2 Samuel - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 5 (1857), "Before the Lord."

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2 Sam. 6:21.

IT is a marvelous dignity to be brought to stand consciously in the presence of God, without any fear of judgment, or even of rebuke. Yet such is the standing into which the believer in Christ Jesus is brought, “according to the riches of God’s grace,” and “the good pleasure of His will.” The thought of such a standing brings forth from the heart of the Apostle that burst of thanksgiving— “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” We know the infinite complacency with which the Father rested, and ever rests in His beloved Son. But He rests in complacency also in the result of that work which His Son finished on the cross. There He can contemplate what His own grace has effected, “having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood.... according to the riches of His grace.” We, indeed, are “slow of heart” to enter into the revealed thoughts of God respecting our own standing in and through Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has suffered once for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God; but being brought there, we stand before God in Him. If our standing be in Him, as well as through Him, how can God see us there otherwise than according to the thoughts of His heart? “And you,” says the Apostle, writing to the believers at Colosse, “that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled, in the body of His flesh, through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unreproveable in His sight.” Of old, it was written of Christ as the Wisdom of God, “When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” (Prov. 8:29, 30.) And has not God His delight too in that which is accepted in Him? And when the Lord Jesus comes to be glorified in His saints, then the world will know that the Father hath loved them, even as He has loved Jesus Himself. (John 17:22, 23.) It is one of the most precious blessings of the believer to know the manner of love wherewith he is loved of God. “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us;” and such is its perfection, that it has rested in nothing short of making us to be in Christ before God, even while we are in this world, as Christ is in the presence of God in heaven. This is the perfect love which casts out fear. (1 John 4:16-19.) One grand characteristic of Apostolical teaching is the anxious endeavor to maintain, in the souls of the saints, the consciousness, that, by the work of Christ they are brought into God’s presence, as the object of God’s delight. In the presence of God, they are in the region of love, but of light also. The Lord’s presence is the large and wealthy place, the place of fullness of joy, but the place of holiness also. If the souls of the saints are kept in conscious nearness to God, then will they walk before Him; but the more they recede in spirit from that nearness, the more will their walk be before men. And the self-exercised Christian knows experimentally the difference between walking in the presence of God, and walking before men. When we are walking before men, we arc scrupulously exact in answering what they expect from us, end are satisfied if we please men; but there is a freedom when we are walking before God, because we are not seeking to please men, but God that searcheth the heart. When we are seeking to please men, we are prone to judge others, but when we are before the Lord, we can only judge ourselves. It is to the joy of the heart of the Apostle, that he could thank God on the behalf of the Thessalonians, “for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.”

A passage in the history of David may illustrate the importance of being practically before the Lord. When David heard that the Lord had blessed the house of Obed-edom, “because of the ark of the Lord, David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness..... And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.” He had stript himself of his royal apparel, as unseemly for him to appear in before the Lord. There was no commandment for him to do this, but the presence of Him before whom he was, instinctively taught David, that it was not the place for him to make a show of the glory which the Lord had given him, when he was before” the ark of the Lord of the whole earth.” For David to have been prominent on such an occasion, would have been entirely out of place. “Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest; Thou, and the ark of Thy strength.” (Ps. 132.; Num. 10) So it ever must be. The sense of being in the presence of the Lord, and “beholding His glory,” will instinctively lead the saints to “cast their crowns before Him.” And even now the realized sense of being in the Lord’s presence, makes us feel the becomingness of the linen ephod, even of being “clothed with humility.” King David in the linen ephod, according to the fleshly judgment of Michel, is demeaning himself as one of “the vain fellows;” for human reasoning is entirely at fault in this respect; it cannot connect “access with confidence” into God’s presence, upon the assured ground of being accepted in the Beloved, with the greatest possible self-abasement. David, before the Lord, must needs cast away every thought of self-consequence, being lost in the admiration of that grace which had preferred the ruddy shepherd-lad before all the goodliness of Saul, and therefore could easily bear the rude taunt of Michel; true type is she of that religion which vaunteth itself, and utters hard speeches against the humiliating confession of those, who, before God, can only see their sin and vileness. “And David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore will I play before the Lord; and I will yet be more vile than this, and will be base in mine own sight.”

But David, even as others, lost in some measure the sense of the happy place of being before the Lord. “The king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies.” How natural to be occupied with all these benefits, and to look now “on the house of cedar,” in which he dwelt, and to compare his own stately dwelling, with the dwelling-place of the ark of God, “within curtains.” How ready the thought, what shall I do for the Lord? and it requires that chastened state of soul, which being before the Lord alone can maintain, not to let such a thought supersede or dim the thought of what the Lord has done for us. The state of David’s heart, when he sat in his own house, was very different from what it was when he was before the Lord. It was well that it was in David’s heart to build an house unto the name of the Lord, (1 Kings 8:18,) but God would teach His servant something more blessed than this, even that He Himself would build David an house. (2 Sam. 7:11, 16.) This was the lesson which David needed to learn, and which, indeed, we all need to learn, before our service to the

Lord can be healthy to our own souls. The last words of David have respect to this (2 Sam. 23:1-5); and under the “strong hand” of God’s teaching and instruction, we each of us have to learn how very secondary is that which has called forth our most hearty energy in the service of the Lord, (and well is it that it has been, and is in our hearts to serve Him,) to that “covenant, ordered in all things and sure,” by which God secures us. But see David again before the Lord. After Nathan had rehearsed to him all God’s goodness and grace, with the blessed addition, “Also the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house.” “Then went in king David and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant’s house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?”

It is not the manner of man; for man has always the idolatrous thought in his heart, that God is to be served by men’s hands, as though He needed something. It requires some training in the school of Christ to keep down this thought. The saint of God is only, and always a recipient, and if he does anything for God, it is of the ability which God Himself giveth. And blessedly did David learn this truth, and enunciate it at the close of his career. “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee and of Thine own have we given Thee.” (1 Chron. 29:14.)

Blessed close of an eventful career, when giving most liberally from his “affection to the house of his God,” which his eyes never saw, to lose the sense of his own liberality in the more overwhelming sense of the grace of God. But ere reaching that close, David had learned a most humbling and bitter lesson under the strong hand of God. Disgrace in his own eyes, and in the sight of others, exile from his own city, and the unnatural rebellion of his own son, followed the fearful sins of adultery and murder, as the chastening of God for David’s sin, when even that sin had been forgiven, in order that God might do him good in his latter end. But was not David’s fall into these foul sins preceded by David’s having got away from the presence of the Lord? Then it was David tarried at Jerusalem, while the host of Israel and the ark were in tents, and encamped in the open field. (2 Sam. 11:11.) David, who could not rest till the ark was brought to Jerusalem, is now content to be far from it. He had willingly lost the opportunity of being before the Lord, preferring ease to conflict. And are we ever in greater danger than when we are “at ease,” ceasing to watch and to pray, as if we were secure from all temptation? “The lust of the eye” leads David first to commit adultery, then to practice deceit, and failing in that, to commit murder; and the consequence was that he was hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and gave speedy evidence of the distance into which he had departed from God, by his keen perception of the wrong of others. How often does righteous indignation burst forth from the heart which is unjudged before God. “David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” (2 Sam. 12:5, 6.) We have to watch in ourselves the motives even of apparent honest indignation, lest in passing sentence on another, we, as David did, pass sentence on ourselves. There is One who “in righteousness doth judge and make war.” And how often, when before Him, do we find righteous indignation against others turned against ourselves, the effect of “godly sorrow.” (2 Cor. 7:11.) David confesses his sin, and his sin is pardoned; but nothing will satisfy David short of conscious nearness to God, “the restoration of the joy of His salvation.” (Psa. 51:12.) And by God’s grace abounding over David’s sin, he was brought into that nearness to God which he craved, or even into deeper consciousness of being before the Lord, than ever he had known before. In the fifty-first Psalm, we find David again before the Lord, and so before Him, that David could only see Him, and himself as in His sight. He saw himself before God, and his sin before himself; and how was the sense of his sin aggravated by seeing it in the light of God’s presence. “Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight, that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.” It may be that David was never so truly before the Lord, as on this occasion. When he went in solemn yet joyous procession before the ark of the Lord, or when he sat before the Lord after the Lord Himself had rehearsed to him His own gracious dealings with him, there was room for the entrance in of some natural, yet allowable, elements of human joy. But now there was no room for such kind of joy; nothing could be joy to David, till he knew again the joy of God’s salvation. And this could only be known under the deep and searching touch of Him before “whom all things are naked and open.” And not till now had David been laid naked and bare before his own eyes. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” We accept the doctrine of original sin, but it is only before God that we learn what it really is to be born a sinner. He who will “judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ in that day,” judges those secrets now, in those who are exercised before Him, and makes them learn, that God “desires truth in the inward parts;” and that there has been inward declension from Him before we have been suffered to fall grievously. It may be comparatively easy to gather sufficient wisdom by observation, and experience, and imitation, to walk in a measure blameless before men. But it is “in the hidden part that God makes us to know wisdom,” and often, as in David’s case, this wisdom is dearly purchased by some sad and grievous failure on our part. What depth of wisdom did David learn before the Lord, to enable him to say, “Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt-offering.”

All outward demonstrations of penitence, to which one at a distance from God would have recourse, are seen to be vain by him who stands before God in confession of sin. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise!” But how despicable in the eyes of men is this sacrifice of God. It is in the hidden part that this wisdom is learned of what, under special circumstances, is pleasing to God. David, before the Lord, had learned this so deeply, that he submissively bows his head under the unrighteous cursing of Shimei, and accepts it as part of God’s discipline on himself. (2 Sam. 16:5-11.) And he knew how to check the, indignation of Abishai, who would have resented this insult on David; for nothing, however keenly felt, and unjust in itself, at the hand of man, will be regarded by one confessing his sin before God apart from the righteous discipline of God. Happy wisdom, only to be learned in one school, to be able to overlook the unrighteousness of man, by so deeply perceiving the righteousness of God. How abject and mean would all that passed between David and God appear in the eyes of men. Man would have looked at David’s outrage and injury against Uriah, and punished him accordingly; and in his honest indignation against such grievous sin, would have overlooked his own sinfulness. David, for many a long year subsequently, was made to know in his own exile, and the unnatural rebellion of his son against himself, that it was indeed an evil and bitter thing to depart from God as he had departed. But it was not this that broke his spirit and gave him the contrite heart, and taught him to know in his inward part that this was the sacrifice of God. The broken heart and contrite spirit had been produced by seeing sin in God’s sight in all its hatefulness and blackness, and in seeing God’s grace abounding over it. We are never Antinomians before God. To learn before Him that where sin has abounded, grace has superabounded, is indeed wisdom. And how growingly precious is the cross of Christ to him who is consciously brought by it into God’s presence. He learns his need of it to maintain him in God’s presence, as well as to bring him into it. It is only under the shelter of the cross that he can have fellowship with God, who is light, and at the same time bear to see what sin is in the light of His presence. And we may lay it down as an axiom, that conscious and realized nearness to God must necessarily be accompanied with deep self-abasement. “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” “Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly; but the proud he knoweth afar off.” May we know in our hidden part that wisdom, that the walk answering to the high and heavenly calling wherewith we are called, must be “with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love!”

“Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

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