

The Faith of David

Walton Exhort 24th July 05

My dear Bre. & Srs.,

As we are all aware, there are many great characters in the Bible – we think of Abraham, a man of incredible faith and Moses an administrative leader.

In our recent readings we have David. He was no academic trained in a palace, as was Moses. His training was as a sheep boy and he took his job seriously. He even knew all his sheep by name. He sought out good pasture and water for them. He protected them and when they got hurt he tended to their wounds – and there were plenty of wild animals in those days. Sometimes a lion or a bear would pounce on a sheep. David told Saul, “When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep, I went after it (he was obviously a good runner) and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it” (1 Sam. 17:35).

What incredible courage and strength! What a risk to himself to save a single sheep! But as far as he was concerned he would not lose even one sheep; he was totally committed to his responsibility and had compassion on his sheep and nursed them, even though they were sometimes mauled by wild animals, or hurt because they had strayed..

David would have been out in all weathers and would have looked ruddy. As he sat down and played on his harp he would still have kept his eye on the sheep.

This is all an outstanding pre-figuring of Jesus’ care for us, his sheep. He knows us all by name, His care is such that he will leave the ninety and nine and go after the one lost sheep. His care is absolute. But the lesson goes much deeper for ourselves: we are each responsible for caring for every one of Christ’s flock. When one goes astray, or gets into difficulty, are we prepared, in spite of the hazards, to run after them, to save them. We know the dire consequences of despising one of Christ’s little ones. The word ‘despise’ is generally translated ‘set at nought’, ‘of no account’. Every sheep is precious and we have the care of the flock. Do we really care for them, as Jesus cares for us, and as David cared for his natural flocks of sheep?

It seems incredible that at the feast Jesse had arranged for Samuels visit that David was not allowed to attend and one feels there must have been a reason for this. Dean Stanley and a few other commentators suggest that David’s mother had been previously married to Nahash (2 Sam. 17:25). And that may mean he did not have the same status in the family as others. The fact that Jesse had eight sons and only seven are named raises a question in one’s mind. David does not seem to have been in favour, and the disparaging way his brothers spoke to him, when he had run to take them some delicacies from their father to them when they were in Sauls army against the Philistines, illustrates the point that he was somewhat despised.

When David saw the armies pitched against each other and then Goliath strode out in defiance of the armies of Israel.. For David, he couldn’t understand the Israelite army’s lack of faith. He was prepared to take Goliath on. He did not need the king’s armour. He had faith in God and he ran towards Goliath with absolute confidence in God and onquored Goliath..

Sometimes in our lives we are faced with Goliath-like problems, and the seemingly overwhelming power of the problem, or whatever, It may seem humanly insurmountable. But, by prayer and real confidence in God, these obstacles CAN and are be overcome. The problem is often our own – we seldom have the faith to go forward; like Peter in the storm, we may start to

walk on the tempestuous sea, but when we see just how rough the sea really is, we find ourselves beginning to sink and we cry out, as did Peter, “Lord, save me”, because the only one we can trust in and who can save us, is the Good Shepherd, because he does not want to lose even one ,whom His Father has called.

David’s very success as the young, heroic captain of the army caused him problems. The women in the victory celebrations sang, “Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Sam. 18:7). His success really created him problems. Saul became possessed with a maniacal jealousy and sought by all means to destroy David. We read in the Song of Solomon (8:6), “Jealousy is cruel as the grave”, and, in Proverbs (6:34), “Jealousy in the rage (or madness) of a man”. David was fearful of his life, not because of wrong doing, but because of jealousy, some just cannot stand others achieving what they have not or could not, and this was the case with David.

David’s success did not go to his head; he was conscious of his smallness, his humble origins and lowly status before God. When offered Saul’s daughter to wife, he said, “Who am I, and what is my life, or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?” (1 Sam. 18:15). David was humble and did not seek high things; even as a king he took counsel from others. We know the saying that often power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. We must all try and follow the humility of David and Jesus – our greatest Example. There is no place for any ‘lording’ it over others; we are all fellow-servants, fellow-slaves, co-labourers together and only one is our Master.

Let us look at Ps. 9:9-10 which I think epitomises David’s faith, our Lord’s faith and it should be ours too: Psalm 9 v 9 “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your Name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you”. Trust is not something that comes naturally, it comes from knowing Him, and seeking Him. The word “seek” conveys the idea of ‘to diligently seek’, ‘to seek for, as we sing in one of our hymns, “those that seek thee shall surely find thee”; therefore if we have these qualities we know that God will never forsake us. God may, of course, choose to develop us through trials, as with Job, Joseph and Jesus, but that is to increase our faith and to strengthen our resolves to trust Him entirely and not in ourselves. We no doubt all can recall the proverb, “If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small” (24:10). Perhaps the opposite is also true, if we have fortitude when suffering adversity our strength is great – so in a sense we can all test ourselves on this point. “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small”.

David’s life, in spite of his great faith and being a “man after God’s own heart”, was a mixture of sweet and sour. He had moments of ecstatic joy, as, for example when they celebrated the return of the ark to Jerusalem. In contrast, there was the depths of despair and anguish when Nathan told him of the enormity of his sin concerning Bath-sheba and the murder of Uriah, which haunted him for the rest of his life.

However, it was not just his own sins that caused David problems, he experienced suffering and oppression from all quarters. Although God had anointed him King, he was hounded, hunted and persecuted by Saul, who should have been grateful for his services. Even after Saul’s death his own son and his own familiar friend, rose up against him in rebellion He suffered disloyalty from family and friends and also the despair and despondency from within himself because of his own weakness and failures. Yet, with all this, he still believed “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your Name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

David put his trust in God for deliverance, and when he had the opportunity to slay Saul he refused to kill the Lord's anointed. Saul was asleep at David's feet and he may well have thought this was, literally, the God-given time to annihilate his foe, and his men encouraged him to do it, saying, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, I will give your enemies into your hands" (1 Sam. 24:3). But the strong-willed David left God to arrange for his deliverance.

The automatic response of the flesh against those that harm us is to hit back. David shows why he was a man after God's heart: he had full confidence that, as he sought to do right before the Lord, the Lord would be his refuge. He knew that whilst he sought the Lord he would not be forsaken. David's faith was pre-figuring the supreme faith of his Greater Son, the Lord Jesus, and leaving us an example to follow.

Let us reflect for a moment on the rebellion of David's son, Absalom. It must have been sorrowful and distressing. Absalom killed Amnon, David's firstborn, and then fled. To David, this was like two deaths, yet he forgave Absalom and after four years he was back in David's court. Then Absalom rose up in rebellion, proclaiming himself king, and David had to flee from his own son, whom he loved. – Joining with Absalom was Ahithophel, David's friend and counsellor. It would seem that he was in charge of the consultative group from whom David took counsel. Kind of an inner cabinet of advisors. Let us look at Ps. 55 from v 2 and see how he dealt with this situation. Ps. 55 v 2: "Hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger. My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me, horror has overwhelmed me". V. 12, "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it was you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng to the house of God."

How did David deal with this? V. 16, "But I call upon God, and the Lord saves me". Even during this sad calamity we see David's faith and the exhortation to us is, v 22, "Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall".

What is the relevance of Absalom's rebellion to us? We are one ecclesia, one fellowship, although the one body is scattered all over the world, black, white, yellow and red; speaking over 70 different languages, Yet we are one family, brothers and sisters, and we all, as it were, go up to the house of God regularly together, to break bread and drink wine in remembrance of our Saviour who also was betrayed by his familiar friend Judas, and the very nation he came to save and demonstrated his authority by many infallible proofs. As with David's family, there can at times be strife and disagreements, but if we are being wronged we should try and show the Christ-like spirit. David did not rejoice over Absalom's death, but mourned and wept; he was applying Jesus' later instruction, "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you". If only we could be more like David!

Although David's counsellor, Ahithophel had a secret grudge against David. He had been grievously wronged by David because he was Bath-sheba's grandfather and a friend of Uriah and he could not really in his heart forgive David, the sin for which God had forgiven him.

Although at Absalom's rebellion many turned against David, many other friends remained faithful and in our own trials it is not just our faith and prayers that sustain us, but the support and encouragement of other brethren and sisters who help share the burdens. For we much each help bear the burdens of others.

David showed trust and confidence in God throughout his life and showed a compassionate humility. Jesus, of course, suffered much more intensely, but, like David, he put his whole trust in God and the salvation that his sacrifice alone could provide. Unlike David and ourselves, Jesus avoided and overcame the pitfalls of temptation, he totally conquered the mind of the flesh; he never failed; he conquered that which had the power of death, and so death has no more dominion over him, and by our belief and obedience in baptism we can likewise escape the consequences of sin – hence our memorial service to remember how our salvation has been made possible.

But the command to remember Jesus in this way is not to just remember; Jesus said DO THIS in remembrance of me, and there are other DOS that we have to comply with in remembering the life of Jesus. His sacrifice was not just his crucifixion, but a life totally dedicated to God and that is the pattern we have to try and follow and we know that is not easy. Paul says, “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of the living God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1 AV).

We ourselves are so frail that at times we feel there is nothing we can do to serve the Lord, but that is not so. We remember the parable of the talents we read together from Matthew. Each was given “according to his ability” (Matt. 25:15). The talent may vary with our circumstances, when we are young, our physical and mental strength, needs to be devoted to the Lord, When we are older and frailer, the words of encouragement and prayer to others. We are not expected to achieve what we are incapable of doing. Our Lord does not reap what he has not sown. We are expected to do what we can with what God has given to us, we have and all have abilities He has given us, and these things vary with each of us.

As we remember Jesus we have to examine ourselves, not others and see how closely we have followed Jesus, to seek forgiveness for our failures and resolve to try and do better where we have failed.

We have seen that David, in all his troubles, put his confident trust in God, and it was not in vain. All of us are treated by an all-wise and powerful God as His children, and we need correction, direction and training, which we sometimes call ‘our troubles’. But we have seen that the Lord will not forsake those who seek him.

The emblems on the table speak of the guarantee of our final deliverance from the shackles of mortality – which only last for a brief moment, and are so light in comparison to the eternal weight of glory, which the future holds and which now must be very close at hand.

We have to recognise our weaknesses because it is only by grace that we can be saved. So let us have the confidence of David, “The Lord is my refuge in times of trouble. Lord, I know that Thou wilt never forsake me, for I seek Thee and put my trust in Thee.”