

MOSES: The Servant of God

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

FAITHFUL UNDER REPROACH

“O God, shall one man sin, and wilt Thou be wroth with all the congregation?” (Numbers 16:22).

FEW men have had greater experience of the ingratitude of their fellows than Moses. Here it broke out again, and this time in a formidable conspiracy led by Korah, with whom were associated two hundred and fifty princes, men of renown. The special points were the position he held and the authority he exercised; and the revolt throws some interesting light on the manner in which God’s servants should consider the position they occupy in his church.

In the history of all workers for God there will come crises, when wrong motives will be imputed and unkind suggestions passed from mouth to mouth, even by those whose spiritual life has been due to their prayers and tears. Now it is jealousy of growing influence: then it is unwillingness to accept directions and fall in rank at the word of command; again it is the dislike of a carnal soul at the high spiritual demands which are in direct collision with its longings for milk and honey, fields and vineyards. Such disaffection begins with one discontented sensual soul; but it spreads as fire in prairie grass.

There are many craven hearts ready enough to follow, who would not dare to lead, in an attempt to subvert some eminent and devoted servant of God. Sometimes the pretext is no better than in the case of the man who voted for the expulsion of Aristides, for no other reason than that he was tired of hearing him called “**the Just.**”

At such times we do well to turn to this dark chapter in the history of the forty years wanderings, and learn how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

I. LOOK ON YOUR POSITION AS GOD’S APPOINTMENT

Korah and his confederates suggested that Moses and Aaron had taken on themselves the offices which they held, the one as king in Jeshurun, whenever the heads of the people gathered; the other, with his family, as priest. “Why should these offices be exclusively vested in the two brothers? Were there not plenty of men as good as they? Was not all the congregation holy? And might not the presence of the Lord be had by others as well as by them?”

It was a conspiracy of princes against the leader and prince, and of Levites against the priestly family.

Instantly Moses fell on his face before God his favorite attitude for meeting these outbreaks of popular hatred and discontent like the bulrush which meekly bows its head as the autumn blast sweeps over the moor. But he made no further attempt to justify his position or Aaron's. He might have alleged his past services, his claims on the gratitude and loyalty of the people; he might have reminded them that their national existence was due, under God, to his faith, his prayers and tears, his intercessions and exertions on their behalf. But on all these points he held his peace, and took the whole matter into the Divine presence, throwing the responsibility on his God.

First, he reminded the malcontents that their own position had been assigned by the appointment of the Most High.

The God of Israel had separated them from the congregation of Israel, to bring them near unto Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them. It was distinctly He who had brought them near, and all the sons of Levi with them. There was, therefore, no cause for jealousy.

The places of influence and authority in Israel were not a lottery, where some men might happen to draw prizes and others blanks. Posts were assigned to men, and men to posts, by the distinct interposition of God. And they who had been so distinctly appointed surely should admit that an equally distinct Divine appointment had been made in respect of Aaron and himself.

Next, and as a result of such a conception of the true position of affairs, this ebullition of anger was shown to be really directed against God Himself.

“For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?” (Numbers 16:11).

When men turn against us, we are too apt to run away from our position in panic; to make terms with them; or to throw down the reins in a pet. Any of these courses is a profound mistake, and quite incompatible with a right apprehension of our position towards God on the one hand, and man on the other.

There are many passages which show beyond doubt that our positions in the visible church are defined as carefully as of members in the human body. Though you be only a joint or hinge, on which other members articulate and work, you must believe that your position was fixed by the All-wise and Almighty Disposer of all. Is it to be supposed for a moment that He, who appointed the place where each star should shine in the bosom of night, should leave the position of the stars of his church to chance? (Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11).

If, then, disaffection or dissatisfaction arise, they must not in themselves determine your course. It may be that they indicate that the time has come for you to go elsewhere. But this evidence is by no means conclusive.

You must go to Him who sent you, whose servant you are, and ask if it is his will for you to vacate your post; and if so, that He should make it clear. If He does not, then let nothing that man can do alarm or trouble you. You must stand to your post, as the lonely sentinel amid the falling lava of the eruption, till the Commander of the Lord's hosts tells you that you may surrender your sacred charge. But if no such orders come, grace and patience will; and you must remain till relieved by death.

Lastly, Moses left the ultimate decision with God.

They were all to take censers, which were the ordinary pre-requisites of the priests alone; and having charged them with fire and incense, were to present themselves before the Lord, at the door of the tent of meeting.

It would be then for God to choose who should be holy, and who should be caused to come near unto Him.

What infinite rest would come into the lives of many of God's servants, if only they drank in the spirit of this heroic soul! so resolute to do the Divine will, at all hazards; and to remain at the helm, though the fire of popular resentment crept along the bulwarks and blistered the skin from his hands.

How often the face is worn with care, and the head streaked with grey, even if the course of the life be not deflected from the straight rule it should follow by thoughts like these What will my committee, or elders, or supporters say? What will become of my children's bread, if I thwart so influential a contributor? How shall I be able to withstand so strong a popular movement? Must I not yield to the suggestions of friends, or threatenings of foes?

Alas! these questions are so often asked, and the course of life decided by the weighing of prudential suggestions, and the consideration of human policy, but with little or no reference to Him, whose slaves we are, selected and appointed for special work.

Let us act as Moses, the faithful servant did, and refer all to the decision of our Master and Lord; and in the meanwhile be at peace.

It is such a profound mistake to carry the burdens of the Lord's work. When difficulties come, as they will, they are his quite as much as they are ours. We have no right to carry his anxieties and care for his cares. He asks us to do his work; to obey his behests; to fulfil his commissions; and to transfer all the weary pressure and burden to Himself.

If the people do not like us, it is for Him to determine whether He will continue us in our position; and if He choose to do so, He must keep us there, and give us favour with them. If our supplies fall off in doing his work, He must maintain us and our dear ones. A royal court is bound to support its own embassies. If our mission involve the assumption of leadership which is disputed by our fellows, we cannot recede from it, so long as we can say with Moses, "**The Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of mine own mind**" (ver. 28).

Thus pride and jealousy are alike impossible. We know we receive nothing except it is given us from Heaven; and we refer all disputants to Him who has put us where we are.

II. CHERISH KINDLY FEELINGS TOWARDS THOSE WHO OPPOSE

How nobly Moses dealt with this murmuring crowd! When first he heard their contentious voices, he assumed the posture of intercession, and began to plead for those who despitefully used and persecuted him. When it seemed, on the following morning, as if God would destroy not the ringleaders only, but all the congregation who assembled with them at the door of the tent of meeting, he fell on his face and pleaded with the God of the spirits of all flesh not to punish all for the sin of one man.

Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, were specially contumelious; and, when he sent to summon them, returned an insulting message, accusing him of betraying them with false representations, asking why he had not led them into the land of milk and honey.

They went so far as to insinuate that they dared not come, lest he should bore out their eyes (ver. 14). Moses was naturally very indignant and wounded by these bitter and undeserved reproaches; but he made no attempt to answer them, except in self-vindication before the Lord. And when bidden he did not hesitate to rise up, and go to them, with no trace of vindictiveness in his address.

And on the following day, when the people, unawed by the terrible judgments that had befallen, murmured against Aaron and himself, and accused them of having killed the people of the Lord, he again averted from them the judgment which was threatened first by his prayers, and then by hastening Aaron to stand, censer in hand, between the plague-stricken and those as yet unreached by the sickle of death. How quick he was to know when wrath had gone out from the Lord!

How eager to stay its progress! How generous to make such efforts on the behalf of those who had but an hour before launched at him their bitter reproaches!

This is the true pastor's heart. He partakes of the spirit of the Good Shepherd, who loved those who taunted Him, and pleaded for the forgiveness of his murderers. There is no more resentment in his heart towards those who oppose Him than in a mother's towards the babe who, in its paroxysm of temper, smites her breast with its tiny hands.

The grey-headed retainers, who, prepared to die, resist the entrance of the mob at the palace gates, that by their blood they may purchase time for their royal master's escape, do not take the malice of the bloodthirsty crowd as a mere personal matter, since they know that they are hated as his representatives, and are proud to suffer for him.

Oh for that chivalrous devotion to CHRIST, that we may only suffer in fellowship with his sufferings, die only in conformity to his death, identified with Him in all! It is, perhaps, the loftiest summit of devotion when we crave love only to pass it on to Him; and dread hatred only because it hurts the hearts that cherish it, and inflicts a wrong on the dear and glorious Lord.

III. YOU MAY EXPECT GOD TO VINDICATE YOU

“And Moses said . . . If these men die the common death of all men . . . then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD” (verses 28-32).

It was a terrible act of vengeance. It was essential to the existence of the camp that the mutiny should be stamped out without mercy. There was no help for it. The cancer must be cut out of the quivering flesh. The death would be painless for the little ones, and though cut off from life here they would pass at once into the broad and blessed spaces of eternity; but for the rest the punishment was merited, and their extermination saved the camp.

Many have essayed to stamp out the church of God; but, like Haman, have been hanged on the gallows prepared for Mordecai. Others have spoken against the servants of the Lord, but have suffered untimely and terrible deaths. The bears out of the wood have devoured. Herod has been eaten by worms. Persecutors have died in horrible torment. No weapon that has been formed against God's saints has prospered. Every tongue that has been raised against them in judgment has been condemned.

Trust Him, O suffering saints, doing his will in the teeth of opposition and hate! Fear not the faces of men; be not dismayed before their threats - He is with you to deliver you.

They may fight against you, but they shall not prevail; their proudest threats shall fail of their fulfillment, as the sea-billow which flings itself on the boulder is dissolved into a cloud of harmless spray.

God loves his saints. They are all in his hand. But especially those are in its covert who are engaged in his sacred work. If only they are faithful to Him and to his behests, and live on his plan, there is nothing He will not do for them. When they call upon Him in their distress, He will deliver them from their strong enemy, and bring them into a large place; because He delights in them, and they put their trust in Him.

~ end of chapter 25 ~

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