

# **DAVID:**

## **SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING**

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### **CHAPTER NINE**

#### **THE MESSAGE OF THE ARROWS**

(I Samuel 20:21-37)

Toils and foes assailing, friends quailing, hearts failing  
Shall threat in vain:  
If He be providing, presiding, and guiding  
To Him again.”

- T. M. Neale

JONATHAN had considerable influence with his father. Saul did nothing, either great or small, which he did not keep from his son. For his love's sake, as well as for his father's, he was extremely eager to effect a reconciliation between him to whom he owed the allegiance of son and subject, and this fair shepherd-minstrel-warrior, who had so recently cast a sunny gleam upon his life.

In all probability Jonathan was much David's senior; but in his pure and noble breast the fountain of love rose unquenched by years. On more than one occasion he had communed with his father concerning his friend, so far impressing Saul as to make him swear that David should not be put to death; thus when David returned in hot haste from Naioth, leaving Saul under the spell of prophecy, and asked him what he had done to arouse such inveterate hate, asserting that there was but a step between him and death, Jonathan did not hesitate to assure him of his willingness to do whatever his soul desired.

It was the eve of the feast of the new moon, when Saul invited the chief men of his kingdom to a banquet; and the friends agreed that this was an opportune moment for testing the real sentiments of Saul. David suggested that he should absent himself from the royal banquet; visiting his father's home at Bethlehem instead. It would be quite easy for him to do this, and yet be back by the third day. In the meantime, Jonathan was to watch narrowly his father's behavior, and mark his tone, noting whether it was rough or kind.

The general outline of this scheme was arranged within the palace; but there were confidences to be exchanged so intimate; words to be said so tender; a covenant to be entered into so pathetic; a means of communication to be arranged so secret that it seemed wiser to continue the conversation in some secluded spot, where only the living things of the woods, that can tell no tales, could behold the flowing tears, and hear the outbreak of those manly sobs that could not be choked down.

There was indeed one other witness; for Jonathan was a deeply-religious man. It was his habit to live in the presence of the God of Israel; and to Him he made his appeal as he bared his heart to his friend, entreating him to deal truly with him; and pleading that in that certain future, when God had cut off David's enemies from the earth, he would not forget the claims of friendship, and cut off his kindness from his house.

Surely the fateful field of Gilboa was already casting a premonitory shadow over Jonathan's heart; and he felt the time would come when David would exercise supreme power, and might be tempted to stamp out the possibility of rivalry on the part of Jonathan's heirs by exterminating the royal house. In his anxiety he made him swear again, and afterwards proposed the ingenious and significant plan in which his art and directions to the little lad would express by a swift telegraphy the secret which would either lift David to peace and safety, or thrust him into the depths of despair.

It is impossible to read the story without thinking of the boys that carry the buff-colored envelopes, so little conscious of what the messages may mean to those in whose hands they place them, here filling them with ecstasy, and there with bitter anguish. The arrows are flying still; the little lads are fulfilling their unconscious ministries with respect to them; often they fall short of the mark, then again they fly beyond it. How often they are beyond! O strong arm, why shoot them with so much energy? O wind, why carry them so lightly? Hearts are breaking as the bow-string twangs. Lives take their color of light or shadow ever after, just because of a few yards less or more!

## I. THE ARROWS TAUGHT THAT A STRONG AND NOBLE FRIEND WAS STANDING IN THE BREACH

Jonathan was a jewel of the first water; unequalled in his use of arms, daring to recklessness on the field of battle, swifter than the eagle, stronger than the lion: yet tender as a woman; true to his friend; so capable of inspiring attachment, that his armour-bearer would face an army at his side; so tenacious of his principles, that he clung to his father's fallen fortunes, even though he had suffered from that father all that jealousy could suggest of bitter insult and murderous hate. It was no child's play that he undertook in the sacred name of friendship; and probably he was quite prepared for the outburst that followed his manly protest for his absent friend. On the first feast day, Saul noticed David's absence, but said nothing; on the second, however, when his seat was still vacant, he turned sharply on his son Jonathan and asked the reason, "**Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to-day?**"

Jonathan instantly made the preconcerted answer about David's desire to see his family, and made out that he had himself given permission for his absence. This identification of himself with David brought on Jonathan an outburst of ungovernable rage. Saul's fury knew no bounds: with stinging allusion to Jonathan's mother, his own wife, as the source of his son's perversity; with taunts that were intended to instill into Jonathan's heart the poison which was working in his own; with demands that David should be instantly fetched and put to death the monarch clearly showed his inveterate hatred and determination that the son of Jesse should no longer tarry above ground.

Jonathan made one vain attempt to reason with the furious monarch; he might as well have tried to arrest the swelling of Jordan in the time of flood. In a paroxysm of ungovernable passion, the king cast his spear at him to smite him. Then Jonathan knew that they must prepare for the worst; and left the table in fierce anger, being grieved for his friend, because his father had done him shame.

*Never be ashamed to own a friend.*

Do not count him your friend whose name you are ashamed to mention, and with whose lot you blush to be identified; but when you have entered into an alliance with another soul, whom you love as Jonathan loved David, dare to stand up for him at all cost to your comfort and relations with those who do not know your friend as you know him. "To be obscure, and poor, and out of court-favour?" that is the greater reason why you should take his part.

It is a noble thing when a man or woman in some gay and frivolous circle, where fashion and pride rule, dares to take the part of some unpopular righteous cause, of some maligned but holy servant of God, of some unpolished but sterling associate. This stamps the confessor with the guinea-die of native worth. It is easier to storm a fort than to withstand the covert sneer, the contemptuous look.

But there is something still nobler, when one dares in any company to avow his loyalty to the Lord Jesus. Like David, He is now in obscurity and disrepute; His name is not popular; His gospel is misrepresented; His followers are subjected to rebuke and scorn.

These are days when to stand up for anything more than mere conventional religion must cost something; and for this very reason, let us never flinch, but as we trust that He will confess our name before His Father and the angels, let us not be ashamed of His. Jonathan's arrows showed that he did not hesitate to stand alone for David; let our words assure Him, who is just now hidden, that we will bear scorn, obloquy, and death, for His dear name.

*Never be ashamed to speak up for the cause of Truth.*

How often the spirit of expediency whispers in our ear, "Let it pass; wait till the dinner is done; do not make a gazing-stock of yourself; take an opportunity of private remonstrance; sit still, be pleasant, we will see what can be done presently." Jonathan took the nobler course.

The dainties were on his plate, but he would not touch them; the cup was in his hand, but he would not place it to his lips; his father was before him, with his claims on his reverence and respect, the king, with the power of life and death in his mouth; but he dared not hold his peace. Had it been simply a question of his own position or respect, of mere politeness, civility, courtesy due to age he would have been the first to put his hand upon his mouth, and be silent.

But it was a question of Truth, Righteousness, Justice; and if he were to be still, the very stones in the wall would cry out against him, and he would forfeit the respect of his own conscience.

But it may be asked, Is it not unseemly to obtrude opinions amongst those who are older and more learned than ourselves? Yes; but there is all the difference in the world between opinions spun like cobwebs from the brain, or caught up at second-hand, and those great basic principles of Truth, Morality, and Right, which are witnessed to by conscience. And when you stand up for these, you do not seek to exalt your own goodness, or win an advantage; but simply to lift the standard from being trampled in the mud. Let the arrows witness to the simplicity and fervour of your allegiance to whatever is lovely and of good report.

## II. THE ARROWS SPOKE OF IMMINENT DANGER

**“Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.”** As the lad ran, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him: **“And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place towards the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times, and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.”** There was no need for Jonathan to enter into explanations, David knew that the Lord had sent him away (22).

**“Is not the arrow are beyond thee?”** You have hoped against hope; you have tried to keep your position; you have done your duty, pleaded your cause, sought the intercession of your friends, prayed, wept, agonized: but it is all in vain; the arrow’s flight proves that you must go whither you may. Behind you is the sunny morning, before you a louring sky; behind you the blessed enjoyment of friendship, wife, home, royal favour and popular adulation, before you an outcast’s life. The heart clings to the familiar and beloved. But the message of those arrows cannot be resisted. There is no alternative but to tear yourself away, take your life in your hand, and go forth, though you know not whither. But take these thoughts for your comfort.

(1) *There are things we never leave behind.*

David had an inalienable possession:

- In the love of his friend,
- In the devotion of the people,
- In the memory of God’s goodness,
- In his experience of his delivering care,
- In the sense of the Divine presence which was ever beside Him,
- In the Psalms which he had already made for himself, as well as for the world.

There are threads woven into the fabric of our life which can never be extracted or obliterated.

(2) *There is a Divine purpose determining our course.*

To the lad there was but royal caprice in the flight of the arrow.

“What are you doing, my little fellow?”

“I am picking up the prince’s arrows; we generally go for game, but he is playing at it to-day.”

That was all he knew; how little did he divine the purpose of his master, and still less realize that each flitting arrow was, so to speak, taken from God's quiver and directed by his hand.

There is no chance in a good man's life. Let us recognize the providence of the trifle. Let us believe that behind the arrow's flight there is the loving purpose of our Heavenly Father. He is sending us away.

(3) *The going forth is necessary to secure greater happiness than we leave.*

Had David lingered in the palace, his life would have been forfeited, and he would have missed all the glory and bliss with which his cup ran over in after years. This was the way to the throne. Only thus could the sentence whispered in his ear by Samuel years before be realized. This mountain pass, with its jagged flints, was the path to the happy valley.

The nest was stirred up that he might acquire powers of flight; the precious wine of his life was emptied from vessel to vessel to lose its strong flavor of must; the trellis-work was taken down that the plant might stand alone.

Follow the arrow's flight then beyond the warm circle in which you have so long been sheltered; beyond the south-land to the icy north; beyond the known to the unknown. Like another Abraham, go into the land which God will show thee; like another Columbus, turn thy prow in the wake of the setting sun. Let David's assurance be yours:

**“Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,  
Neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption:  
Thou wilt shew me the path of life.”**

### **III. THE ARROWS TAUGHT THAT HUMAN LOVE MUST SUFFER SEPARATION**

This was the last meeting of these two noble hearts for a long time.

Indeed, the friends only met once more, shortly before Jonathan's death. They had realized that this must be so. The soul of Jonathan, especially, seems to have been overcast with the impression that their happy intercourse would never again be renewed; therefore he pledged David with that pathetic vow, to be faithful to his seed, and to remember their love when all his enemies had been cut off.

**“Go in peace,”** Jonathan said, finally, as though he could no longer bear the awful anguish of that parting. Forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, **“The Lord shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, for ever.”**

Then David arose and departed to become a fugitive and an outlaw, liable at any moment to capture and violent death; whilst Jonathan returned thoughtfully and sadly to the palace, where he must spend the rest of his life in contact with one who had no sympathy for his noble sentiments, who had outraged his tenderest sensibilities.

These are the hours that leave scars on hearts, and whiten the hair.

The world in its rush is so unconscious of all the tragedies which are taking place around. Young hearts suffer till they can suffer no more; aged ones cannot forget; and years after some scene like this, eyes will film with tears as it is recalled. But Christ comes to us in these dark moments, as of old to the disciples, on whom had broken the full import of their Master's approaching departure.

**“Let not your heart be troubled . . . believe also in Me.”**

There is no comfort like this. To believe that He is ordering each detail; to know that love is prompting each action of his hand, each thought of his mind; to lie back on his bosom and utterly trust Him there is nothing like this to bridge the yawning gulf of separation, with its turbid, rushing stream beneath.

**~ end of chapter 9 ~**

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