2 Samuel - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Short Papers, David's Three Attitudes

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In the course of David's most eventful and deeply instructive history, we find him presented, by the pen of inspiration, in three remarkable attitudes, namely, lying as a penitent; sitting, as a worshipper; standing, as a servant. And not only do we see him in these attitudes, but we hear his utterances therein; and, we may truly say, the seeing and the hearing are full of deep moral instruction for our souls. May the Holy Spirit enable us to profit by it! May He guide our thoughts as we look at, and hearken to, King David, as a penitent, a worshipper, and a servant! And, first, then we have him Lying as a Penitent.

" And David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon, the earth." (2 Sam. 12:16.) Here, then, we have David lying upon the earth, in the attitude of a true penitent. The arrow of conviction had entered his conscience. Nathan's pungent, pointed word, " Thou art the man," had fallen, with divine power, upon his heart, and he takes his place in the dust, conscience-smitten, and heart-broken, before God.

Such is the attitude. Let us now hearken to the utterance. This latter we shall find in the fifty-first Psalm. And oh! what an utterance it is! How fully in keeping with the attitude! " Have mercy upon me, God, according to thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." This is real work. The penitent places his sins side by side with the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God. This was the very best thing for him to do. The best place for a convicted conscience is the presence of divine mercy. "When a convicted sinner and divine love meet, there is a speedy settlement of the question of sin. It is the joy of God to pardon sin. He delights in mercy. Judgment is His strange work. He will cause us to feel the sinfulness of sin—to judge it—to hate it. He will never daub with untempered mortar, or cry peace, where there is no peace. He will send the arrow home. But, blessed be His name, the arrow from His quiver is sure to be followed by the love of His heart, and the wound which His arrow inflicts will be healed by the precious balm which His love ever applies. This is the order—"Thou art the man"—" I have sinned against the Lord"—" The Lord hath put away thy sin."

Yes, beloved reader, sin must be judged in the conscience, and the more thoroughly it is judged the better. We greatly dread a superficial work of conscience—a false peace. We like to see the conscience probed to its deepest depths, by the action of the Word and the Spirit of God—the grand question of sin and righteousness fully discussed, and finally settled in the heart. We have to bear in mind that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, and, in this dangerous character, it is quite possible he may endeavor to lead souls into a kind of false peace and happiness, not founded upon the cross as the divine provision for the sinner's deepest necessities. We should deeply ponder those weighty words in the parable of the sower. " But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with Joy receiveth it: yet hath he no root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." Matt. 13:20, 21.

Mark the words, "Anon, with joy receiveth it." There is no deep work of conscience—no moral judgment of self or of sin; and, as a consequence, no depth of root—no power of endurance. This is peculiarly solemn, and worthy of the most profound consideration, at the present moment. We cannot too carefully ponder the connection between the expressions, " Anon, with joy"—" No root"—" Withered away." There is great danger of a merely intellectual reception of the plan of salvation, apart from any spiritual work in the conscience. This is frequently attended with the most joyous emotions. The natural feelings are wrought upon, but the truth has not penetrated the heart; there has been no furrow made by the action of the word; and hence, when the time of trial comes, there is no power of continuance. It is found to be mere surface work, which cannot stand the action of the sun's scorching rays.

Now, let not the reader suppose that we attach undue importance to conscience-work in the matter of conversion. We are fully persuaded that it is the Christ we reach, and not the way we reach Him, that saves our souls; and moreover, the true foundation of the soul's peace is not a certain process or exercise of any kind, whether of the heart, the conscience, or the understanding. It is the divinely-efficacious sacrifice of the Son of God that purges the conscience and imparts peace to the convicted soul. It is the assurance, on God's authority, received by the grace of the Holy Ghost, that the momentous question of sin was settled, once and forever, on the cross, that liberates the soul and gives a peace which nothing can ever disturb.

All this is so plain that if any one were to say to us, u I have peace because I have passed through such deep exercises of conscience," we should, without hesitation, tell him he was self-deceived. It was not an exercise of conscience that ever satisfied the claims of God, and therefore it is not an exercise of conscience that can ever satisfy the earnest cravings of a convicted soul. Christ is all, and having Him, we want no more. We deem it a thorough mistake for persons to build anything on the mode of their conversion. It "is, in point of fact, affording the enemy an advantage over them, which he is sure to use in shaking their confidence. The ground of the believer's peace is not that he was converted in such and such a manner—that he felt so deeply, and wept so much, or struggled so hard, or prayed so fervently. All these things have their place and their value. We do not suppose that Paul ever forgot, or ever will forget, the moment between Jerusalem and Damascus; but we are perfectly sure he never built his peace upon the remarkable circumstances of his conversion. Luther could never forget his two years in the cloister, but Luther never built his peace upon the profound exercises of those' years. Bunyan could never forget the slough of despond; but Bunyan never built his peace upon the mental anguish which he tasted therein.

No doubt, the exercises through which these three remarkable men passed, exerted a very important influence on their after course and character, both as Christians and as ministers; but the ground of their peace was not aught that they had felt, or passed through, but simply what Christ had done for them on the cross. Thus it must ever be; Christ is all and in all. It is not Christ and a process, but Christ alone. Let souls ever remember this, and let it be well understood that, while we press upon our readers the immense importance of a deep and thorough work of conscience, we do not want them to build upon the work in their conscience, but upon Christ's work on the cross. " It is the work wrought for us, and not the work wrought in us, that saves our souls." True, they are intimately connected; and, therefore must not be

separated; but they are perfectly distinct; and, therefore mast not be confounded. We can know nothing of the work wrought for us save by the work wrought in us; but just in proportion to the depth and intensity of the work wrought in us, will be the clearness and fixedness of our rest in the work wrought for us.

But there is another point in reference to which we are anxious to avoid misunderstanding. Some might suppose that the object of our remarks on David, as a penitent, is to prove that unless we have passed through precisely the same exercises, we have no just ground for believing that we are really regenerated. This would be a grave mistake. For, in the first place, David had been a child of God for many a day before that solemn moment on which we have been meditating.1 And, further, we believe that David found his relief not in any exercises within, but in communications from without, even the precious promises and assurances of God to his soul. He rested not on the fact that the arrow had entered his heart, in these words, " Thou art the man," and drawn forth the penitential cry, " I have sinned against the Lord." No; but upon the precious truth conveyed to him in the words, " The Lord hath put away thy sin."

Finally, let not a damp be cast upon any souls because the earliest moments of their spiritual history were characterized not by profound penitential exercises, but rather by the most peaceful and happy emotions. It is impossible that the "Glad tidings" of salvation can do aught else but gladden the believing soul. There was great joy in Samaria when Philip preached Christ to them and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing when he learned that Jesus had died for his sins. How could it be otherwise? How could any one believe in the forgiveness of sins and not be made happy by the belief? Impossible. "Glad tidings of great joy," must make the poor heart glad. " Forgiveness 'twas a joyful sound, To us when lost and doomed to die." Surely it was. But does this fact interfere, in the smallest degree, with the value of a deep and thorough work of the Spirit of God in the conscience? By no means. A hungry man values bread, and although he will not think of feeding upon the pangs of hunger, yet the pangs of hunger make him value the bread. So it is with the soul; it is not saved by penitential exercises; but the deeper its exercises, the more solid its grasp of Christ, and the more steady and vigorous its practical Christianity.

The simple fact, beloved reader, is this. We see, in the present day, a fearful amount of flippant, easy-going, airy Christianity, so called, which we greatly dread. We meet with many who seem to have attained a kind of false peace and frothy happiness, without any real exercise of conscience, or any application of the power of the cross to nature and its ways. These are stony-ground hearers. There is no root—no depth-~no power—no permanency. And not only are such persons self-deceived, but the tone and aspect of their profession are, amongst other influences, forming the channel along which the tide of infidelity shall, ere long, roll its poisonous and desolating waters. We believe that cold, uninfluential orthodoxy, and flippant, formal, airy profession are, just as thoroughly as dark and degrading superstition, paving the way for that infidelity which shall yet cast its mantle over the whole civilized world.

This is a deeply solemn thought; but we are impressed with it, and we dare not withhold it from our readers. We long to see a more effective testimony for Christ—a more earnest discipleship—a more thorough self-surrender and whole-hearted consecration to the name and cause of Christ. For this we sigh, for this we pray; and we certainly do not expect to find it amid the ranks of those who have never known much exercise of conscience, or tasted the power of the cross of Christ.

However, we must not anticipate a line of thought which may come before us as we proceed with our subject. We shall, with God's blessing, see in David, ere we close, a noble illustration of personal devotedness. Meanwhile, let us contemplate him in the second of his remarkable attitudes, namely, Sitting as a Worshipper.

In the opening of the seventh chapter of the second book of Samuel, we find David sitting in his house of cedar, and surveying the many and varied mercies with which the hand of Jehovah had surrounded him. " And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart: for the Lord is with thee."

In a word, David would build a house for God. But he was not the man, nor was his the time for that. Nathan is, at once, dispatched to correct the mistake. The service was well-meant; but that was not sufficient. It must be well-timed as well as well-meant. David had shed much blood; and, moreover, there were enemies and evil occur-rent. There were also deeper lessons of grace in which David had to be instructed. God had done much for him; but all that had been done, in the past, was as nothing compared with what was yet to be done in the future. If a house of cedar was a great thing, how much greater was an everlasting house and kingdom. The Lord telleth thee, that " he will make thee an house." This was reversing the matter altogether. The doings of the past were full of grace—the doings of the future would be full of glory. The hand of electing love had lifted David from the sheepcote to place him on the throne of Israel. " And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, Lord God; but thou hast also spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come." The past and the future are both brought, in brilliant array, before the vision of King David, and he has only to bow his head and worship.

" Then went King David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, who am I, O Lord God?" Here then, we have David's second attitude. Instead of going out to build for the Lord, he went in and sat before the Lord. There is great moral beauty and power in this. To an unintelligent eye, he might have seemed to be in a very useless attitude; but, oh! we may rest assured of this, that no one can ever stand as a servant, who has not sat as a worshipper. We must have to do with the Lord, before we can act for the Lord. Show us a man who has really occupied the place of a worshipper, and we will show you one who, when he rises to his feet, will prove an effective servant.

And be it noted, it is one thing to sit before the Lord, and another thing to sit before our work—our service—our preaching—our circumstances—our experiences—our anything. How often are we tempted to sit down and gaze at, or think over, our various exploits, even though these may be ostensibly in the Lord's work? This is sure to super induce weakness. Nothing can be more miserable than self-occupation. It is right enough to feel thankful if the Lord has used us in any department of work; but oh! let us beware of keeping self before our eyes, in any shape or form, directly or indirectly. Let us not be found self-complacently surveying the various things in which we are engaged, the different interests we have set on foot, or the varied spheres of action in which we take part. All this tends to puff up nature, while it leaves the soul barren and impoverished.

Mark the difference! " Then went king David in and sat before the Lord, and said, who am If " " I " is sure to fall into obscurity and oblivion when we sit before the Lord. We hardly know which to admire most, the attitude or the utterance. "He sat," and said, "Who am I?" Both are lovely—both in exquisite moral order. May we know more of their deep, deep meaning and immense practical power! May we prove what it is to sit in the divine presence, and there lose sight of self and all its belongings!

We do not attempt to enter upon an exposition of the fifty-first Psalm which, as we have said, is David’s utterance as a penitent,· nor yet of the seventh chapter of second Samuel, which gives us his utterance as a worshipper; we merely introduce these precious scripture to the notice of the reader, and pass on, in the third and last place, to look at David Standing as a Servant. “ Then David the king stood up upon his feet.” (1 Chron. 28:2 Ch, xxviii. 2.) This completes the picture of this lovely character. We have seen him lying on the earth, with the arrow of conviction piercing his conscience, and the chastening rod of God held over him. We have seen him seated in the sanctuary, surveying the actings of grace in the past, and anticipating the bright beams of glory in the future. And now we see him rising into the attitude of a real, true-hearted servant, to lay himself and his resources at Jehovah’s feet. All is intensely real. The penitential cry—the aspirations of the worshipper—the accents of devotedness and consecration—all is deep, fervent and genuine. “ I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God.” “ Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of God.” What self-forgetting devotedness is here! David was not to have the honor of building the house, but what was that to one who had found his place in the sanctuary, and learned to say, “ Who am I?” It was all the same to David who was to build the house. It was the house of his God, and that was enough. The strength of his hand, the love of his heart, and the resources of his treasury were all willingly devoted to such an object.

We would fain pause here to expatiate; but we must close. May the Holy Ghost apply these things to our hearts, by His mighty power. Christian reader, dost thou not long for more whole-hearted devotedness? Dost thou not sigh after a more lofty consecration of thyself and all that thou hast to Christ and His cause in the earth? Well then, just get a little nearer to Him. Seek to be more in His presence. You have risen up from the attitude of a penitent, go, now, and sit, and gaze, and worship; and then, when the fitting occasion offers, you will be ready to occupy the position of an effective-servant.

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