

VERY SINGULAR
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“He...put his household in order, and hanged himself.”
2 Samuel 17:23.

AHITHOPHEL was a man of keen perception and those who consulted him followed his advice with as much confidence as if he had been an oracle from Heaven. He was a great master of diplomacy, versed in the arts of cunning—far-seeing, cautious, deep. He was for years the friend and counselor of David. But thinking it judicious to be on the popular side, he left his old master that he might, like many other courtiers, worship the rising sun and hold an eminent position under Absalom. This, to use diplomatic language, was not only a crime, but a mistake. Absalom was not the man to follow the warnings of wisdom and Ahithophel found himself supplanted by another counselor. And whereas he was so incensed that he left Absalom, hurried home, arranged his personal affairs and hanged himself in sheer vexation.

His case teaches us that the greatest worldly wisdom will not preserve a man from the utmost folly. Here was a man worthy to be called the Nestor of debate, who yet had not wit enough to keep his neck from the fatal noose! Many a man, supremely wise for a time, fails in the long run. The renowned monarch, shrewd for the hour, has before long proved his whole system to be a fatal mistake. Instances there are, near to hand, where a brilliant career has ended in shame—a life of wealth closed in poverty—an empire collapsed in ruin. The wisdom which contemplates only this life fails even in its own sphere. Its tricks are too shallow, its devices too temporary and the whole comes down with a crash when least expected to fall! What sad cases have we seen of men who have been wise in policy, who have utterly failed from lack of principle! For lack of the spirit of honor and truth to establish them, they have built palaces of ice which have melted before they were complete. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” The wisdom which comes from above is the only wisdom—the secular is folly until the sacred blends its golden stream therewith!

I desire to call your attention to the text on account of its very remarkable character. *“He put his house in order, and hanged himself.”* To put his house in order showed that he was a prudent man. To hang himself proved that he was a fool. Herein is a strange mixture of discretion and desperation, mind and madness. Shall a man have wisdom enough to arrange his worldly affairs with care and yet shall be so hapless as to take his own life afterwards? As Bishop Hall pithily says, “Could it be possible that he should be careful to order his house who regarded not to order his impetuous passions? That he should care for his house who cared not for either body or soul?” Strange incongruity—he makes his will and then, because he cannot have his will, he wills to die! ‘Tis another proof that madness is in the hearts of the sons of men! Marvel not at this one display of folly, for I shall have to show you that the case of Ahithophel is, in the spirit of it, almost universal. And as I shall describe sundry similar individuals, many of you will perceive that I speak of you. Thousands set their houses in order, but destroy their souls! They look well to their flocks and their herds, but not to their hearts’ best interests. They gather broken shells with continuous industry, but they throw away priceless diamonds. They exercise forethought, prudence, care—everywhere but where they are most required. They save their money, but squander their happiness. They are guardians of their estates, but suicides of their souls. This folly takes many forms, but it is seen on all hands, and the sight should make the Christian weep over the madness of his fellow men. May the series of portraits which will now pass before us, while they hold the mirror up to Nature, also point us in the way of Grace!

See before you, then, the portrait of AN ATTENTIVE SERVANT. He is faithful to his employers and fulfils well the office to which he is appointed. He is up with the lark. He toils all day—he rests not till his task is done. He neglects nothing which he undertakes. I see him among the throng, I will single him out and talk with him.

You have been engaged for years in farming. You have plowed, sown, reaped and gathered into the barn—and no one has done the work better than you, and yet, though you have been so careful in your labor, you have never sown to the Spirit, nor cared to reap Life Everlasting. You have never asked to have your heart plowed with the Gospel plow, nor sown with the living Seed—and the consequence will be that at the last, you will have no harvest but weeds and thistles—and you will be given over to eternal destruction! What causes you to care for the clover and the turnips, the cows and the sheep, but never for yourself, your truest self, your ever-existing soul? What? All this care about the field, and no care about your heart? All this toil for a harvest which the hungry shall eat up—and no care whatever about the harvest that shall last eternally?

Or you have been occupied all your life in a garden and there, what earnestness you have shown, what taste in the training of the plants and flowers, what diligence in digging, planting, weeding and watering! Often has your employer congratulated himself that he has so careful a servant. You take a delight in your work and well you may, for some relics of Eden's memories still linger around a garden—but how is it that you are so choice with yonder tulip and so indifferent about your own spirit? What? You care for a poor rose which so soon is withered—and have no thought about your immortal nature? Does this sound like a reasonable man? You were very careful, in the winter, to keep up the heat of the greenhouse, lest those feeble plants should suffer from the frost. Have you, then, no care to be protected from temptation and from the dread storms of Almighty Wrath which are so soon to come? Can it be that you are diligent in ordering the walks, beds and shrubberies of your master's grounds, and yet are utterly careless about the garden of your heart in which fairer flowers would bloom and yield you a far richer reward? I marvel at you! It seems so strange that you should be so good a worker for others, but take such poor care of yourself! I fear your lament will have to be, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept."

It would be too long a task to dwell particularly on each of your employments, but I will hope that, in each case, you are anxious to do your work thoroughly, so as to secure approval. The horse is not badly fed, nor the carriage recklessly driven, nor the wall carelessly built, nor the woods ill planed—you would be ashamed to be called a negligent workman. Put it, then, to yourself—will you watch over another man's goods and be unmindful of your own highest good? What? Do you mind the horse and the wagon, the parcels, the errands, all sorts of little matters and shall that soul of yours, which will outlast the sun and live when stars grow dim, be left without a thought? What? Do you love others so much and yourself so little? Are minor matters to absorb all your thoughts, while your own eternal concerns are left in utter neglect?

Some of you are domestic servants and endeavor to discharge your duties well. You have much to do from morning till night and you would be ashamed for anyone to say, "The room is unswept, cobwebs are on the walls, the floors are filthy, the meals are badly cooked because you are a bad servant." No, you feel rather proud that when you have a situation, you can keep it and that the mistress is content with you. Suffer me, then, to ask you, in the gentlest manner, Is your heart never to be cleansed? Are your sins always to defile it? Have you no thought about the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?" Do you think God made you to be a mere sweeper and cleaner of rooms, a cooker of meat, and so on, and that this is all you were designed for? There must be a higher and a better life for you—and do you altogether disregard it? Will you weary yourself, day by day, about another person's house and have you no interest in your own soul? Have you so much care to please (as you should) your master and mistress, and no care about being reconciled to God? I will not think that you are so bereft of reason!

I address a still larger class, probably, if I say there are many here who will go off to the City, in the morning, to fulfill the duties of confidential accountants. You never suffer the books to be inaccurate—they balance to a farthing! It would distress you if, through your inadvertence, the firm lost even a sixpence. You have perhaps been many years with the same employers and have their unbounded respect. From your boyhood to this day, you have been connected with the house. I have known several admirable men of high integrity and thorough faithfulness, whom their employers could never sufficiently value, for they laid themselves out with intense zeal to promote their commercial interests and worked far harder than the heads of the house ever did! Had the whole concern been their own, they could not have been more diligent—and yet these very men gave no head to their own personal interests for another world! It was grievous to observe that God was not in all their thoughts, nor Heaven, nor Hell, nor their own precious souls. You good and faithful servants of men, will you perish as unfaithful servants of God? What? Will you never look onward to the last

great reckoning? Is it nothing to you that the debts due to Divine Justice are undischarged? Are you willing to be called before the Lord of All and to hear Him say, “You wicked and slothful servant! I gave you a talent, but you have wrapped it in a napkin.” God forbid that I should diminish one grain of your diligence in your secular avocations, but, from the very zeal you throw into these, I charge you, if you are reasonable men, see to it that you destroy not your own souls! Be not like Ahithophel who set his house in order and hanged himself! Set not your master’s concerns in order and then destroy your own souls—for how shall you escape if you neglect the great salvation?

Look now to another picture—THE PRUDENT MERCHANT. I must briefly sketch him. He knows the ways of trade, studies the state of the market, is quick to perceive the opportunity of gain, has been cautious in his speculations, has secured what he has obtained and is now in possession of a competency, or on the road to it! He prides himself in a quiet way, upon the prudence with which he conducts all his worldly transactions. And, my dear Friend, I am sure I am glad to see you prudent in business, for much misery would be caused to others as well as to yourself by recklessness and folly. But I want to ask you, if you are thoughtless about religion, how it is that you can be so inconsistent? Do you study how to buy, and buy well, but will you never buy the Truth of God? Do you put all that you get into a safe bank, but will you never lay up treasure in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupts? You are wary of your speculations, but will you play so deep a hazard as to jeopardize your soul? You have been for years accustomed to rise up early, sit up late and eat the bread of carefulness—will you never rise early to seek the Lord? Will you never prevent the night watches to find a Savior? Is the body everything? Is gold your god? Why, you are a man of intelligence and reading and you know that there are higher considerations than those of business and the state of trade! You do not believe yourself to be of the same order of beings as the brute that perishes—you expect to live in another state! You have a Book which tells you what that life will be and how it may be shaped for joy—or left to be drifted into endless sorrow.

Am I a fanatic, my dear Sir, if I respectfully put my hand on yours and say, “I beseech you, think not all of the less, and nothing of the greater, lest haply, when you come to die, the same may be said of you as of a rich man of old who had been as cautious and as careful as you—‘You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall these things be which you have provided?’ I charge you, if you are prudent, prove it by being prudent about the weightiest of all concerns. If you are not, after all, a mere bragger as to prudence, a mere child enraptured with silly toys, then show your wisdom by following the wisest course.” I have heard of one, the stewardess of an American vessel, who, when the ship was sinking, saw heaps of gold coin scattered upon the cabin floor by those who had thrown it there in the confusion of their escape. She gathered up large quantities of it, wrapped it round her waist, and leaped into the water! She sank like a millstone, as though she had studiously prepared herself for destruction! I fear that many of you traders are diligently collecting guarantees for your surer ruin, planning to bury yourselves beneath your glittering hoards. Be wise in time. My voice, no, my *heart* pleads with you, for your soul’s sake and for Christ’s sake, be not like Ahithophel who set his house in order, and hanged himself! Take sure bond for enduring happiness! Invest in indisputable securities! Have done with infinite risks and be assured of life everlasting!

A third photograph shall now be exhibited. This will describe a smaller, but a very valuable class of men—and if they were blessed of God, how glad would I be! THE DILIGENT STUDENT. He seeks out the best of books to assist him in the pursuit of his branch of knowledge. He burns the midnight oil. He is not afraid of toil. He cares not for throbbing brain and weary eyes, but he presses on—he trains his memory, he schools his judgment and all with the hope that he may be numbered with the learned. The examinations of his university are to him the most important periods in the calendar—his degree is the prize of his high calling. Knowledge is sweet and the honor of being associated with the learned is coveted. My young Friend, I would not for a moment abate your zeal, but I would beg space for one consideration worthy of immediate attention. Ought the best of sciences to be left to the last? Should self-knowledge and acquaintance with God be treated as secondary importance? Should not the Word of God be the chief volume in the wise man’s library? Should you not burn the midnight oil to peruse the Infallible page written by the Divine finger? With all your getting, should you not get the understanding which comes from above and the knowledge which is the gift of God, and which will introduce you, if not among the learned, yet among the gracious? If not into the academy of savants, yet into the general assembly and Church of the First-Born, whose names are written in Heaven? Should there not be with you the wish to train your complete manhood and to educate yourself to the fullness of the stature of what a man should be? Should not the noblest part have the chief care? I speak to a wise man! I would have him be truly wise. I would not

have him set his study in order and tutor himself—and then forget the eternal life and the destiny that awaits him. O Student, seek you first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and then shall your temple of wisdom be built upon a Rock!

I will take another character, a character which is very common in great cities—I am not sure but what it is common enough—THE REFORMING POLITICIAN. I value our politicians highly, but we scarcely need to be overstocked with those who brawl in public houses and discussion rooms while their families are starving at home! Some men who spend a great deal of time in considering politics, are hardly benefiting the commonwealth to the extent they imagine. I will suppose I am addressing a man who feels the home and foreign affairs of the nation to be his particular department. Well, my respected Friend, I trust you occupy a useful place in the general economy, but I need to ask you one or two questions well worthy of a Reformer's or a Conservative's consideration. You have been looking up abuses—have you no abuses in your own life which need correcting? There is no doubt about the Reform Bill having been needed, but do you not think a Reform Bill is needed by some of us at home—in reference to our own characters and especially in reference to our relation towards our God and our Savior? I think only he who is ignorant of himself will deny that. And would it not be a fine thing to begin at home and let the politics of our house and our heart be set quite right, and that immediately? You have in your brain a complete scheme for paying off the National Debt, elevating the nation, remodeling the navy, improving the army, managing the Colonies, delivering France and establishing the best form of government in Europe! I am afraid your schemes may not be carried out as soon as you desire, but may I not suggest to you that your own heart needs renewing by the Spirit of God, your many sins need removing by the Atonement of Jesus and your whole life requires a deep and radical change? And this is a practical measure which no aristocracy will oppose, which no vested interests will defeat and which need not be delayed for another election or a new Premier!

I daresay you have faced much opposition and expect to face much more in agitating the important question which you have taken up, but ah, my Friend, will you not sometimes agitate questions with your conscience? Will you not discuss with your inner nature the great Truths which God has revealed? Would it not be worth your while, at last, to spend some time in your private council chamber with yourself thinking of the now, and of the past, and of the to come—considering God, Christ, Heaven, Hell and yourself as connected with all these? I press it on you—it seems to me to be the greatest of all inconsistencies that a man should think himself able to guide a nation and yet should lose his own soul! That he should have schemes by which to turn this world into a Paradise and yet lose Paradise for himself! That he should declaim violently against war and all sorts of evils and yet, himself, should be at war with God! Himself a slave to sin! Shall he talk of freedom while he is manacled by his lusts and appetites? Shall he be enslaved by drink and yet be the champion of liberty? He that teaches freedom should himself be free! It is ill to see a man contending for others and a captive himself! To arrange the nation's affairs and to destroy yourself is as foolish as Ahithophel who put his household in order, and hanged himself!

We will pass to another character—and how much of what I am now to utter may concern myself I pray God to teach me—THE ZEALOUS PREACHER. The character is no imaginary one. It is not suggested by bitterness, or colored by fanaticism—there have been such and will be such to the end—men who study the Scriptures, are masters of theology, versed in doctrine, conversant with law—men who teach the lessons they have gathered and teach them eloquently and forcibly, warning their hearers of their sins, pointing out their danger—and pleading with them to lay hold on Christ and life eternal. And yet—for all this, they are themselves unconverted! They preach what they never felt, they teach what they never knew by experience. Brother ministers, I allude not to you any more than to myself, but of all men that live we are most called upon to watch lest our very office should help us to be hypocrites—lest our position as teachers should bring upon us a double curse! Do not let us seek the salvation of others and lose our own souls! To preach Christ and not to have Him—to tell of the Fountain, and not to be washed in it—to speak of Hell, and warn men to escape it, and yet go there ourselves—God grant it may never be so with any of us!

But, mark you, the point of this warning comes to many here who are not altogether ministers. You are not preachers, but you are Sunday school teachers, tract-distributors, Bible women, or city missionaries. Then hear you the same warning! Will you go round with those tracts from house to house and yet have no religion in your own houses? O miserable souls! Who has required it at your hands to teach others of God when you are not reconciled to God yourselves? What can you teach those children in the Sunday school? I say, what can you teach those children, when you

yourselves are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity? May not the very words you spoke to your classes today, rise up against you in the Day of Judgment and condemn you? Do not be content to have it so. Do not point out the right way to others, yet run in another road yourself! Do not set others in order and slay yourselves!

I have another picture to look upon—it represents A CAREFUL PARENT. Many who may not have been included under other descriptions will be mentioned here. You love your children well and wisely. As far as this world is concerned, you are careful and prudent parents. You were very watchful over them in their childhood, you were afraid that those infant sicknesses would take them to the grave. How glad you were, dear mother, when once again you could lift the little one from the bed and press it to your bosom, and thank God that it was recovering its health and strength! You have denied yourself a great deal for your children. When you were out of work and struggling with poverty, you did not so much grieve for yourselves as for them—it was so hard to see your children needing bread. You have been so pleased to clothe them, so glad to notice their opening intellect and you have, many of you, selected with great care places where they will receive a good education. And if you thought that any bad influence would come across their path, you would be on your guard at once. You wish your children to grow up patterns of virtue and good citizens—and you are right in all this. I wish that all felt as you do about their families and that none were allowed to run loose in the streets, which are the devil's school.

Now, as you have been so very careful about your children, may I ask you—ought not your own soul to have some thought bestowed on it, some anxiety exercised about it? It is a child, too, to be educated for the skies, to be nurtured for the Father's House above. Look in the baby's face and think of the care you give to it—and then turn your eyes inwardly upon your soul and ask, "What care have I given to you, my Soul? I have left you unwashed, unclothed, unhoused. No blood of Christ has fallen on you, my Soul. No righteousness of Christ has wrapped you. For you, my Soul, my poor, poor Soul, there is no Heaven when you must leave this body. For you there is no hope but a fearful looking for judgment and of fiery indignation! My Soul, forgive me that I have treated you so ill. I will now think of you and bow my knee and ask the Lord to be gracious to you." I wish I could call upon you personally and press this matter upon you. Think that I am doing so! When you reach home, think that I am following you there and saying to you, "If you care for your children, care for your soul." Look at the boys and girls sleeping in their cots, tonight, and if you are unconverted, say to yourself, "There they lie, the dear ones, they are little sermons to me. I will remember what the preacher said when I look at them. My God, my Father, I will turn to You—do turn me, and I shall be turned."

The last of my crayon sketches is one which may concern many. It is that of THE OUTWARD RELIGIONIST who yet is regardless of his own soul. It is the oddest and strangest of all that there should be such people. I have met with Protestants, flaming Protestants, I might add, raving Protestants who, nevertheless, know no more about Protestantism than about the genealogy of Greek gods! And were they questioned as to what it is that was protested against by the Reformers, they would guess wide of the mark. Yet are they very concerned that our glorious constitution in Church and State should be "thoroughly Protestant"—though I cannot for the life of me see what difference it would make to them! If they have no faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, what matters it to them how a man is justified? There are others who are "Dissenters to the backbone," but yet sinners to their marrow! To ungodly men I say solemnly, What matters it what you are in these matters? In all probability, the side which has the honor of your patronage is a loser by it! If you are leading bad lives, I am very sorry that you are Dissenters, for you injure a good cause. What fools you must be, to be so earnest about religions in which you have no concern!

Many, again, are very orthodox, even to being strait-laced and yet are unbelievers. If the preacher does not come up to their weight and measure, they denounce him at once and have no word bad enough for him. But now, my Friend, though I cannot say that I am altogether sorry that you think about doctrines and churches, let me ask you—Is it wise that you should set up for a judge upon a matter in which you have no share? You are vociferous for setting the church in order, but you are destroying your own soul! If these things belonged to you, I could understand your zeal about them. But since you have nothing to do with them, (and you have not if you have no faith), why do you look after other people and let your own salvation go by default? It may be a very important thing to somebody how the Duke of Devonshire may lay out his estate at Chatsworth, but I am sure it is not important to me, for I am in no degree a part proprietor with his grace. So it may be very important to some people how such-and-such a doctrine is taught—but why should you be so zealous about it when you are in no degree a part proprietor in it unless you have believed in Jesus Christ?

What startles me with some of you is that you will cheerfully contribute for the support of a Gospel in which you have never believed! There are those of you here to whom I am thankful for help in Christ's service. You put your hand into your pocket and are "generous to the Lord's cause." But how is it that you do this and yet refuse to give Jesus your heart? I know you do not think you are purchasing His favor by your money—you know better than that—but why do you do it? Are you like those builders who helped Noah to build the ark and then were drowned? Do you help to build a lifeboat—and being yourself shipwrecked, do you refuse the assistance of the lifeboat? You are strangely inconsistent! You keep God's Sabbaths, and yet you will not enter into His rest! You sing Christ's praises and yet you will not trust Him. You bow your heads in prayer and yet you do not pray! You are anxious, too, sometimes, and yet that which would end all your anxiety, namely, submission to the Gospel of Christ, you will not yield! Why is this? Why this strange behavior? Will you bless others and curse yourselves?

I speak to the whole of you who as yet have not believed in Jesus and I ask—What is it with which you are destroying your souls? Every unbeliever is an eternal suicide—he is destroying his soul's hopes. What is your motive? Perhaps some of you are indulging a pleasurable sin which you cannot give up. I entreat you, cast it from you! Though it is dear as the right eye, pluck it out! Or useful as the right arm, cut it off and cast it from you! Suffer no temporary pleasures to lead you into eternal destruction! Escape for your life! Sweet sin will bring bitter death—may God give you Grace to cast it away!

Or is it some deadly error with which you are destroying your soul? Have you a notion that it is a small thing to die unsaved? Do you imagine that, by-and-by, it will all be over and you can bear the temporary punishment? Dream not so! Not thus speaks the Infallible Word of God, though men would thus buoy up your spirits and make your forehead brazen against the Most High! It is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! God grant that you may not run that risk and meet that fate!

Or perhaps some self-righteous trust holds you back from Christ. You can destroy yourself with that as well as with sin. To trust to ourselves is deadly—only to trust to Jesus is safe. I will explain that to you and have done. Inasmuch as we had sinned against God, God must punish us—it is necessary that sin should be punished, or there could be no moral government. Now, in order to meet that case, to have mercy upon men in conformity with justice, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world and became Man and, as Man, He took upon Himself the sins of all His people and was punished for them. And whoever trusts Jesus is one of those for whom Jesus bore the smart, for whom He paid the debt. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, if you trust your soul with the Christ of Nazareth, your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you! Go in peace—your soul is saved! But if you put away from you the Christ who says, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth," you may be very wise and you may arrange your business very cleverly, but, for all that, you are no wiser than the great fool of my text who set his house in order, and hanged himself! God teach both hearers and readers to be wise before it is too late! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: 2 SAMUEL 15:12-37.

Verse 12. *And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.* Absalom had, by graft, insinuated himself into the hearts of the children of Israel and led a rebellion against his father David, that he might obtain the crown for himself.

13, 14. *And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee, for we shall not else escape from Absalom; make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.* It must have been a sore peril which compelled so brave a man as David to say to his servants, "Arise, and let us flee."

15. *And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king shall appoint.* What a loyal spirit they displayed in the time of trial! Oh, that such loyalty could always be found in all the servants of King Jesus! But, alas, many of His servants pick and choose as to which of His commands they will obey!

Some of them will not understand the plain letter of Scripture and others of them know their duty, yet they do it not. There is reason to question whether we are the servants of Christ if we have not the spirit of obedience to Him. Brothers and Sisters, let us search and look in the book of the King's ordinances and see whether we are walking in all of them blamelessly. If we can say that we are, it is well. But I am afraid that there are some of His commandments which we would rather not understand—or if we do understand them, we are not in a hurry to obey them. How easy it is to make excuses for not doing what we have no wish to do! Blessed are those Christians who can say, “Behold, Your servants are ready to do whatever my Lord the King shall appoint”

16-18. *And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women which were concubines, to keep the house. And the king went forth and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.* The king's bodyguard of personal friends who had seen long service with him in the contest with Saul—these kept close to him.

19, 20. *Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, why go you also with us? Return to your place, and abide with the king: for you are a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas you came but yesterday, should I this day make you go up and down with us? Seeing I go where I may, return you, and take back your brethren: mercy and truth be with you.* This was the manifestation of a generous spirit on the part of David and therein he was like the Son of David, who thought more of the safety of His disciples than He did of any way of escape for Himself. Let the same mind be in us which was also in David, and in Christ Jesus, great David's greater Son! And let us look, not only on our own things, but also on the things of others.

21. *And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will your servant be.* He was a newcomer, but he was a fine recruit—and when our young converts who have lately joined the Church, have this spirit of loyalty in them, they will make mighty men of valor in the Lord's army! Whether Christ's cause be held in honor or in contempt, we will cast in our lot with Him! Whether He is reigning on the earth or His name is cast out as evil, we will share His fortunes. To whom should we go but to Him? And where could we find a better Master than this gracious King under whose banner we have enlisted?

22-26. *And David said to Ittai, go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness. And lo, Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the Ark of the Covenant of God: and they set down the Ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the Ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation; but if He thus says, I have no delight in you; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seems good unto Him.* David would run no risks with this sacred treasure—and though it would have been a great comfort to him to have had the Ark of the Covenant with him, yet he cared too much for it to think only of his own comfort. How careful ought we to be of the Truth of God and of the things of God—of which this Ark was but a type! Lord, let us run what risks we may, but we would not expose Your Truth, or Your good cause to any risk.

“Let Him do to me as seems good unto Him.” What a grand spirit there was in David even in his exile! There was a sweet spirit of song in him before his great fall, but that fall broke his voice and he sang more hoarsely ever afterwards. Yet what depth, what volume, what melody and harmony are here—“deep calls unto deep.” What submission and subjection to the Divine will and, withal, what a holy confidence! Let the Lord do as He wills—David feels himself to be less than nothing and submits himself absolutely to the Divine Purpose. It is not easy to get to that way, but we must be brought to it. If we are the Lord's servants, we must lie passively in His hands and know no will but His. Yet deep waters will have to be passed through before we reach this blessed experience.

27-30. *The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Are not you a seer? Return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there comes word from you to certify me. Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the Ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there. And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and*

he went barefoot: and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up. David probably wept partly because of his troubles, but also because of his sin which the thought of his troubles doubtless brought to his mind—and especially that sin which he has so deeply deplored in the seven penitential Psalms—and most of all in the 51st Psalm. He wore no royal robe on this pilgrimage of sorrow! And “he went barefoot” up the slopes of Olivet.

31. *And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray You, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.* Ahithophel was David’s choicest friend, companion and counselor, yet he had failed him in his time of need. David could use the weapon of all-prayer when he could use no other—and this is like the flaming sword at Eden’s gate which turned every way. It will slay our foes if they come from Hell. It will drive away Satanic suggestions. It will overcome our adversaries if they come from earth. It will sanctify our afflictions even if they come from Heaven. To know how to pray is to know how to conquer! David checkmated Ahithophel when he said, “O Lord, I pray You, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.”

32. *And it came to pass that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and earth upon his head.* Here was an immediate answer to David’s prayer, for the very man who alone could deal effectually with Ahithophel, comes to the king!

33-37. *Unto whom David said, If you pass on with me, then you shall be a burden unto me: but if you return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father’s servant hitherto, so will I now also be your servant: then may you for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And have you not there with you Zadok and Abiathar the priests? Therefore it shall be that what thing soever you shall hear out of the king’s house, you shall tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok’s son, and Jonathan, Abiathar’s son; and by them you shall send unto me everything that you can hear. So Hushai, David’s friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.*

You know the rest of the history, how Absalom took the advice of Hushai and Ahithophel was defeated. God does not always answer prayer quite so rapidly as He did in this case, yet, when His people are in sore straits, they often have prompt replies to their petitions, to encourage their faith and to keep their hope alive in the time of trial!

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