note the change of tenses, etc).

Whenever God calls us to special service He provides a special anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Remember how the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, **“See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri; and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship.”**

This is universally true. As certainly as there is the call, there will be the equipment. But we must look up for it, we must claim and appropriate it; without feeling it, we must reckon that it is ours, and step out on the predestined path.

It is in the act of obedience that we become suddenly and thankfully aware of the possession. Oh, that the Spirit of Christ may come mightily on all his servants, so that they may be equipped for the demands of the present age, and that the Master may say of each of them, **“Behold my servant, whom I uphold . . . I have put my Spirit upon him, and he shall bring forth judgment to the people.”**

This transformation in the young farmer amazed all that knew him beforetime; and they said one to another, **“Is Saul also among the prophets?”**

It made as great a stir as when Saul of Tarsus joined the Christians, whom he had persecuted, or when Bunyan and Newton became ministers of the Word. One of the older people, however, divined the reason. Rumours of Saul’s interview with Samuel were beginning to circulate, and he said in effect; “Has he not been with Samuel, the father of these blessed and exalted movements? What wonder, then, if he partake of his gifts!”

When the first tremor of excitement had passed, and Saul regained full mastery of himself, he went up to the high place, probably for meditation and prayer, that he might comprehend the full significance of the crowding events which had transpired within the recent hours.

To whom can we turn, most Holy God, in the supreme moments of life, but unto Thee? Only Thou canst understand.

Ere Samuel dismissed his astonished and awe-stricken guest, he bade him act in each circumstance as occasion served (ver. 7).

There is always room for the exercise of sanctified common sense. The circumstances may be Divinely contrived, but we must use them for good or evil, making them stepping-stones or stumbling-blocks. The same circumstances may come to all; but one man receives their lesson and transmits his answer in a very different spirit from his friend and neighbour.

In one case, the sun and shower produce flowers and corn; in another, weeds and poppies. The Divine guidance of our lives does not obviate the necessity for the exercise of prudence, that looks before and after, and upwards, in order to ascertain what the will of the Lord is.

There is always in the regimen of life an abundant need for the exercise of our judgment, through which the light of God may be shining as through a clear pane of glass.

We are not dumb, driven cattle, nor the creatures of fate or chance. We are not automatons. So long as we look for guidance, it will be freely given; but when it is given we must use it, and it is useless unless we do. Only they that receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life.

On that memorable night when God's angel achieved the deliverance of Peter from his prison, we are told that the celestial visitant led the dazed Apostle through the first and second streets, and then departed from him; and when Peter had considered the thing, he went to the house of Mary. So long as he was bewildered, and half asleep, living in a trance, walking in dreamland, it was necessary that he should be carefully watched and led; but so soon as the sharp morning air had revived him, so that he was able to consider, he was left to act on the decision of his own sanctified understanding.

To him that overcometh, the Master promises to give a white stone, which is surely the Urim and Thummin stone - a judgment through which the Shekinah light glows and shines. May it be our happy privilege to receive it at his hands, that we may be able to say with our Lord, "**My judgment is just, because I seek not my own will, but his that sent me.**"

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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