

Decision

1 Sam. 18: 1-4; 20: 42; 23: 16-18. 2 Sam. 1: 25-27; 15: 19-22.

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I have in mind to use these verses as giving us a set of circumstances in line with what we have presented to us in that wonderful chapter, Philippians 3. We read of the great apostle giving an account of his throwing aside all that would distinguish him as a man in this world, and counting all things but loss for Christ. In these passages, where David and Jonathan are so much before us, I wish to shew first that there is a similarity between this and Philippians 3; then to shew that there is just as great a contrast. David, as he stood with the head of Goliath in his hand, is seen as an outstanding type of our Lord Jesus Christ in His triumph over the power of sin, the world, Satan and death. As he comes up from the valley of Elah, we have a picture of Christ coming forth in the might of His victory when He arose from among the dead. It is striking that David took the head of Goliath to Jerusalem (1 Sam. 17: 54), the place which was to become the centre when he established his kingdom. Some have thought Golgotha — the place of a skull — may have some reference to this event, but I just refer to it as shewing a link between this and what we have in Philippians 3, where Christ is seen on high after His triumph.

The first thing I wish to draw attention to is the fact that Jonathan was so captivated by David that, of his own volition, he stripped himself of his robe, garments, sword, bow and girdle. This reminds us of the apostle when he said that all which had distinguished him both intellectually and religiously he had cast aside for Christ. Jonathan put all upon David as though he would say to him, "You are more worthy of these than I." As far as we know, Jonathan could not have been aware that David had been anointed, but what he did know was that this man had gained the victory, and had wrought deliverance for the people of God; and as he observed him in His triumph, he "loved him as his own soul." All that distinguished him as the son of the king, Jonathan yielded to David. In his appreciation of David, and of what David had done, he willingly gave him the place of pre-eminence.

Is it not true that at some time in our history, and perhaps more than once, we too have been consciously in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and, born of our love for Him, have felt there was nothing which we would not do for Him? We have, as it were, stripped ourselves of any mark of human glory and have told the Lord that He alone was worthy. In the light of the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord it may have led, too, to some external stripping so far as our place in this world was concerned. If we have had such an experience — and I feel sure we have — we, like Jonathan, have been tested as to how far we were prepared to go in our resolves. It is easy to say things, but how do we act when the test actually comes?

In the subsequent history of these two lovely characters, David and Jonathan, we shall see how Jonathan was tested, and we may be able to see where we have failed, or are in danger of so doing. In the incidents of which we have read, we shall find David and Jonathan alone. Only they knew what passed between them, and only the Lord knows what passes between Him and us when we too commit ourselves to Him in the secret of His presence.

In 1 Sam. 20: 42, the scene has completely changed. In 1 Sam. 18, when Jonathan first attached himself to David, David was had in honour, and was in great acceptance as having just slain the giant; but now he is in rejection and Saul is seeking to destroy him. This is what we have to face also; the One

who has won our hearts is in rejection and is not wanted in the spheres where once we had our life. I am sure Jonathan could not have loved David more, and his love was as strong here as when he first made that covenant with him, but the external circumstances were altered, and Jonathan is tested by them. "And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed; and Jonathan went into the *city*". David was hiding in the *field*, but the *city* was still in the heart of Jonathan, and he was not prepared to follow David into the field and into the cave of Adullam. It is only as we accept the rejection of Christ that we shall be prepared to suffer with Him.

Again in the incident in 1 Sam. 23: 17, Jonathan met David in the wood, and we are given further light as to what Jonathan knew. He said to David, "thou shalt be king over Israel." Do we not believe this of our Lord? Indeed we do; the crowning day *is* coming. But listen again to Jonathan, "I shall be next unto thee." What right had Jonathan to say that? Did he deserve that place? He desired it, but did he deserve it? I recall a similar set of circumstances in the life of our Lord when James and John asked almost the same thing; one desired to sit on His right hand and the other on His left hand in the kingdom. A desire we may well foster in our hearts, but what was the Lord's answer? "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Beloved, this is the only way to a place in the kingdom. It has been pointed out that John saw one thief on the right hand of the Lord and another on His left when He hung upon the cross. Did he then remember what he had said about the right hand and the left hand in the kingdom? We can be sure that the one who approximates most nearly to the suffering of Christ at the hands of men will have that place, for He said that "it is prepared" for someone. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, reminded them that while all ran in a race only one obtained the prize, and he exhorted them, "So run, that ye may obtain," (1 Cor. 9: 24). The place is there, but who will find it?

It is sad to read that Jonathan once again went back, as not being prepared to suffer with David, for we read, "David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went unto his *house*". First the city, now the house, and Jonathan left David to suffer even if he had made a covenant with him. What is it that holds us back from sharing the rejection of Christ? The city, the scene of man's activities? The house, our own circle of interest? Are we going to allow these things to take precedence over the interest of Christ? All things have their right place, but if they come before the preparedness to suffer with Christ we shall not be in a pathway which will merit a reward in the coming kingdom. Let us be prepared to accept His rejection in relation to all our circumstances, content to wait for the day of His exaltation.

Jonathan aspired to the second place in the kingdom, but he fell on the mountain of Gilboa. David never forgot the covenant they had made, and he lamented for Jonathan as we read in 2 Samuel 1. Had Jonathan gone forward with his desire, and cast his lot in with David, he probably *would* have been second in the kingdom; but instead of David being able to rejoice over him, he had to lament over him. Whilst David did not have Jonathan's company with him in his rejection, he certainly appreciated Jonathan's affection. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished." (2 Sam. 1: 26-27). We may be thankful that the Lord appreciates our love to Him and the desires of our hearts towards Him, even if we are not fully prepared for the path of rejection along which He has gone. Yet how much more does He value the affection that is prepared, if need be, to suffer *for* Him, and at all times to suffer *with* Him.

In 2 Samuel, chapter 15, we have another set of circumstances in the life of David, circumstances in which he was rejected again. Absalom had usurped the throne and David was fleeing. Once more

there is a call to faithful ones to share with him in his rejection, and we read of Ittai the Gittite who was in company with the king. He was a Gentile, as David said, "thou art a stranger and also an exile . . . take back thy brethren; mercy and truth be with thee." Ittai however, had made up his mind and said so in no uncertain manner. "What place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be," (v. 21). He was an exile from the city, an exile from his home, but the company of David compensated for them both. Not only do we read that this man went over with David but also "all his men, and all the little ones that were with him." It has been pointed out that this man said "in *death* or life," not in life or death. Beloved, are we prepared to die with Christ that we may live with Him? In baptism we have professed to accept death with Him; is it true of us in practice? Not only did Ittai go over, he took his associates with him and also the little ones. Brethren, let us see to it that we not only go that way ourselves, but are prepared to take our little ones with us. Why embark on that pathway ourselves, and yet leave our little ones behind, or maybe push them into the world out of which Christ has been cast? May we imitate the faith of Ittai and take them with us.

We learn from a later Scripture that Ittai had the fourth place in the kingdom, so far as the conflict was concerned. It is the last time we read of him; he is leading the forces of David into battle. Joab had a third; Abishai had a third, and Ittai had a third as they went into the conflict. He is given a leading place by David, and he shared in the ultimate victory.

May we also have this deep affection for our Lord, and along with it the preparedness to suffer with Him. If He has the predominant place in our affections and we seek grace to answer to our desires, we like Paul will be found reaching forward "for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus," (Phil. 3: 14, N. Tr.).