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## 2 SAMUEL

The first book of Samuel closes with the introduction of David. We saw him in preparation for his life-work; in the fields as shepherd; in the palace as musician and courtier; in the wilderness as outlaw. He was fitted for the position to which he was appointed, and for which he had been anointed. In the second book, we have the history of his specific contribution to the purpose of God. The question of preliminary preparation for service is not in view here, but rather the service resulting therefrom. We have already seen the threefold process of preparation in the fields, in the palace, in exile. In the fields, the essential spirit of a king, that of the shepherd, had its training. In the palace, the incidentals of kingliness were cultivated. In the exile, fibre was toughened, and the king was prepared for government. All these values are in this story. David is here the shepherd of his people, the centre of his court, and the strong ruler. The story of the book begins with the crisis that brought David into his specific work. Our attention, then, is fixed upon him fulfilling the office of king under the direct government of God, and from that standpoint there are two permanent values in the study. The book teaches us first that God's opportunity is created by the attitude of man towards Him; and secondly, that man's opportunity is created by the attitude of God towards him.

In the appendix to this book are two psalms which are of great use, as they state the principles which the story illustrates. As in the first book of Samuel the whole of its values are suggested in Hannah's song, with which it opens; so in the second book the values are crystallized in David's songs, with which it closes.

Let us begin with the first statement, that God's opportunity is created by the attitude of man towards Him. That principle emerges into clear declaration in the first of the two psalms:

*"With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful,  
With the perfect man Thou wilt show Thyself perfect;  
With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure;  
And with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward.  
And the afflicted people Thou wilt save:  
But Thine eyes are upon the haughty, that Thou mayest bring them down."*

All of which means that God is to a man what the man is to God. That is the principle. The story of David perfectly illustrates it. The attitude of David towards God is revealed as fourfold. There is manifested first, his conception of the supremacy of God; secondly, his conviction of the righteousness of God; thirdly, his confidence in the mercy of God; and finally, his conformity of desire to the will of God. There were times when faith faltered, and he did foolish things, when his passion mastered him, when he fell into fearful sin; but underneath the faltering faith I find faith which never faltered; deeper than the passion was the passionate desire for holiness; profounder than any sin, however heinous, was the attitude of soul which could say, "My soul followeth hard after God."

David's conception of the Divine supremacy I need not stay to illustrate. It may be stated superlatively. There is no instance recorded in which he called in question the crown rights of Jehovah. His conviction of the righteousness of God never wavered. Foolish things he did, awful sins he committed, but he never doubted the righteousness of God's dealing with him. Charged with sin by the prophet of God, he confessed it, and bent himself to the stroke of God, convinced of the absolute Tightness of the Divine character and method. He had perfect confidence in God's mercy. If there is one demonstration of confidence in mercy more powerful than another, it is willingness to be punished. "Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man." That submission to the stroke of God is the finest revelation of his confidence in the tenderness of the Divine heart. His deepest desire perpetually was for conformity to the will of God. A man of passion, he fell into dark deeds of crime; yet through all the long processes of punishment, through the sin of his children, and the breaking of his heart in consequence, he never murmured against the stroke of God, but in perfect confidence in His mercy, and unceasing conformity of desire after His will, he endured.

That attitude created the Divine opportunity. Over a man who had a conception of His supremacy, God was able to exercise His sovereignty, taking him up, setting him upon the throne, and leading him in the administration of his kingdom. Towards the man convinced of His righteousness, it was possible for God to exercise that Tightness in all His dealing with him. To the man with desire conformed to aspiration after Himself, God was able to come as Saviour. Thus all the forces of God are seen operating in the life of a man in right attitude towards Him, and so this man became the instrument of God through whom He accomplished His wider purpose. How I thank God that it was written of David that he was a man after God's own heart. There are men in the Bible of whom had it been written, it could never have helped me as it does when I see it written of David a man who did so fall and fail and stoop to sin. Why does it help me? Because it excuses sin? A thousand times no! but because it shows me that God's measurement of a man, and God's ability to deal with a man, depend upon the deepest aspiration in that man's heart; and that God takes the measurement of a man by what he wills to be, and not by the faltering and failing of the moment. Even David could look up into the face of God, and say, "The Lord will perfect that which concerned! me." This is the first great revelation of the book, that God's opportunity to make me and use me is created by the deep, underlying, positive attitude of my life towards Him.

Now we may turn to the other side. Whence came these attitudes of David towards God? How is it that they came to be such, as I have attempted to epitomize as a conception of supremacy, a conviction of righteousness, a confidence in mercy, a conformity of desire. The attitude of God towards David created David's attitude towards God. This attitude David described in the second of the two psalms already referred to. Let us rapidly survey it It first declares the purpose of God:

*"David, the son of Jesse, saith,  
And the man who was raised on high saith,  
The anointed of the God of Jacob,  
And the sweet psalmist of Israel."*

It then reveals a secret of power:

*"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me,  
And His word was upon my tongue."*

It then affirms a principle of kingship:

*"The God of Israel said,  
The Rock of Israel spake to me:  
One that ruleth over men righteously,  
That ruleth in the fear of God,  
He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth,  
A morning without clouds;  
When the tender grass springeth out of the earth,  
Through clear shining after rain."*

It finally declares the Divine persistence:

*"Verily my house is not so with God;  
Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant,  
Ordered in all things, and sure;  
For it is all my salvation, and all my desire,  
Although He maketh it not to grow."*

These are the attitudes of God towards David as he understood them purpose, power, principle and persistence, and they created his attitude towards God.

The purpose of God as manifested. The singer evidently recognized that his appointment to kingship was Divine, and poetically he describes that, both as to the man upon whom the choice of God rested, and the ultimate issue of the choice. He did not sing of the anointed of the God of Israel, but of the anointed of the God of Jacob; that is, the God of the man Jacob in all his meanness chose David to be king; and in the fact as stated there is a suggestion of his consciousness of his own unworthiness. The man so anointed became not the sweet psalmist of Jacob, for songs cannot proceed out of meanness, but the sweet psalmist of Israel, for God can change Jacob to Israel, and so make possible all songs. That was the Divine purpose, and David's assurance of it created his attitude towards God.

The power of God as known. The statement "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was upon my tongue," is poetically true to his previous description of himself as "the sweet psalmist of Israel," but it contains the whole philosophy of godly life. It is not merely a statement that he was inspired when he sang his song, but that the inspiration of his life was that of the Spirit of the Lord, and the expression of it was the word spoken. The New Testament equivalent of the verse is, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure." Thus the singer was assured, in the second place, that God's power was commensurate with all His purpose.

The principle of God for his guidance. The king who rules righteously and in the fear of God is a benediction to his people; the benediction of the rising sun in the morning, when there are no clouds. The king who rules his people righteously is like sunlight after rain. It is somewhat difficult in this country to appreciate the beauty of the figure. In the country of David all the land is parched and burned and brown after the summer drought. Then there comes a day of sweet, silent rain, followed by clear shining; and suddenly, like a flash of emerald, all the earth is green. This was the singer's picture of the result of the exercise of kingship in the fear of God, and in righteousness. This does not seem to help us, yet the principle is applicable to all. When God would prepare David for the exercise of kingship, He did so by giving him a picture of the final King; and whatever He wills that we should be, and for Him, He reveals to us the pattern in His Son.

The persistence of God. Notwithstanding this threefold revelation of purpose, power, and principle, David was compelled to say, "My house is not so with God; yet "Thank God for that" yet ----!" There is all the Gospel in it for my heart!

"Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." Thus David affirmed finally his confidence in the persistence of Jehovah.

How did he answer these attitudes of God, which created his opportunity? He heard the purpose, and consented to it. Saul the anointed king hid behind the stuff. David the anointed king moved right on with his eye upon the goal, never turning back. Conscious of the Divine power, he answered it, and cooperated with it. He felt the power, and responded to it. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was upon my tongue." Mark well the intimate relationship between these things. Whittier sang beautifully of men who die with all their music in them. I do not criticize Whittier. There are people who die with all their music in them, who never had their chance to sing. But if we have music in us, and can express it, we have no business to die with it in us. "It is God which worketh in you . . . work out" That is the principle of salvation.

The principle of kingship is revealed, and while David certainly failed, he yet conformed thereto. Think of the condition of the kingdom when he came to it; then see it as he left it. From utter political and social chaos he had brought it to its highest realization. Solomon stands out upon the page of Bible history in lonely and wonderful splendour in certain directions; but as king he was a disastrous failure, so much so that when he died the kingdom was rent in twain. Solomon was the Lorenzo de Medici of Hebrew history, solacing the people for lack of liberty with shows and pageantry; and God help the people when they are so seduced. David lifted Israel to its heroic age, to its finest and its best. He was imperfect, and his kingdom was imperfect, but by comparison he answered the revelation of that principle so that it was fulfilled in measure in his history.

His answer to the persistence of God was that of his perfect confidence in it. It was that confidence which made him write his penitential psalms. When we speak of David's sins let us in all fairness speak also of his penitence. When we would know how deep his penitence was, let us hear his declaration, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." That is the language of a man dealing with the profoundest things of life. Of course, if men deal with the surface ripples only, they will say that God is not harmed by human sin; but to know God is finally to exclaim of every sin, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." Yet such a confession demonstrates the consciousness of the persistence of God in mercy. I would be overwhelmed by my sin, and by my sin made careless of sin, and ultimately by my sin made to continue in sin, were it not that I know the infinite goodness of God is set upon delivering me, if I will but stand in right attitude towards Him. Thus God was able to operate through David, His opportunity being created by David's attitude towards Him; yet that attitude of David towards God was the result of His attitude towards David. The deepest truth of all in this revelation of inter-relationship is that of God's attitude towards a man. Man's responsibility is created thereby. His responsibility is that of his attitude, and that in turn decides the Divine action.

The living message of this book is patent. In order to understand it, one of the lessons of the first book of Samuel must be remembered, namely, that the ultimate victory of God is independent of the attitude of individuals or peoples towards Him. With that clearly in mind, it will be recognized that the supreme matter for cooperation in service is the attitude of the soul towards God. Fitness for service is created by the conformity of the life to the will of God. Conformity of the life depends wholly upon the attitude of the soul towards God. The conformity of my life to the will of God does not depend upon my ability, but upon my abandonment ; not upon my persuading God to do something, but upon my allowing myself to be persuaded by God to be something. The attitude of conformity is that of being willing to know, to be, to do His will. By that attitude God measures a man, and through that attitude acts with a man.

That doctrine is a two-edged sword. God is measuring me not as man would measure me. I am prone to measure a man by the last sin he has committed. God never does. He measures by the attitude of his soul. This doctrine is full of comfort, but it is awful in its severity. What is my attitude towards God? Have I lived a clean life? Would I, if I had had the chance to live a filthy one? That is the question. Half the purity in which some men boast is a question of birth and of environment. We talk of other men living in the underworld. The question is, would we live there if we could? If so, God measures us as in the underworld. This is fire. It scorches, it burns. God have mercy on me, a sinner.

Yes, but are you down? Have you committed a sin? Are your Christian friends not quite so friendly as they were, in consequence; yet all the while do you want to go right? Then that attitude of your soul is God's measurement of you.

Yes, but do not let us slip out by that door, if all the while we want to do the evil thing. Let us be careful. God help us to discriminate. We need supremely to guard against disproportionate excuse or accusing.

Now do you not see the sin of the priestcraft? Who is to come in between the soul and God? I am only an interpreter of principles. I dare not bare my soul to you, and would not have you bare yours to me. David was a man after God's own heart, because of the posture of his soul; and God at last fulfilled the underlying desire of his heart. The triumph of a man is the triumph of God over him, and man only wins when he yields to Him.