

Committal

2 Sam. 15: 19-22; Ruth 1: 15-22; John 6: 66-69.

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We gather from the Lord's words to Laodicea in Revelation 3 that lukewarmness and a lack of vitality in relation to the interests of Christ are features which mark the closing days of the church's history in this world.

We cannot fail to observe that these features are all around us today. The general attitude of men and women (and alas! young people) in the world is one of almost complete indifference to the things of God; and this spirit of indifference seems, in some degree, to have crept into the lives of some of the Lord's people. Do we not need to remind one another of the vital importance, as also the preciousness, of divine interests?

In the three passages we have read we see persons marked by definite committal in days of declension and departure. In each chapter we see those who were giving up the position and moving away, and the question is raised with Ittai, with Ruth and with the disciples, as to whether they, too, would give up. The *backward* current is strong and often attractive, and it needs true devotion and courage to stand against it.

Ittai's test was regarding his loyalty to a *person* — to David, who was in rejection; a usurper, his own son Absalom, had seized the throne. It would appear that Ittai had not long been connected with David, but quite evidently David had won his affections. He was a "stranger" and an "exile," but he was marked by absolute loyalty to his rejected king. As the opportunity of returning from following David is put before him we hear his words of true committal, "As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, *whether in death or life*, even there also will thy servant be." Notice that he puts *death* first; his devotion to David was such that even death itself would not deter him from completely following his rejected king.

Where are we as regards our loyalty to a rejected Christ? His rights for the moment have been usurped. Satan is spoken of as the "god of this world," (2 Cor. 4: 4), and as the "prince of this world," (John 12: 31). We are also told that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," or "in the wicked one," (1 John 5: 19). we see that the opposition is powerful, and Satan has many devices which he can use to divert believers from full committal to the Lord. Further, the religious profession around us is largely marked by deadness (see Revelation 3) and lack of response to the love of Christ. One meaning of Ittai's name is "living," and in the power of living affections he was prepared to cast in his lot with David in rejection. Such living affections, prompted in the power of the Holy Spirit, will enable us in our day to be marked by what is vital and true, and help us to give the interests of the Lord the pre-eminent place in our hearts and lives.

The motive which governed Ittai was devotion to David; there does not appear to have been any seeking of reward; indeed he was prepared to die with the king. But in 2 Samuel 18, we find David restored to the throne, and verse 5 of that chapter shows the appreciation David had of his devotion; a third part of the people is put under his control.

Many Scriptures speak of the compensation which awaits those who are marked by true committal to Christ in these days. Paul writing to Timothy says, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with

Him," (2 Timothy 2: 12), and to the young saints at Thessalonica he says "that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer," (2 Thess. 1: 5). Let us seek grace to be fully committed to the *Person* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The days of the judges, to which times the book of Ruth relates, were difficult days, marked by constant failure on the part of God's people. Elimelech and his wife Naomi, discontented with the condition of things in the land, went down to Moab. Discontent and weakness amongst the people of God results from lack of appreciation of God's purpose and of what is centred in Christ; and when these things cease to attract the heart there is always a movement towards the *apparent* advantage of man's world. The result of every such movement is disappointment, sorrow and death. In such circumstances Ruth shines. She was by birth a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, but in her affection for Naomi she says, "Thy people shall be my people." There was nothing *outwardly* attractive in those people, but evidently her heart had been won in some way by Naomi and she "clave unto her." Again the opportunity to return is presented, but "she was steadfastly minded to go with her," and her committal is perhaps more remarkable and more far-reaching than any other. Her name means "friendship," and she is minded to be friendly with the people of God. She is prepared to cast in her *whole life* with God's people, and to be completely committed to the sphere where God's inheritance was to be found. The words she used are worthy of careful notice, "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me," (Ruth 1: 16, 17).

James speaks of those who are marked by the "friendship of the world," and solemnly adds that such are enemies of God. There are many spheres of interest, many circles of fellowship, many organizations which Satan may use to allure the children of God. Some of them may appear on the surface to be comparatively harmless, but they have no place for Christ who is the centre of all the interests of God. Let us seek help to refuse their beckoning voice, remembering that it is in *this world* that our Lord was rejected and crucified.

The vastness and fulness of "the inheritance of the saints in light," (Colossians 1: 12) is open to us. Ruth had no claim to the sphere of blessing (Nehemiah 13: 1); she came in on the ground of sovereign mercy, and verse 14 of the chapter quoted from Colossians shews the cost at which we have been given a place in the realm of divine interests.

The further chapters in this book shew the wonderful blessings and privileges into which Ruth was brought, culminating in her being brought into the line from which David sprang; and she is found in "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ," as recorded in Matthew 1: 5. What a portion was thus opened to her consequent upon her sincere and definite committal to the people of God! The blessings and privileges available to us in our day are inexhaustible, but they are enjoyed as we are found in the path of full committal.

In Ittai we see one committed to a "person;" in Ruth we see committal to a circle of interest; in John 6 the question of committal to the *truth* is raised. The Lord Jesus had been speaking of searching things, and many were not prepared to accept the word. "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him," (verse 66). the apostles were challenged "Will ye also go away?." Peter's answer was clear and definite; he recognized that the words spoken were the "words of eternal life," and that He who spake them was "Christ, the Son of the living God." This is a challenge which is not unknown in our day; the truths of Christianity often cut across our natural inclinations and desires, and sometimes across our ecclesiastical links. We may seek to add our own thoughts to what is

written, or we may endeavour to turn the edge of the word away from us.

At the beginning there were those who "continued *steadfastly* in the apostles' doctrine," (Acts 2: 42). It is through the apostles that the word of God has reached us, and Paul says, "the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord," (1 Cor. 14: 37). John also says, "We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us," (1 John 4: 6).

As we read the words of the apostles, words which are inspired by the Spirit of God, we see how in all things they magnify Christ; He is the theme of their ministry. Paul could say to those to whom he had made known the choicest truth, "Ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus," (Eph. 4: 21). Let us not refuse the searching character of the truth, or falter in our following the One who is Himself the truth, but rather let us value it and allow it to have an ever-increasing place in our hearts and in our lives. The Psalmist could say "O send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me," (Psalm 43: 3).

Committal to David brought great reward to Ittai; Ruth too, as committed to God's people, entered into wonderful blessing and privilege; and as we read the Acts we see Peter boldly and joyfully taking his place in the testimony of his Lord. May we each be enabled to say in truth, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart," (Jer. 15: 16). Thus may we be found fully committed to a rejected Christ; to the sphere of His interests, and to His word.