

A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

It almost seems contradictory that God would choose a shepherd to lead His people and be their king. A shy, retiring, country-bumkin, with no sophistication, placed in the responsibility of administering a government from a big city capital. What could God have been thinking?

But, then again, why would God call you to His kingdom, for such a time as this? You lack confidence among people. You are unsure about your status with God and the body of Christ. You sometimes waver back and forth regarding your assurance of salvation. Why would God call you?

To understand the wider significance of David's call to the kingdom his predecessor was King Saul. He was the king that the people had chosen. In their unbelief of God's promise to lead them and be their King, they wanted someone they could see, like all the other nations around them. The prophet Samuel was greatly disturbed over their clamor for the tall, angular, muscular, striking figure of Saul. God reassured Samuel that they had not rejected him as a prophet, but they had rejected God as their king. "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee." 1 Samuel 8:7, 8.

But the choice of Saul soon proved to be a disaster. The exaltation of Saul and adulation poured upon him corrupted his heart deceiving him to trust in human strength rather than in God. His mind was constantly filled with conspiracy theories. In a desire to control and consolidate his power he became tyrannical like all the kings of the nations round about. The people suffered greatly under the consequent lack of spiritual leadership.

It became apparent that dynastic change must occur, but how? The church and nation were becoming more and more worldly. The gospel was not proclaimed. The principles and statutes of God were neglected. The knowledge of the true God was fast fading from Israel's national consciousness. Would God instigate a *coup d'etat*

and overthrow Saul? Or would God's love win back the kingdom with Him acknowledged as King by all?

During times of revolutionary change, particularly in government, the danger is for anarchy to prevail and everyone does what is right in his own eyes. When there is no figure of leadership and the people lack a sense of purpose, then everyone seems to spin off in all directions.

While visiting Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, the question arose, why did Gutzon Borglum choose the four presidents to carve into the rock? The answer is that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt were representative of the tumultuous beginnings of our young democracy and its consolidation and resilience through turbulent times by strong, visionary leaders.

God was the true King of Israel. But the people were not satisfied with just that. They wanted someone who could provide a visible presence and a functioning bureaucracy. The people have always wanted to be taken care of and defended. So God needed someone who acknowledged His primary leadership of the people and yet could be a king for the people who would submit to the Lord.

When I was a boy, my father would tell me Bible stories at bedtime. The story I would ask him to tell me most often was the story of Joseph because it took such a long time, but the one I probably enjoyed the most was the story of David and Goliath. David is the only person in the Bible whom God called a man after his own heart. Both the Old and the New Testaments record this fact. In 1 Samuel 13:14 Samuel said, "The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart," and in Acts 13:22 Paul said, "After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart.'" God seemed to be saying, "I really like David," and God was clearly involved on a personal and emotional level with David.

Why did God share with David what was on His heart? Even more personal for us, How can I become a person after God's own heart? The answer to this secret is that God said, "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do." Acts 13:22.

Let us review what we know of the youthful days of David. Although the Scriptures give a very full account of David's life, but little is told us of his early days. We know, however, that these were spent at Bethlehem, and he is first brought before us as a shepherd, minding his father's sheep.

Bethlehem was a small town, built on one of the highest hills in Palestine, about four miles to the south of Jerusalem. Its name signifies "The House of Bread," and was probably bestowed on it on account of the fertility of the surrounding country.

It was an ancient city in David's time. The patriarch Jacob had sojourned there in his wanderings and it was near by that Rachel had died and was buried. The monument erected by Jacob to the memory of his beloved wife was still standing. It was in Bethlehem, too, that David's great grand-parents, Ruth and Boaz, had their homes; and it was there, a thousand years later, that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was manifested in sinful flesh to save His people from their sins. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel." Micah 5:2.

Jesse, David's father, was counted a very old man. He had eight sons, of whom David was the youngest, and two daughters, both of whom had children of their own. These, although David's nephews, would be about the same age as himself. They were doubtless among his youthful companions, and we can imagine how, as they minded their sheep together, or practiced with their slings, they would talk of what they hoped to do when they grew to be men. It is not likely, however, that they anticipated becoming so famous as they afterwards did. One of them became a great king, and all grew up to be famous warriors. Joab, the great general and statesman, brave but crafty and unscrupulous; Abishai, the mighty man of valour; Asahel, "as light of foot as a wild roe;" and Amasa, who afterwards commanded the army of Absalom and was slain by Joab in treachery, were among these nephews of David. Then there was Elhanan who became one of the chief mighty men of Israel. He also lived at Bethlehem. These were the youthful playmates of David.

David was not only a shepherd boy, able to run races with the fleet-footed Asahel, and to sling stones like Joab and the others, but was also a musician and a poet. As he listened to the voice of Nature, speaking all around him, and thought upon the Word of God, he sang promises to his Maker, and made sweet music on the harp. He had carefully stored up the instruction received from his father Jesse, Samuel the prophet, and other good men, and had hidden the words of God in his heart that he might not sin against Him.

The shepherd's work was not done at sunset. The sheep had to be guarded from the attacks of hungry wild beasts, or these would come

and destroy the flock, so that David sometimes had to remain out at night, and watch the sheepfold. It was not always pleasant, but instead of complaining, he composed verses on the beauties of the star-lit heavens. The eighth Psalm was one of the songs he wrote on this subject.

O Lord, our Lord,
How excellent is Thy name in all the earth!
Who hast set Thy glory upon the heavens. . .
When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy
fingers,
The moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained
What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?

David knew that although he was young and simple, the Lord could reveal in him the same glory that made the heavens beautiful, and so we find these words in the same psalm:—

Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast
Thou established strength.

When Jesus reminded the Jews of these words He said, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou has perfected praise;” so that when God was doing this with David, He was “establishing strength” in him. That this was a real strength was seen in David’s case. More than once while he was guarding the sheep at night, fierce beasts came prowling round, and on one occasion a lion, emboldened by hunger, seized one of the lambs, and was dragging it away. David might have thought of the great danger he would run by interfering with the lion, and perhaps reason that he could not hope to save the lamb, and his own life was more precious. But no, he had the true shepherd heart. He loved his sheep, and his only thought was that the lamb was in danger and must be rescued. Besides, God was his strength, and even though the lion was much stronger than himself, God was stronger still. So he went in God's strength to do his duty, taking only a shepherd's staff. He overtook the lion and struck it until it dropped the lamb and turned on David. Then it was seen that God really girded him with strength, for in spite of its superior strength the lion was slain. Another time a bear attack the fold, but David pursued it and fought it with the same result.

In all the experiences of his life the youthful shepherd learned to see the working of God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses also,

had tended sheep, and as David studied the records of the past, he saw how all men were like sheep, and God was a great Shepherd, feeding and guiding His flock, and leading them to the fountain of the water of life.

He knew how the very helplessness of the sheep appealed to his own heart, and how carefully he sought to lead them where the pasturage was best and the way was easiest. So the Lord was guiding him, only with infinitely greater love and wisdom.

So the shepherd boy was learning the ways of the Lord. By faithfulness in the discharge of the duties allotted to him, he was developing a character that God could use anywhere. One who does everything to the glory of God, even if it be only minding-sheep, is achieving true and lasting greatness.

Sometimes scoffers quote the words of the Lord, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart" (Acts 13:22), in connection with David's great sin, in order to show that the God of the Bible is not the God of truth and righteousness, forgetting or not knowing that the words were spoken long before that event, with reference to David's general disposition, and that the sin of David was signally rebuked by the Lord, and acknowledged by David.

We have the account of the first public appearance of David. The prophet Samuel had been directed by the Lord to go and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king in the place of Saul, whom He had rejected. Seven sons of Jesse passed before the prophet, but the Lord's choice was not among them. "And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." At Samuel's order, he was sent for, and as soon as he appeared, the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." 1 Sam. 16:11, 12.

Immediately "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David." What did David do then? Did he assume a lordly air, and demand to be treated as a king? Did he at once place himself before the public, proclaiming the fact that the Lord had chosen him king, and attempt to seize the authority, or demand at least to be consulted in regard to public affairs?—Nothing of the kind; he made no claim whatever in his own behalf, simply because the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. If he had put himself forward, he would have shown himself unfit to lead the Lord's people.

Some time afterwards a musician was needed to play before Saul. Then some one recommended the son of Jesse, and Saul sent

messengers, saying, "Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep." 1 Samuel 16:19. So we see that David had returned to his sheep, after he was anointed king, as though nothing had happened. An anointed king keeping sheep! How natural it would have been to persuade himself that he was wasting his talents, and that it was his duty to be leading men instead of sheep. But he did nothing of the kind, because he was a man according to God's heart, and the Lord is "meek and lowly in heart." Here we have a sample of the kind of men whom God uses in His work.

"And David came to Saul, and stood before him; and he loved him greatly; and he became his armor-bearer." 1 Sam. 16:21. At last David is at court. It looks as though there was now more prospect that he might fill the position for which he had been anointed, than when he was tending sheep. But still he is only an armor-bearer, a servant. Now we shall expect to see him begin to work himself forward and push his claims to the allegiance of the people. Ah, that's because we don't know the Lord. David was a man according to God's own heart, and God's heart is love, and love "vaunteth not itself," and "seeketh not her own." 1 Cor. 13:4, 5.

Instead of seizing upon the throne, which was his by Divine right, "David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem." 1 Sam. 17:15. The special object for which he was called to Saul seems to have been accomplished, and the anointed king returned contentedly to his father's sheep in the wilderness.

But he did not stay there. There was war, and three of his brothers were in Saul's army. The brothers, who had been passed by in the choice of a king, were in the army, where there was some chance of distinguishing themselves and becoming known while David, the one chosen and anointed, was an unknown shepherd boy. At last he also was sent to the army, but only as a messenger to carry provisions, and to come again. See 1 Sam. 17:17, 18.

Suppose that David had proudly refused to do such menial service. Why should he, the anointed king, act as an errand boy? Thousands of people do far less ability than he, and having no such evidence as he had that the Lord has called them to the work, have refused to do humble work that they thought was beneath them, and have complained bitterly that they were not elevated to the position to which they felt sure that God had called them. But then they were not chosen ones, according to God's heart. If David had refused to perform that humble task, he would have missed the opportunity of

doing a thing which brought his name before all Israel, and fastened the eyes of the nation upon him. We often miss a high place, because we think ourselves already too high to occupy a low place.

Goliath was slain, and David was in high favor. "And Saul took him that day, and would let him no more go home to his father's house." "And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants." 1 Samuel 18:2, 5. Here at last was a position more in keeping with his real calling; nevertheless he was only a servant.

But "favor is deceitful," and Saul's regard for David soon cooled. The people's regard for David aroused Saul's jealousy, and so "Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand." 1 Samuel 18:13. Although called upon to step down to a lower position than he had occupied, there was no complaint; but "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him." 1 Samuel 18:14. That was why David behaved so wisely; for Christ, when He was in the form of God, "counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant." Phil. 2:6, 7, R.V. By his willingness to serve, David was demonstrating his fitness to reign.

Finally, David was compelled to flee for his life from the presence of Saul. But why did he submit to such injustice? Why did he not stand his ground, and claim his rights? The throne was his by right, and the people respected and loved him. Why did he not assert his right to the throne, rally the people around him, and take possession of the place to which God had anointed him? The reason why is that "God was with him," and he was a man after God's heart. Christ was the manifestation of God to men, and He, "when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." 1 Peter 2:23.

Twice Saul was completely within his power, yet no advantage did he take of it. It was not because David restrained himself, that he did not kill Saul, but because he had no desire to do so. At one time he had cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, his heart smote him even for that. The Lord hath anointed David to be king, and David was determined to leave it wholly with the Lord to bring him to the throne.

It is easy for folks to say that their case is in the Lord's hands, and at the same time to persuade themselves that God has left all the details to them. The pagan idea that "God helps those who help themselves," has a large place in the creed of many Christians. So

the friends of David tried to persuade him. When Saul was in the cave where David was, they said, "Behold, the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee." 1 Samuel 24:4. But David was not to be persuaded to take the Lord's work out of His hands. God had said that David should be king, and it was the Lord's business to perform His own promise.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who *emptied Himself*." The root of all sin is in the admiration and exaltation of *self*.

It is self that has caused all of the mischief and all of the evil and all of the distress in the universe; and it leads in the showdown of the world's iniquity. 2 Tim. 4:2. The great contest of the universe and of the ages is of self against God. Micah 6:8.

The great question with all the intelligence in the universe and through all the ages is, *God or self*—which shall reign? Which shall be the way of the universe?

This way of self is sin. The way of God is Righteousness. Every person readily will say that the way of Righteousness is the preferable way. But when to take that way it is found that self must surrender and be put down and out, and even to be crucified and die.

Then comes the conflict. Then is the call for compromise: and self, if allowed to have its own way, will make its way to be the way of righteousness.

Martin Luther understood this when he wrote—

"The Pope should be ready to renounce the popedom and all his wealth and all his honors, if he could thereby save a single soul. But he would see the universe go to destruction sooner than yield a hairbreadth of his usurped power."

And he did *not* understand it, at least he did not remember it, when in his discussion with Zwingle he found himself holding a false position, and, rather than yield, he tore from the stand in front of him the cloth cover on which he had written with chalk, "Hoc est corpus meum, Hoc est corpus meum. You shan't drive me from it, You shan't drive me from it. You shan't drive me from it: not by reason, common sense, carnal arguments, nor mathematical proofs."

Yet self of itself will not surrender self; and self cannot empty itself of itself. Only divinity can do this. The mind that was in Christ can accomplish it. And divinity in Christ has shown the Way. The mind that was in Christ has accomplished it for every soul.

He *is* the Way Righteousness against the way of sin: the Way of God against the way of self. Let this mind be *in you*, which was also in Christ Jesus who emptied Himself. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

It is the way of the Cross, it is true: the way of crucifixion. But O joy! *He* is ever the Way; and when our old man is crucified with Him, it is “that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth we shall not serve sin.” Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who emptied Himself that God might be manifest in the flesh. “This mind” in you will also empty yourself, and God will be manifest in the flesh again: God instead of self, *in you*.