

SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

F. B. Meyer, B.A

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FORSAKEN? NEVER!

(I Samuel 12:22)

“For the glory and the passion of this midnight
I praise thy name, I give Thee thanks, O Christ!
Thou that hast neither failed me nor forsaken
Through these hard hours with victory overpriced;
Now that I too of thy passion have partaken,
For the world’s sake called elected sacrificed!”

- H. Hamilton King

WHILST the whole land was ringing with the news of Saul’s exploit in the deliverance of Jabesh-gilead, it appeared to Samuel to be an auspicious moment for confirming the kingdom in his hand; and therefore he summoned a great convocation of the nation at Gilgal.

On that spot Israel had encamped for the first night after crossing the Jordan, and the twelve great stones commemorating that event were still visible. There the act of circumcision had been performed, cleansing the people of the neglect of the wilderness; and there, too, the first Passover in the Land of Promise had been celebrated. Amid these great memorials and memories of the past the people gathered from far and near to crown Saul king. He had been designated at Mizpeh; he was to be crowned at Gilgal; it was the inauguration of his reign, its ratification and confirmation by the entire people. After this great ceremony, Saul and his people rejoiced together with peace-offerings and thank-offerings before God; and this was the moment that Samuel chose to lay down his office as judge the last of the judges, and the first of the prophets.

I. SAMUEL’S RESIGNATION

An end must come to the longest and most successful ministry, and the author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, reverting to this event in Samuel’s life, says: “Before his long sleep Samuel made protestation of his innocence before God and the people.” Yes, the long sleep will come to all, and happy are they who before they lay their heads down to the last sleep, and their spirits enter to receive their final award, are able to extend their hands and bare their hearts before those who have known them best, and say, “These at least are clean.” This is what Samuel by the grace of God was able to do. Standing bare-headed before the vast audience of the men of Israel, and, pointing to his white locks, he said, “**I am old and grey-headed, and I have walked before you** (as in Eastern lands a shepherd precedes his flock) **from my boyhood up.**”

His had been an unblemished career, and for his own sake and the sake of God, on whose behalf he stood, he was anxious to obtain from the people a vindication of the blamelessness of his career. He therefore protested; **“I have not defrauded you, nor oppressed you. Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass? Can any man confront me as having taken from his hand even a sandal, as a bribe, that I should turn away mine eyes from his misdoing?”**

And all the people, with one unanimous consent, cried; **“Thou hast not defrauded, nor oppressed, nor taken anything from our hand.”**

But the old man was not content; he wanted to bind the people by a solemn oath, as in the very sight of God and the king; and, therefore, he said, lifting his hand to Heaven, **“I call God to witness against you this day, and his anointed king, that what you have said is true.”**

And again, from the lips of all the people, with one unanimous shout, there came the response, **“God is witness.”** The old man was comforted, and added, **“Yes, God is witness: the very God who brought our people out of Egypt, and appointed Moses and Aaron.”**

Oh, that all our public men to-day were as clean-handed and pure-hearted as Samuel was! that when the records of their actions are rehearsed before the judgment-seat of God, it may be discovered that those who have been high in office have not prostituted their high position for their own emolument, or acted for private gain, but that they were clean-handed and pure-hearted. Happy is that nation whose public men are free from all complicity with bribery and from making profit out of the necessities or the sore distress of their fatherland!

II. HE DESIGNATED HIS PEOPLE’S SIN

It was a great opportunity to show them where they had done wrong; and a man whose own hands are clean is permitted to be the sincere critic of others misdoing. See to it that your own eye is single, and that the beam is extracted from it, before you essay to remove the mote from your brother’s eye. In several particulars he pleaded with that dense mass of people, and dared to hold up the crimes of his nation, that they might see them as they were.

First, he set himself to show the difference between their former and their latter method of procedure.

He carried their thoughts back to Egypt, and, in effect, said; When your fathers were in bondage to the Egyptians, and under the oppression of Pharaoh, you cried unto the Lord, and in gracious answer He raised up deliverance. And when in the days of the Judges you were oppressed first by Sisera, then by the Philistines, and then by the people of Moab, you cried to God for deliverance, and it came; but now, when the threatened invasion of Nahash, the King of the Ammonites, is filling the horizon with thunder-clouds, instead of holding a great convocation for prayer, you insist upon my appointing a king.

Why have you deteriorated? Why was prayer your natural resort three hundred years ago, and now it is neglected? Is it not because you are prayerless that you have drifted from your ancient moorings? In this is a great sin.

Must not we always take care that, instead of saying impulsively and impetuously, “**We will do this or that,**” we should constantly wait before God that He would appoint a deliverer?

Secondly, *in his dealing with the people, he put a new reading upon past history.*

On their side, they pointed out the successive catastrophes which had befallen their country how the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Moabites, and Sisera, and other surrounding nations, had oppressed them, and brought them under their power; and therefore, as a way of deliverance from such troubles, they had argued the necessity of having a king. Samuel, of course, admitted the successive afflictions which had befallen his people, but he did not put the same reading upon them.

He said; “You demand a king who shall make such catastrophes no longer possible; but I tell you on the other hand, that, whether you have a king or not, if you forget God, as you have forgotten Him, and if you turn to Baalim and Ashtaroth as you have turned to them, neither your king, nor any alternative mode of government you can invent, will deliver you from the consequences.”

In other words, he made it clear that it was not the presence or absence of a monarchy, but the want of singleness of purpose, and devotion to the Lord, which had been the cause and root of all their troubles.

Thirdly, *he indicated to the people that God had never failed to send them a man when a man was wanted.*

He said; “Look back upon your past history. Even apart from an hereditary line of kings, with the prestige of Royal descent, God has always raised up a man to help you in an emergency. Consider did not He raise up Moses and Aaron? Did not He raise up Jephthah and Barak, Gideon and myself? See how perpetually in the dark hour, in answer to prayer, God has sent you the man that was needed. Could you not have trusted Him; and instead of being so urgent for a king, have waited for Him to do for you, as He had done aforetime?”

Lastly, he said; “My countrymen, you have greatly deteriorated; you have failed in your faith; you have demanded a visible king, but have forgotten the invisible Lord; you have magnified the arm of flesh, but have forgotten the mighty power of the Eternal. You have been sheltering under the idea of a new royalty, whereas God was your King, your true Head, the Leader, and Patron of the nation. You should have rested only on Him.”

Are we not all liable to the same lapse of faith? We look to the visible and forget the invisible. The air is filled with anxiety, clamour, and controversy; whilst in the shadow, behind the thin veil of sense, stands the eternal crowned Christ, waiting ever to trim the lamps of the golden candlesticks and to hold the stars in his right hand.

It was a brave thing, a noble thing, a right thing, for Samuel to show to his people how they had drifted from the old true standing ground of faith into practical atheism and unbelief.

III. SAMUEL'S ASSURANCE

Having handed over his office to Saul, who henceforth was to be the shepherd and leader of the chosen people, and having dealt with their failure and deterioration, he went on to say with inimitable sweetness, **"The Lord will not forsake his people for his great Name's sake."**

Oh, take these words to heart, and let them sink, like a refrain of music, into your soul. The Lord will not forsake his people! They may have lost their ideal; for a moment they may have drifted from their ancient moorings of childlike confidence; but the Lord cannot forsake his people, for his great Name's sake.

How perpetually this argument was used by the holy men of the old time. For instance, in Exodus 32:12, where God talks of casting away his people, when they had made the golden calf and worshipped it with garlands and dances, Moses dares to go into the Divine Presence, and say; **"LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people."** i.e., "Thy credit is at stake!"

And in Joshua 7:9, when Israel had fled before the men of Ai, Joshua threw himself upon the ground before the Ark and cried, **"O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?"**

Then in Isaiah 48:9, 11, later on in the history of the chosen people, Isaiah, dealing with their sins, and speaking to them in God's name, says; **"For my Name's sake will I defer mine anger; and for my praise will I refrain for thee that I cut thee not off."** **"For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another."**

In Ezekiel 20: these remarkable words are repeated thrice! **"I wrought for my Name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among whom they were."**

God's name is God's character. He is bound by his self-respect not to forsake his people.

The old prophet went on to say; **"It hath pleased the Lord to make you his people."**

God hides his reasons. He loves because He will. The flame of his love requires no fuel. The bush is not consumed for its maintenance. We may put alongside with these, those words of the great Apostle; **"He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for his own possession."**

This assurance applies to men;

(1) *As individuals.*

God will not forsake you. He did not choose you because of your goodness or beauty, and He will not forsake you because you have failed of your best. He has made you his child by adoption and grace, not that there was anything in you to specially attract Him, but because He would.

Some day He may explain to you his reason, but just now there is no reason that any of us can guess at, why we have been chosen from the rest of men to be his. It has pleased Him to make us his sons and daughters. We may have sinned against Him and grieved his Holy Spirit; we may have mixed ourselves with the seed of the people amongst whom we dwell but God will not forsake his people.

If He did, there would be a charge against his love that it was not infinite, that it ceased after sin had reached to a certain height of outrage, that it could not abound over sin. His power also would be impugned, for the lost spirits in hell would boast that He had attempted more than He was able to perform that He had not counted the cost.

There would also be an imputation upon his immutability. It would be spread through the universe that He took up a sinful soul, cleansed and clothed it, loved and blessed it, and then He changed. At the news that God could be fickle, the palace of eternity would rock, the throne of Heaven shake, and the mighty vault of space would reel to destruction. God dare not surrender the work which He has begun in the heart of man.

That is why we may count on being saved. We have no positive claim on God; there is no native beauty nor attractiveness to Him who sees the inner life; there is nothing necessary in our service but He has set his love upon us, and He must go through with it, and stand to his bargain before all worlds. O soul of man, God will not forsake thee.

(2) *As a Church.*

Why could not God forsake Israel? Because the chosen people was the type of what He desired every nation to become; and therefore He must needs go on building up Israel, that his type might not be broken; and He had to work through Israel to bring other nations to its level. If God had abandoned Israel, how could He have hoped to regenerate the world?

What was true of Israel may be true of a Church. There may be many failures and inconsistencies in her that ought to be altered. But God cannot cast her away in spite of all her sinful imperfections. He will refine and purify her till she realize his ideal and become his perfect Bride.

(3) *As a Nation.*

Our country cannot go drifting on into materialism and irreligion, as she is doing. God cannot afford to let her become immoral and debased; cannot permit her to follow in the way of Rome and Greece; cannot forsake the people whom He has blessed and used since the days of Alfred, who have been the pioneers of missionary and Christian civilization through the entire world.

For his Name's sake He cannot do it.

(4) *As a World.*

God cannot forsake this world, reeking though it be with blasphemy and impurity, with tyranny and sin.

- It has been saturated with the Blood of his Son and of myriads of his saints.
- It has been bedewed with the tears of the noblest souls that have ever breathed, and it is yet destined to shine amidst its sister stars with an untarnished beauty;
- it is to be the specimen to all the universe of what God can do with a fallen world and a degraded race.

God cannot forsake our earth, and some day we shall see her glistening in the light that shone over Paradise, and the children of men walking in the white robes of purity, love, and truth. **“The Lord will not forsake his people for his great Name's sake, because it hath pleased the Lord to make you a people unto Himself.”**

~ end of chapter 13 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
