

DAVID DEVISING LIBERAL THINGS **FOR GOD**

A man cannot estimate his life without looking before and behind. He must remember that he sprang from babyhood, and that he is going on to the decay of old age. He will then be reasonable, and humble and wise. So we cannot understand our meeting this morning without looking a long way back and a long way forward. We are here because of facts of almost hoary antiquity, and prospects of almost inconceivable splendour and durability, and it is in proportion as we open our eyes to these that our coming together is useful and pleasant. It is precisely that we might be helped so to open our eyes that God has required this periodic assembly at our hands as a matter of duty. In our daily lives, we are, as it were, walled in by our immediate surroundings. We "*cannot see afar off.*" The places, the persons, the circumstances of mortal life are liable to fill the mental horizon, and to hide from view the remoter and infinitely more important facts to which we are related. Coming to the breaking of bread helps to break down, or at all events to see over, the four walls of our present petty experience, and to be ennobled and braced by the view of things beyond, before and behind.

Apart from the Scriptures, the help afforded by these meetings in this respect would be very slight. Dim and traditional and weak would be our faith if it depended merely upon our own acts and utterances on such occasions. It is the matters exhibited to view in the divine records that supply the material of those mental exercises that result in "*edification.*" The matters, while having a certain sameness of fundamental topic, are wonderfully varied, and absolutely inexhaustible in their suggestiveness. Whether Moses, the prophets, or the apostles, we are made to feel that their words, given by inspiration of God, are profitable for reviving and strengthening the man of God to every good work.

They all relate to one system of truth. It does not matter which part of the Bible we touch, enlightened by the Truth, we can place it and use it. We are not as we once were, and as the great mass of people are today—so ignorant of Bible things (though it might be, so religious), that the biggest part of the Bible had no meaning and no use for us. Every part we now find connected with the whole, and, by its means, we can obtain access to its whole breadths and heights of present meanings and future glories.

We take David for example this morning. He is before us in the reading—before us as a king firmly seated on his throne. We ask, how came he there? Was he always king? No. Was he the son of a king? No. What was he? A shepherd boy, the member of a humble family. How came he then to wear a crown? Because of the visit of Samuel years before, to pick him out of his father's family, and anoint him for the throne. Who was Samuel? A prophet. What is a prophet? A man through whom God speaks. God? Yes. Who is God? The Eternal, the Creator, the upholder of all things. How do we know? Because He has manifested Himself in speech and action. He chose Abraham and made him a nation, and brought that nation from the servitude of Egypt by many wonderful works, that that nation might be to Him a witness and a monument and a name in all the generations of mankind (Isa. 43:10, 21; Jer. 13:11). With what purpose? That He might at last realise His object in creating the earth and man upon it. What is that? That the earth might be filled with His glory and peopled with an emancipated and rejoicing race.

If we ask more searching and earlier questions than these, we get our answer. If we ask how there came to be an afflicted race such as now occupies the earth? How came they to be in need of emancipation? The Bible fails not. It takes us away to the beginning of man upon earth. It is the only book that does. It gives us a clear and chaste line of genealogical descent right away back to the start. No other book upon earth does. Human accounts do to a comparatively short way back, and lose themselves in the cloudland of fable and guess. The

Bible goes clean back to the start and shows us how God, having made man for His own glory (in which lies man's highest joy and well-being), man—Adam—the first man—deflected from that perfect line, and in the breaking of law, set aside the divine will and set up his own as the rule of action—the consequence of which was alienation and sentence of death, with much attendant evil on the road to the grave. Adam, the exiled, propagated himself, and filled the earth at last with a race in his own unhappy position. The race continues to this day, amid all the evils that result from man having to take care of himself instead of living under the open guidance and friendship of his Creator. But God purposes redemption; and His plan is laid in Abraham and his seed, Christ. Working out the plan, Abraham's descendants were nationally used, and in the picture of David before us, we have a stage in the work—an important stage.

There are several things connected with him that will yield comfort and instruction; for this is the object of the record, as Paul informs us (Rom. 15:4). In the scene exhibited in the chapter read, he is in prosperity and exaltation. It was not always so. As already said, he was once in a very lowly way of life—a rustic lad following the sheep; and God made choice of such an one to be captain over God's people. Accustomed to think of David as a crowned monarch and the founder of a long line of illustrious kings, it is not easy for us to realise his humble origin in its full force. If we suppose a mechanic or herd boy in our own age exalted to power, we will be enabled to understand the case of David—a man of no "birth"—having none of the human prestige arising from rank, wealth, or pedigree—suddenly called to the highest position. The case is practically interesting to us in this way, that we are called by the gospel from the humblest classes of society to be heirs with Christ, the son of David, of the kingdom in Israel in the coming day of its universal dominion upon earth. Our neighbours laugh at the presumption of the idea. We would agree with them in thinking such an idea presumptuous—absurd—insane—any other hard name they might choose to use—if it rested in any degree on human opinion or conception. But it is God's own invitation—God's own promise; and the case of David is a historic illustration of the very feature of it which is now so much scouted:

"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world—rich in faith—heirs of the Kingdom which he hath promised to them that love Him."

"*Rich in faith;*" this is where David would present a great contrast to the mechanics and shepherds of our day. He was of a fervent mind and affection towards all things pertaining to the purpose and Law of God. He was a man of love, of faith, of obedience. In this, he was a "*man after God's own heart.*" In this, he differed totally from most men of similar social position in our day. For this he was chosen. So it is now. Poverty is no recommendation to God if the poor one lacks the wealth of mind that can rejoice in the worship and fear of God, and in the hope of His covenanted goodness, and in all the service God has associated with these things. The poor must be "*rich in faith*" before they will be chosen for the Kingdom—a faith, too, that works by love; a faith that is not dead, but fruitful in every good word and work, according to the divine law of these things.

In the next feature of David's case, we may also learn something. Though called to the kingdom by the anointing oil of Samuel, he was not immediately elevated to it. He was put through a preliminary period of trouble—so dark and sore that often he despaired of the upshot:

"I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul."

We have been called by the gospel, but we are in trouble—often dark and sore. Are we tempted to despair? Remember David. The exaltation to which we are going on is for ever, therefore the trial is longer. It is no accident, it is of divine appointment, though it may appear all so human. Let us endure; there will be a bright opening to the darkness by-and-by. The trouble is good. It humbles us and proves us. It is easy to believe God in the light, will we

trust Him in the darkness? This is the question which is settled to God's glory and our honour if we continue steadfast unto the end. Faith tried in this way will *"be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing at the appearing of Christ."* It is truly a privilege to be tried. We do not always see it in present weakness. We shall see it when the process is finished, and when we stand accepted and comforted in the presence of Christ.

David came at last to great prosperity and power. What was his first thought? Here again we get instruction, and perhaps reproof. David said to Nathan:

"I dwell in an house of cedar, and the ark of God dwells in curtains"—

That is, "I am well provided, the things of God are not, I cannot be satisfied with this situation of things."

"Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed. I will not give sleep to mine eyes nor slumber to mine eyelids until I find out a place for Yahweh—an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." (Psa. 132:3-5).

The instruction is this, that a man after God's own heart is not satisfied to enjoy personal prosperity without making the things of God an equal sharer, at least, in the prosperity. This we have to apply to ourselves. We have no such prosperity as David had; and we have no ark of God to provide with a splendid tent. But in measure, according to circumstances, every man of God will act out David's principle. If God has not an ark, He has a Bible, and a gospel, and a people and a work. With all these, the honour of His name is associated. And he is a wise man who attaining to great estate like David, is able to feel as David felt—unable to enjoy his own part until he had done bountifully for God's part. In the highest sense, God requires nothing from man, but it has pleased Him to have requirements upon earth; and to depend upon His people for their supply. David proposed to do what God could not sanction. He proposed to do what God could not sanction. He proposed to build a temple. In this scheme of prophetic analogies, God had reserved this work for David's son, and therefore He forbade David to proceed. But nevertheless the existence of the project in David's mind was pleasing to God.

"Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."

The *"devising of liberal things"* is always acceptable to God. We have here a possibility of reaching a high mark in His favour. It is much decried in our day. Spiritual enterprise is quenched by the children of the flesh under various specious pleas. Big ideas and small purses don't go well together. This is the sort of water-hose they turn on. But the fire kindled from the altar cannot be put out.

"Thou didst well that it was in thine heart."

What is in the heart will struggle even through a small purse sometimes. It is not the big purses and small ideas that do the work or give pleasure to God.

Out of David's voluntary scheme for honouring God came a result of recompense which was David's comfort to the day of his death, and in which we have a personal interest by the gospel. David referred to it in his *"last words."*

"God hath made with me an everlasting covenant, which is all my salvation and all my desire."

This covenant was communicated by the prophet who brought word from God that David was not to build the house.

"Thou shalt not build Me an house: Yahweh will build thee an house . . . thy house and thy kingdom shall continue for ever before Me."

"Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne."

This covenant, though bearing on Solomon, had ultimate reference to Christ, as David's own last words show, and as was plainly declared by Peter on the day of Pentecost. God had promised to Abraham the everlasting establishment of his seed as a great nation in the land of

promise. God now opens to view in the covenant made with David the means by which the greater purpose is to be accomplished. The house of David is made the royal house of the nation; a son of David is to be Yahweh's anointed, by whom its whole work is to be done. And we, brethren, if our faith and obedience are such as to be well pleasing to Him, are this man's brethren and joint-heirs. In him, God had made with us "*an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David*," as promised (Isa. 55:3); and we look forward to participating with him in the glory and honour and immortality of David's throne in the age he will introduce at his coming. It is a great future, and would be a presumptuous and an insane expectation if it did not rest upon God's own promise by Christ. It does so rest.

"To him that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (Rev. 3:21).

The identity of his throne with David's is established beyond all doubt by the angel's words to Mary:

"The Lord God shall give unto him (Jesus) the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32).

Consequently, we indulge no illusion, and foster no fanatical thought in looking forward to sharing with Christ, with David, with Abraham, the unutterable glories of the age of righteousness and life that will yet dawn upon the earth in virtue of the covenants made of God with the fathers. God has promised, and the Word of God cannot fail. It is all a question of conformity to the requirements with which the glory is conditionally associated. God had given us models to copy from, as well as precepts to obey. We have them in Christ, in David, and others. There will be a family likeness running through all the accepted. Differing in measure and degree, they will all be men of faith and obedience, and love and fervour—delighting in God more than in the works of God—in the Creator more than in the creature.

A final instruction of the chapter before us may be found in the act performed by David on receiving the covenant-message from God by Nathan. He went before the ark of the Lord, and offered thanks and prayer. We need this lesson. Performing "devotions" and "saying" prayers has become such a rank abomination in our age—matter of dead formalism and hideous superstition—that we are liable, by reaction, to be carried into the opposite extreme, and to become prayerless and heartless men, and, therefore, such as God cannot regard with any satisfaction. Of this, we must beware. Prayer is the most ennobling and the most beautiful act of high reason in the universe, notwithstanding the abominations with which it has become associated. It is the expression of fully developed and instructed intellect.

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By Bro. Robert Roberts