

“A Man After God’s Own Heart”

To anyone familiar with Scripture my title will have brought David, son of Jesse, immediately to mind. That is as it should be, for the Holy Ghost Himself has seen to it that the aforementioned David would be so described and it becometh the disciple of Christ to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. Here is the son born of a woman ... the shepherd born to be King ... the soldier born to battle ... the servant born to humiliation ... the sovereign born to sorrow - David was all of these things and more. Whilst the former two phrases point to no anticipative hardship, yet the latter three promise such with a witness. As far as David is concerned suffering and glory are inseparable; humiliation and exaltation two sides of the same coin.

That which follows is offered by way of introduction to the memory of the life of David. It is not reading for the faint-hearted. Nor is it for the half-hearted. Much less is it for the entertainment of the weak and beggarly professors of Christ who have embraced with joy a profession of contemporary Christianity which is altogether without conviction, commitment and cost. Herein is genuine, red-blooded, biblical, Christ-centred theology which alone deserves the title of ‘Christianity’. As you read on ask yourself Could I live alongside a man after God’s own heart? Could I relate to a man after God’s own heart? Could I sympathise with a man after God’s own heart? Could I learn from a man after God’s own heart? Could I draw even nearer to a man after God’s own heart? Insofar as you come to value the company of David, and as you are taught of God to see eye-to-eye with him, you will find yourself nearer to the heart of God than heretofore. As you warm to him, you will come to recognise the sound of his heartbeat and, as you do, you will learn how to examine and interpret the sound of your own. In so doing you will discover whether or not you have grasped David’s vision and embraced David’s goal, even Christ and the ongoing pursuit of God.

1 Samuel 16

It might be assumed that David, apart from Saul’s failure, would have continued in obscurity. Yet it is hard to imagine that such a rare commodity as a man after God’s own heart could have been hidden without limit of time. As it is written of Christ, one is inclined to imagine that such a man as David ‘*could not be hid*’ indefinitely. Yet it is certainly correct to say that David’s rise to fame and fortune was, in the plan and purpose of God, inextricably linked to Saul’s demise and downfall. It would not, however, be to the detriment of David’s memory to admit that had Saul served the LORD faithfully there would have been no real need for David’s ‘coming’. It might as truly be said that had it not been for the failure of the first man Adam that the coming of Christ - the last Adam - into the world would not have been necessary. Had not sin abounded, grace would not have had need, nor occasion, to much more abound. Stepping into the gap is, however, a recurring theme in Scripture and it is always mighty men who answer to such a need. Such logic then takes nothing away from Christ, or grace, or David.

The very first words of 1 Samuel 16 are addressed by God to Samuel His Prophet. Much had gone before in the ministry of Samuel and it is open to some conjecture as to where might be the most appropriate point in the earlier narrative to introduce thoughts concerning the then future coming of David. Israel had sought a King against the clear command of God and God had tolerated them in their folly. Why so? Suffice now to apply the aforementioned principle viz. that had sin not abounded in Saul, grace would not have had need, nor opportunity, to much more abound in David. Saul then is the darkness in and over against which David's light would shine the brightest. Though David's light shone against such a backdrop yet "the darkness comprehended it not". This was no new thing. God had at the beginning of time said "let there be light, and there was light" and He had spoken against the backdrop of the darkness which "was upon the face of the deep". God's light then could not be hid "and there was light" - and God's true king would now no longer languish in obscurity whether comprehended or not by such as Saul and his kind. Here is a lesson worth learning. Light is no less valuable though it be not seen nor perceived. Only the blind fail to comprehend the light. Only the deaf hear not a voice. I once thought that words were of nothing worth until heard and received. Then the obvious dawned upon me. John (Baptist) was "a voice crying in the wilderness" and that was what was required of him prophetically. He could not determine the response nor influence the reception of words spoken by him. But he could speak what he knew and he could testify what he had seen whoever might, or might not, receive his witness.

Stating The Not So Obvious !

It is worth noting here that which is so often overlooked viz. that by 1 Samuel 16:1 Saul is no longer Israel's king. Verse 26 of the previous chapter states that "*the Lord hath rejected thee (Saul) from being king over Israel*", and verse 28 that "*The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee (Saul) this day*". What is perhaps even more striking is what follows in that verse viz. that the kingdom rent from Saul **had** consequently been given "*to a neighbour*", even David who "*is better than thou*". However we may understand this, a momentous event, even a great transaction, has taken place and is now attested in Saul's hearing. As if to seal the transaction by blood, Samuel called for "*Agag the king of the Amalekites*" and "*hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal*". Herein Samuel made good that which Saul had come short of in his service for the LORD.

Yet prior to the matter of Saul's disobedience being suitably redressed, Saul had seen fit to presume to worship (vs.30). So often, even today, do we observe professedly repentant 'Christian' leaders presuming to worship the LORD whilst sins uncovered under their charge continue unaddressed, unhindered, unabated. **Behold such as seek honour of men (vs.30) though hypocrites at heart.**

David Discovered !

I speak now of the **discovery** of David for it seems to me that such an one had been born into the world for such a time as this. Born of a woman - an handmaid of the LORD - David is 'textually' invisible until now. Yet is he known of the LORD. 1 Samuel 16:1 may at first glance appear to suggest uncertainty as to the identity of the one chosen to be king instead of Saul - but not so! Though Samuel is at this point unenlightened in this regard, the LORD knows them that are his. Much more does he know whom he hath chosen to be king over all Israel. It might be assumed,

therefore, that the indefinite nature of the LORD'S command to Samuel concerning the anointing of a successor to Saul had more to do with Samuel's present state of mind than any unwillingness on the part of the LORD to enlighten him. Samuel is not asked to justify an appropriate term of mourning for Saul. Rather is he asked to explain his mourning in terms that do justice to the LORD'S rejection of Saul from reigning over Israel. That Samuel's response to the said **rejection** was to **mourn** speaks volumes. *"To be carnally minded is death"* and Saul's response here was but a revelation of his carnality at such a time as this. Samuel was but responding to Saul's 'death' in the context of the flesh. Yet the response of the LORD to Samuel's mourning, as related in verse 1, leaves no room whatsoever for anything other than a moving on. *"Stand still ..."* concluded Moses on an earlier occasion. *"Go forward"* said the LORD in response to Moses hesitancy. Here we have a prophet who would stand still in his mourning whilst the LORD would have him go forward in his anointing.

There is both urgency and compulsion in the words that follow. *"Fill thine horn with oil, and go"*! An horn full of oil would speak of certainty. *"Fear hath torments"* and only that which is certain will sustain even a fearful prophet. Having filled the horn, Samuel would have before him the anticipation of an outpouring which would inevitably follow. Such a command in itself would not secure the requisite assurance for the prophet, as testified to by Samuel's answer in verse 2. But neither would the LORD accept a lack of assurance on the part of the prophet as an excuse for inactivity. Often the LORD'S people are called upon to act in the midst of fear and confusion. A command from the LORD is never negated by **our** trepidation or **our** uncertainty. Yet are we to discern even more from the words of Samuel?

Returning to verse 1 we note that, at this point, the LORD'S anointed is still a mystery to Samuel. He is told that he is being sent to a father, even Jesse! He is assured that the anointed one, yea the anointed king, will be found amongst the sons of Jesse. But as to the specific identity of he who is to be so anointed, Samuel is as yet uninformed and unenlightened. Here is how the LORD keeps his prophets in check. Here is how the LORD teaches even his prophets to walk a step at a time. *"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"* - and sufficient for the prophet of the LORD is the gradual unfolding of His purposes.

Now having been told to go - and told where to go - Samuel asks *"How can I go"*? At first glance this seems to be an excuse on Samuel's part **not** to go. Yet on careful examination it appears that Samuel is but expressing a legitimate worry, the substance of which would have to be overcome if the said mission was to be successful. He is, as it were, begging the question and the LORD's indulgence. He is asking the LORD how his task may be accomplished if Saul should hear of it. What is clear from this is that Samuel is now in no doubt as to Saul's true character. Having recently participated with Saul in an 'act' of worship (1 Sam.15:30&31) - and yet even now mourning for Saul - Samuel has been made wise concerning Saul's true nature and intent. The disarming thing (in 1 Sam.15:30) to the undiscerning is that Saul is altogether frank and open (one might even say honest!) in his solicitations toward Samuel. *"Honour me now that I may worship the LORD"*. Saul is nothing if not honoured before men. Indeed here he confesses himself unable to worship the LORD if such carnal honour is not forthcoming. But is there yet more here to read into Saul's words? Is Saul inferring that to deny him such **honour** would

deprive the LORD of worship? We shall see, as the story of David unfolds, that Saul is an altogether self-seeking sinner in whom there is much guile. How typical of the cries of so many professed leaders of the LORD'S people today who are both "*deceiving and being deceived*" as they seek, often successfully, to manipulate those around them by both word and deed. Professing themselves to be concerned with the worship of the LORD, many such feign a piety which is at best a mixture of honesty and guile; at worst an amalgam of downright lies.

Samuel then (in 1 Sam.16:2) is acutely aware of Saul's inflexible hostility and what would be his continuing resistance to any advancement toward the fulfilment of the LORD's purpose in which he would not feature pre-eminently. It is not my intention here to analyse the development of the character of Saul up until this point. Later reflections will develop this theme. Suffice to say that Saul has by now clearly lost all sensitivity toward the LORD and the things of the LORD. All that matters to Saul immediately, and from henceforth all that will matter to Saul, is Saul himself and the things which pertain to Saul. That Samuel's fear (1 Sam.16:2) was legitimately founded is further confirmed by the fact that the LORD answers him in terms of a solution thereto rather than a dismissing thereof. Samuel is then, as it were, vindicated by the LORD in his suspicion of Saul. But why should Samuel even suspect that Saul would 'hear' of his mission (and as a result, kill him)? Here is where the disciples and prophets of the LORD are, apparently, at a great disadvantage in their dealings with their opponents and enemies. 'Honesty is the best policy' is universally proverbial but the practice thereof has always been at a premium. Who has not found it, at times, grossly disadvantageous in the telling of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth (even when no mischief or malice is intended)?

Returning to the initial expression of fear on the part of Samuel, we would have to assume that he suspects the very real possibility of Saul getting to know details of his movements. Saul will not relinquish his kingdom easily. That the prophet has declared to Saul that he no longer possesses a kingdom will not deter Saul from assuming that he will be **the** exception that proves the rule. Others may compromise; others may fail; others may fall by the wayside; and others may be discarded - but the LORD would surely not "*repent*" concerning His prior acceptance of Saul. Had not Saul filled a unique role heretofore? Would ever another lay claim to the role which he had filled - even that of the first king of all Israel? Yet the LORD'S acceptance of Saul as **the people's choice** of a king over Israel could never answer to **His choice** of a king for Israel. The LORD never had chosen Saul! Disobedient Israel had chosen Saul!

Samuel's fearful suspicion that Saul might discover his intention was not, therefore, unfounded. Such suspicion was based on a realistic appreciation of the true character of Saul - particularly now that his kingship was under threat. Saul could now reason - even with himself if need be - that his concerns were not personal but official. "*Is there not a cause*"(?) might Saul well argue concerning the office of king. Had the LORD heretofore set out provisions whereby the office thereof might pass to another? Then, if not, who would dare defy the LORD by seeking to usurp his authority? Only such as might be considered traitors and, by implication, the lawless and disobedient! As king, Saul would justifiably be obliged to keep tabs on such as were lawless and disobedient. Saul, then, would have

his governmental 'intelligence' in place, from henceforth ever ready to discover the schemes of such as would see, perceive or discern otherwise.

Now the LORD here comes speedily to Samuel's rescue. *"Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD"*. Not only does the LORD give Samuel a legitimate alibi, He gives him also the very words whereby Saul's curiosity regarding Samuel's real intent will be deflected - if needs must. Now Samuel will not require the alibi until the very last moments of his journey. Having travelled to Bethlehem without incident he is met on arrival by *"the elders of the town"* who *"trembled at his coming"* - presumably for fear of trouble. Now suchlike elders often cause more trouble than they fear. Whilst charged with the care of their own town they are concerned primarily for their own care in the midst of whatever trouble might arise for whatever reason. Yet we should perhaps not underestimate the fear which Saul's reign had now associated with it. There is no evidence to assume that Saul had changed into a tyrant overnight. Yet here we have fearful elders who are presumably responding understandably to the company of the LORD's prophet who had only recently conveyed a devastating indictment upon Saul's reign as king, and that to Saul's face! No one else would have spoken to Saul in such a manner. Yet neither would Samuel, unless the LORD had commanded that such a message be delivered. Had the elders of Bethlehem already received word of this 'conversation', from whatever source, or are we to assume that the mere presence of a prophet of the LORD was in and of itself a fearful experience. If the former, did the elders but assume that the wrath of Saul would inevitably follow the presence of Samuel or, if the latter, is the suggestion simply that the presence of a prophet was often associated, in the experience of the people so visited, with 'fear and trembling'. Would to God that today's ecclesiastical 'elders' would be both sensitive to danger from a very real enemy and would likewise tremble at the hearing of the word of the LORD - for this is the inevitable consequence of a prophet's presence.

"I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD" says Samuel to the elders of the town (1 Sam.16:5). Here is another mark of a prophet of the LORD. Having asked of the LORD, and having been given a message from the LORD (vs.2), he will deliver such a message with precision. *"It is required of a steward that he be found faithful"*. Robert Murray McCheyne expressed the secret of a prophetic ministry when he said ... *"get your text, get your thoughts, get your very words from the LORD"*. Yet contemporary 'sermon dispensers' - not preachers - shy away from such advice and trade rather in what 'old Warburton' described vividly as *"dead men's brains"*. Now I am not here supporting the profession of 'Charismatic' charlatans who would feign a verbal familiarity with the LORD which passes all spiritual intelligence and understanding. To accept the testimony of such would be to accuse the LORD of repetitive and idle chit-chat. But Samuel was neither inherently contemporary nor would he ever be satisfied with the mere transmission of second-hand information. He was a preacher of 'the old school' whose ways were from everlasting. Clarity was of the essence of his ministry. For Samuel a faithful rendering of the word of the LORD was essential. It should be understood, however, that whilst a 21st Century prophetic ministry will not experience the immediacy of communication of Samuel's ministry, yet such a ministry will be both vital and authoritative. Show me a company of professing Christians who do not long after an authoritative prophetic ministry and I will show you, at best, 'a mixed multitude' and at worst 'an assembly of the wicked'.

Now the plot thickens (1 Sam.16: 5) as Samuel prepares the way for the anointing of he whom the LORD had ‘*provided*’ (verse 2) as king over all Israel. ‘*Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice*’ saith Samuel to the elders. When it comes to ‘*Jesse and his sons*’ however, **Samuel will sanctify them** seeing that it was to ‘*Jesse the Bethlehemite*’ that he was sent in the first instance. Such a family will be different from other families. Such a family will be highly favoured. Such a family will find themselves singularly brought ‘*to the kingdom for such a time as this*’. It is recorded of Jeremiah (Jer.1:5) ... ‘*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations*’. Others may look on in wonder; others may participate; but nothing apart from the presence of Jesse and his sons will satisfy the requirements of the LORD respecting this moment of destiny concerning the kingdom previously rent from Saul and given ‘*to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou*’. Yet still, as far as scripture narrative is concerned, the identity of the one born to be king, among the sons of Jesse, is yet to be revealed even to Samuel the prophet. We have need of patience ... and humility!

The Anointing !

1 Sam.16:6 begins with the words ‘*And it came to pass*’. Now such words are instructive in that they convey the thought of **fulfilment**. That which was to be has now come **to pass**. That moment which was promised has arrived. And it will pass - without doubt it will become memorable rather than anticipatory. Here is a line in history which is about to be crossed and over against which the past will give way to the future. From henceforth ‘*old things are passed away; behold all things are become new*’. Now Eliab, as Jesse’s firstborn, is first to come before the LORD and at first sight Samuel assumes that this is he whom the LORD intends to anoint as king. ‘*Surely the LORD’S anointed is before him*’ he says. Now this presupposition on Samuel’s part was not apparently based on the ground of Eliab being Jesse’s firstborn. Such logic might have been understandable, though misguided. What is disturbing rather are the words with which the LORD corrects the prophet’s error of judgement regarding Eliab. Do you remember how Saul is described in 1 Sam.9:2? ‘*Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people*’. Appearance and stature were Saul’s above measure and no doubt he ‘looked the part’ (whatever that might mean?) whilst leading the nation. But this was small consolation when balanced against the character of the man who would be king to a disobedient people (see 1Sam.8:8-18). In 1 Sam.16:7 Samuel is corrected by the LORD in terms which indicate that the prophet had been influenced in Eliab’s favour by the re-appearance of those very same characteristics of appearance and stature. Now; ugly, small kings are not the answer to spiritual leadership. But neither are we to perpetuate the errors of old by a simplistic naivety which assumes that **all** that matters is what **appears** to matter. The qualities for spiritual leadership are hidden out of sight and are as treasures in the heart. ‘*Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee*’ ‘*Son give me thine heart*’. ‘*For man looketh on the outward appearance but the LORD looketh on the heart*’ (1 Sam.16:7).

As subsequent verses unfold it is apparent that Samuel has indeed assimilated the sum and substance of that which was revealed to him by the LORD in response to his haste in declaring Eliab to be ‘*the LORD’S*

anointed’. He has had to re-learn, even as a prophet, the most fundamental of lessons viz. not to speak for the LORD until spoken to by the LORD and instructed so to do. He is now sufficiently subdued and restrained, yea even chastised, before examining Jesse’s other sons - and this time there will be no impulsive carnal declaration(s). Indeed we will observe that even the most compelling logic will not influence the prophet’s impending pronouncement, nor the timing thereof. *“Then Jesse called Abinadab made Shammah made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel”*(1 Sam.16:8-10). But all, in turn, are rejected by Samuel. Why so? For the simple reason that the LORD himself had made known to Samuel, either audibly - or by implication of His silence - that none of those presented answered to the spiritual anointing planned. May we also learn *“that there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak”*(Eccl. 3:7). ‘Actions speak louder than words’, saith the proverb, and a spiritual silence oft-times speaks louder still, as it is written - *“And he (Christ) answered him to never a word”*(Mth.27:14). More profitable is the silence of GOD’s Word than the speculative reckonings (or should I say ramblings) of even distinguished disciples of the LORD of whom it may be recorded - *“He not knowing what to say, said ...”*. Have ye not read, or have ye never heard a preacher say something on this wise viz. ‘I have not a text to establish what I am about to suggest, **but ...**’ or, ‘I cannot give you chapter and verse for what I am about to say, **but ...**’ or, ‘I know the scriptures don’t say this specifically, **but ...**’ or, ‘I know that scripture is silent on (this or that matter) **but ...**’? And to what end does such speculation lead but to that of confusion and uncertainty falling far short even of a peradventure. Such statements are pregnant with ‘pious doubt’ and should never be confused with, or proffered alongside, declarations of faith. Nor should any disciple of Christ ever be required to believe or confess anything other than that which is **“written”**.

Another misguided approach to the presentation of truth is sometimes hidden in the apparent humility of the preacher who would never dare to speak authoritatively, preferring rather to preface **his** insights into GOD’s truth with the words ... ‘I would suggest ...’ or ‘I would judge ...’ neither of which will satisfy nor comfort a child of God who looks for certain spiritual guidance in the face of temporal perplexities. But being vain in their imaginations such as reason thus will, no doubt, persist in their carnal and well-intentioned speculations to add enlightenment to the eternal and absolute brilliance of the revealed word of GOD.

Now Samuel is puzzled. Had he not *“sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice”*(1 Sam.16:5) as required of the Lord? Yes! but not all of Jesse’s sons had been immediately present upon Samuel’s arrival and appearing. Had Samuel been careless, or even presumptuous, in assuming otherwise? Perhaps so! What really matters now, however, is that Samuel has learned not to proceed without a word from the LORD. Now note this - insofar as the prophet now acts, he does so ‘administratively’; not as a ‘delegate’, but as a ‘minister’, of the most High GOD. What a lesson is here for ‘ministers’ of the Gospel who may be tempted to assume a *delegated*, rather than an *administrative*, authority in ‘the ministry’ into which they have been *“put”*, whereby they will demand obedience from **their** hearers in response to **their** message, irrespective of its biblical content or warrant. After all, having been sent of GOD, are they not ‘delegated’ to speak on the behalf of GOD? **No they are not!** They are rather to ‘administer’ that which pertains to the ‘ministry’ - nothing less, and certainly nothing more.

Now, Samuel asks the question of Jesse ... *"Are here all thy children"?* (1 Sam.16:11) ... to which Jesse replies ... *"There remaineth yet the youngest and, behold, he keepeth the sheep"*. Do not miss that which Jesse here comes to appreciate viz. that in the dawning of the revelation of David, even to Jesse himself, in the greater scheme of things the initial association is of David's *'keeping of sheep'*. Here Jesse touches upon a theme of eternal significance and proportion in relation to an occupation, apparently, ever so temporal. What other explanation can there be for Jesse's exhortation to Samuel to **"behold"** (1 Sam.16:11)? It is not here ... *"behold David"*! but ***"behold, he keepeth the sheep"***. It is as if the very words themselves, even as they proceed out of the mouth of Jesse, illuminate the proceedings with both 'truth' and 'light' even to Jesse himself. The truth of David as a shepherd keeping the sheep is now in view and that just might be significant in identifying David as the one who until now was being prepared to shepherd GOD's people Israel. This answers to Jesse's ***"behold, he keepeth the sheep"*** with a witness. It is good advice to read the Word of GOD aloud. Often a 'difficult' passage of scripture is illuminated in the hearing of it - even through one's own voice. No marvel then - for *"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of GOD"* (Rom.10:17).

"Send and fetch him" saith Samuel in response to Jesse's revelation of David. And so David is *"brought in"*. *"Now he (David) was ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to"* (1 Sam.16:12) - David was evidently worth **beholding**. No surprise then that the LORD should indicate His approval by instructing Samuel to *"anoint him"*, saying *"this is he"*. *"Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren"* (1 Sam.16:13). Here is a theme which will recur repeatedly in the life of another anointed one centuries later, even Jesus Christ himself, viz. *Jesus in the midst*. Jesus in the midst of his brethren is but one theme of the epistle to the Hebrews as it is written *"I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee"* (Heb. 2:12).

Now the substance of that which follows in the remaining verses of this chapter is strikingly ironic. We read in vs.13 that on the very day of his anointing, *"the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward"*. In vs. 14, by way of contrast, it is a very different story as it is written *"But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him"*. From *"that day forward"* David would be 'comforted' *as* never before whilst Saul would be 'troubled' *as* never before. Not that this would always be evident. Yet that would be the heavenly reality which would be played out against the earthly backdrop of David's certain exaltation and Saul's certain demise which would become more and more manifest as the days ahead ran their course. Have you noticed (vs.15) how well Saul's servants understand the situation which now confronts him? They are in no doubt as to the source of Saul's trouble. It is from GOD, they say, that an evil spirit comes and troubles their lord. Yet they will remain loyal to him. They will stay by his side in his adversity. Their heart will go out to him and they will seek to facilitate his recovery and to have him well again. But surely such loyalty is misdirected? Is it not above and beyond the call of spirituality, and therefore folly in the extreme, given what they know of the source of Saul's trouble, to remain thus? Why then will they so act? I confess even yet to struggling with this question and I am persuaded that what follows does not answer to an exhaustive appraisal or critique of either such peoples' motives or actions. I will therefore keep

my comments brief and beg the readers' indulgence and sympathy should I fail to satisfy their more thorough and insightful curiosity. I have no doubt that Saul's servants would come in a variety of 'shapes and sizes'. Some would understand him. Some would admire him. Some would want to be like him. Some would want to pander to him in the hope of gaining a measure of favour which was wanting in other spheres of their lives. Some would seek to gain advantage by being in his company. Some would want to find purpose in an otherwise empty life by being significant in their generation by serving him. Some would want the security of being associated with him. Some would want the fame associated with his triumphs. Some would enjoy the notoriety of fighting alongside him. Some would just like being around him. What is certainly true of most who would come within Saul's influence is that they would 'know their place' and all such are to be commended for this. After all, Saul was their king. They would know that Saul was above and beyond them in the greater scheme of things and they would appreciate his leadership, without which they would be as a people not having a purpose; as soldiers not having a commander; as sheep not having a shepherd.

But what is this talk of a people not having a purpose? Was not the nation of Israel inextricably bound up with the eternal purpose of God? Were these people not already special? Would not GOD himself teach their hands to battle? Would not the LORD himself be their shepherd? Yet they longed the rather to be like other nations who could identify, in the flesh, with a king. And sowing to the flesh, of the flesh they had reaped corruption, as exemplified in the immediate corruption of **their** chosen king, even Saul.

How common a theme is this; the privileged son, exceptionally favoured, yet longing for the conformity of mediocrity and equality? Having said all that, however, and returning to the question in hand, what would be common to all, or certainly most, of those who looked to Saul would be that they would, in some measure, have **loved** him. And it is written that *'charity shall cover the multitude of sins'* (1 Peter 4:12) - but surely not on this wise? What I am saying is that love and loyalty are not easily renounced; and rightly so. That is how it should be for *'A friend loveth at all times and a brother is born for adversity'* (Prov. 17:17) - but loyalty must surely have its bounds, though some might insist that a qualification such as this would render such loyalty bereft of any real value. Surely a loyalty such as may be renounced can only be an excuse for **treachery** and **mutiny**! Such might be the rationally expedient deduction of Saul in the circumstances in which he finds himself - and with such a conclusion we all may concur in similar circumstances. But surely he who is spiritual will go only as far as Paul *'the least of the apostles'* (1 Cor. 15:9) who would direct his hearers on this wise viz. *'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ'* i.e. follow me **only insofar** as I follow Christ. The implication then is clear. Should Paul *'be(come) a castaway'* (1 Cor. 9:27) he would not have others follow him. Any suggestion to the contrary in Paul's preaching or writing would have clouded, yea indeed polluted, the whole of his ministry.

We may then understand the loyalty of Saul's servants. We may even, in some measure, seek to excuse them in their folly. But what is that to them? If they are to abandon Saul, to whom shall they go? Yet all such logical reasoning and reckoning is of little worth when it dawns upon us that the result of an otherwise faithful people remaining in the loyal service of an

unfaithful king, who has been altogether rejected by the LORD, inevitably leads to and ultimately ends in their like corruption and condemnation.

It is to the credit of the servants in view that they hold not back from Saul the truth of the source of his trouble viz. *'an evil spirit from GOD'* (1 Sam.16:15) and without any hesitation they set before Saul a solution of sorts to alleviate the distress which such aggravation would cause him. I say 'a solution of sorts' for such as that proposed, though mysteriously supernatural, would only ever be effective for a time and would have to be administered repeatedly. The solution *'... a man, who is a cunning player on the harp'*. The plan *'... when the evil spirit from God is upon (Saul) ... he shall play with his hand, and (Saul) shalt be well'*. To this Saul approves (1 Sam.16:17) and issues instructions for such an one to be brought to him. Now one of the servants present confesses to having seen just such an one as this - a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite! Not only is this son of Jesse *'cunning in playing'* but is also described by the servant as *'a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him'* (1 Sam.16:18).

Now it is accepted that the record of scripture is not always set forth in strict chronological order. Yet we must surely place the events under consideration here as having occurred whilst David was yet occupied in *'keeping the sheep'* (as referred to previously in vs.11). How then are we to understand such a full report of David's qualities as here recounted? If it be so that David is here honestly represented in such glowing terms whilst but a lonely shepherd boy, how can such a report be justified in terms of **evidence** to hand? It cannot surely be a speculative or merely fanciful testimony to David's prowess. This would not do justice to the integrity of the loyal servant of Saul responsible for recounting these things. Such a testimony (to David) cannot have been simply so offered to Saul in order to persuade him in his hesitancy - for there is no hesitancy in Saul's willingness to receive such an one as suggested. I can only conclude that the one responsible for delivering the goodly report concerning David already had an **intimate** knowledge of him and that such an one was already on friendly terms with the lad who was born to be king. Such an one may very well have known of David's exploits in fighting a lion and a bear. He may very well have heard from David's own lips of how the lonely shepherd boy had oft-times longed to be of age and rank to fight the LORD's battles against the LORD's enemies and, if so, would have been in no doubt as to David's sincerity and readiness so to do when the time came - as it most certainly would. In other words, David was already and truly *'a man of war'* at heart and would no doubt, in his prayers, make oft-mention of the needs of his countrymen who were at war on the battlefield with the LORD's enemies whilst he was isolated on the hillside with his sheep. It is also clear that the said servant of Saul, who so knew David, was convinced as to David's careful and serious approach to *'matters'* and such conviction is not gained overnight but rather accumulated over time and through experience. When the said servant describes the one in view as *'a comely person'* it would but reaffirm us in the conviction that here is one worth looking at and to (as counselled on an earlier occasion by Jesse) *'behold'*. Further; the implication is surely that David was 'becoming' of the characteristic qualities so listed. In other words it is as if the servant here speaking is saying that when you see the one I am describing you will see him as he is and you will not be disappointed. He will be to your eyes all that I have sought to convey to you - and more! A glimpse of him will be enough to convince you of the veracity of my testimony to him.

I digress a little but not, I trust, irresponsibly. Have you ever visited a place of worship and looked up expectantly to the pulpit only to be met by the apologetic and empty gaze of a timid and retiring preacher who fills you with exceeding dread (but for all the wrong reasons) before he even speaks? Have you ever, in such circumstances, feared the worst and were subsequently disappointed in your lack of judgement seeing that he was even more ineffective and incompetent than you ever imagined he could be - **if appearances meant anything**? Now I know that *'man looketh on the outward appearance, but GOD looketh on the heart'* yet there is a countenance which answers to substance and an image which answers to **might, warfare, prudence and comlieness**. I have oft remarked at such times that I could never see myself following such an one into battle. *'We are but little men; there is scarcely a man alive on the face of the earth'* said C. H. Spurgeon on at least one occasion. Now I know that Napoleon Boneapart was little - and Adolph Hitler was little - and many followed **them** into battle. And I know that Paul's name itself means 'little'. Yet I am persuaded that there is a 'look' that ought not to pertain to GOD's preachers. You will know it when you see it - I hope! Better still if you never encounter it.

Now last, but by no means least, on the list describing the one identified (specifically in vs.18) are the words ... *'and the LORD is with him'*. Here is (David's) crowning glory, even before the time of his anointing by Samuel in vs.13. All other qualities previously listed, however commendable in and of themselves, would be of nothing worth spiritually without this. Here is David's greatest asset. Not his might; not his fight; not his prudence; not even his comlieness; but **the immediate presence of the LORD** now! This adds weight to all that has gone before. Notice this - it is **not** ... *'and the LORD was with him'* ... for that could have been said of Saul even now. Rather are we assured that David knows the presence of the LORD **now**! And *'NOW is (always) the accepted time; now is the day of salvation'*. I have heard it said of (some of) them of old time that to be a Christian one must know of a time when, a place where, and a manner how, he or she was converted. Do you see where I am going with this? It is all in the past. Such as insist upon this would readily dismiss the **present** godly testimony of many who would, through honesty, confess to having difficulty in recognising, and therefore certainly identifying, the specific time of their 'new birth'. Yet the self-same wisecracks would happily and positively pronounce upon the secure eternal state of multitudes who have but 'prayed the sinner's prayer'; or who have 'made a decision for Christ'; or who have 'given their heart to Jesus'; such having as a result (in their blessed opinion) laid hold of eternal life. No matter to them that many such show no ongoing evidence whatsoever of the life of GOD in the soul of man. As long as they speak of 'a time when, a place where, and a manner how', that is good enough for them - and I am persuaded good enough for Satan himself. Have you ever ventured to listen to such an one give his 'testimony' to the 'saving and keeping power of Christ' only to realise that you have endured 25 minutes of pre-conversion self-aggrandisement and a closing 5 minutes 'to the glory of GOD'. Away with such carnal displays, however eloquent and however scandalously enthralling such 'testimonies' may seem! Give me, any day, the company of men too ashamed of their rebellious pre-conversion days to entertain an audience so easily enraptured. A 'disciple' of Christ is not to be recognised as such for his past profession alone, much less for his well rehearsed 'testimony' thereof however detailed and apparently spectacular, but for that which is true of him NOW and for that

upon which he trusts for future glory. As saith the Apostle Paul as he looked to the future; *‘for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed’* (Rom. 13:11) and in another place *‘forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of GOD in Christ Jesus’* (Phil.3:13&14).

Now; though the text of 1 Sam.16:18 does not specifically name David, presumably the aforementioned servant of Saul did so in the hearing of Saul, for vs.19 reveals to us that Saul himself named David as the son he would demand of Jesse via his messengers. Here is a matter of necessity and urgency in respect of which there must needs be no mistake or delay. *‘Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep’* is the **instruction** (not the request) of Saul to Jesse. And notice again the association - or should I say ‘identification’ of David **‘with the sheep’**. Is it not clear then that from the outset of the revelation of David we are to see him inextricably ‘identified’ **‘with the sheep’**? And is it not the case that the revelation of Jesus Christ himself is inextricably linked with his sheep? *‘And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the LORD came upon them, and the glory of the LORD shone round about them: and they were sore afraid’* (Luke 2:8&9).

The response of Jesse is immediate; indeed strikingly so! Without question he *‘took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul’* (1 Sam.16:20). Do you see the significance of the gifts given by Jesse to Saul? Do you see the bread and the wine? Do you perceive their significance? Do you see the kid? Do you perceive the significance? Do you see that all is administered by the hand of David? Do you understand the significance? Though measurably significant in and of themselves, yet such gifts delivered to Saul apart from David would be of nothing worth. David alone answers to the need of Saul. He is the true gift given. Here is the *‘child born’* and the *‘son given’*. How well do you appreciate the significance of this truth? As you partake of the LORD’S Supper do you see beyond the elements (or emblems) of bread and wine and is your focus upon him of whom the elements speak? Or are you bound to a ceremonial form and in bondage to the weak and beggarly elements which are the natural substances of bread and wine? Have you never sighed in response to hearing of the controversies which have raged down through the running centuries over whether the bread should be leavened or unleavened; whether the wine should be fermented or unfermented? Have you, perhaps, lost sight of the LORD in the LORD’S Supper? Let me take you back to the days of Saul and David. Here comes the one who would have eternal significance - accompanied by temporal symbols. What (or who) think ye that Saul’s eyes were upon - however significant the attendant gifts? An old hymn puts it well - **“Once it was the blessing, Now it is the LORD”** and in a later verse **“Once His gifts I wanted, NOW the Giver own”**.

I marvel then that men are so soon removed from the simplicity that is in Christ in the LORD’S Supper. Be it the blasphemy of Popish transubstantiation; be it the confusion, complexity and error of Lutheran consubstantiation; be it even the sacramental mystery of the LORD’S presence in the Supper as advocated by many Protestant traditions; whatever happened to the clear intent of the Apostle Paul’s words when he said ... *‘for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come’* (1 Cor.11:26). Nothing more and nothing less (than

eating the bread and drinking the cup) constitutes the LORD'S Supper. I have heard many evangelical '*cunningly devised fables*' in my time, but few are more ridiculous than that which suggests that in the celebration of the Supper we come before GOD as a company, or assembly, of his people and 'offer Him (Christ) up afresh to the Father in our worship' - whatever that is meant to imply? Methinks that the Roman Pontiff is himself better prepared than I am to embrace such a concept.

'And David came to Saul' (1 Sam.16:21). Now note this - David's 'coming' (to Saul) was an wholehearted response to his having been 'sent' by his father. Here we have displayed a striking unity of purpose on the part of (Jesse) the father and (David) his son. From the perspective and presence of Jesse, David was *sent*. From the perspective and presence of Saul, David *came*. One thousand years later, in the fullness of time, 'GOD *sent* forth His Son' who '*came unto his own*'. From the perspective of heaven (Jesus) the Son was *sent*. From the perspective of earth (Jesus) the Son *came*.

Now when David came to Saul it is recorded that he '*stood before him*' and '*loved him greatly*'. That David should readily love Saul is not at all surprising. After all, was he not David's king? - and was he not the LORD's anointed? - and had he not fought the LORD's battles? Yet note the wording ... '*and he loved him greatly*' i.e. he *so loved* him. The coming of David to Saul manifested not just love, but an intensity of love which was exceedingly abundant.

Now, it is recorded in John's Gospel that GOD - did not just love but - '*so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son*'. This '*so*' great love of GOD in sending his Son is not to be perceived as conveying the idea that the world was so vast that GOD'S love required to be '*so*' great in order to answer to it. Much less should it be imagined, even for an instant, that the world was in any wise deserving of such great love - or that it was the inevitable response of a GOD who was in some manner obligated to it, having created it '*in the beginning*'. Here was a demonstration of *grace* - the free unmerited favour of GOD - to what had become a rebellious and sinful world. The ever so descriptive term '*Sovereign grace*' conveys this idea wonderfully. It is grace **sovereignly** dispensed i.e. dispensed altogether (and for no other explicable reason) than the good pleasure of the King. Why is GOD gracious? Because it pleases Him! He is so because to be so is 'according to the good pleasure of His will'. Nothing else will answer to our hopeless state of depravity '*by nature*'. For '*by nature*' we are '*children of wrath, even as others*'. But '*by grace are we saved*' - **because we are loved!** Being '*a man after mine (GOD'S) own heart*' David's love is exceeding abundant; even to Saul.

As to whether or not Saul is to be numbered amongst those to whom GOD is eternally gracious is a matter worthy of further consideration - but is not within the scope of the verses under immediate consideration. That it is here recorded that David should love Saul *greatly* is in no wise an evidential guarantee of Saul's eternal salvation any more so than Isaac's love for Esau should necessarily negate GOD'S hatred of Esau.

What immediately follows in the narrative is not without significance (as it is written) '*he (David) became his (Saul's) armourbearer*' i.e. David became Saul's servant! David came not to be ministered unto but to minister! Though he is the LORD's anointed, he will

take upon himself *'the form of a servant'*. Notice again the wording *'he became his armourbearer'*. Here is a **voluntary** submission which will glorify David's humility and which will magnify his obedience to the will of his father. Yet we must needs address the apparent discrepancy between what Saul had called for - as recorded in 1Sam.16:16&17 - and what David became (vs.21). Saul was looking for one who could *'play well'* on the harp and he was granted an *'armourbearer'*. Now David could most certainly play well on the harp, but he is persuaded that the need of the hour is yet bound up with struggle and strife. The need for an appropriate response in battle was at the heart of David's thinking and this is typified in his becoming Saul's *armourbearer*. David (in his role as a minstrel) would most certainly have occasion to relieve the distress of Saul by his playing, but the distress of Israel would yet require relief through victory and conquest in battle. ***The fighting was far from over.***

David Established By Saul !

Now 1Sam.16:22 is not simply a repetition, or reaffirmation, of the substance of verse 19. The former verse had but kindled hope in the heart of Saul, whereas the latter expresses Saul's considered response to David's initial and *immediate* presence. Saul is well pleased with David as he *'stood before him'* and as such is persuaded that David's continued presence is altogether personally advantageous. David has not been called upon by Saul to demonstrate his *'cunning in playing'*, his *might* or his *prudence*. He has, simply by his presence, demonstrated his *comeliness*. This is altogether sufficient to guarantee all else beside. Do we not here glimpse something of David's greater son, even Jesus Christ, as we see that but a look is sufficient to convince the serious seeker that *'I am he'*. *'Behold the Lamb of God ...'*. *'Look unto me ...'*. Insofar as Saul is concerned he only has to look upon David to be assured that this is he that should come and that there is no need to look for another.

Having first demanded of Jesse that he send David his son to him (vs.19), Saul now rather *petitions* for Jesse's assent to the continuation of the alliance that has been forged, and is now being practically revealed, in the providence of GOD. Why so? Why this apparent change of attitude on the part of Saul - once demanding now apparently pleading? Perhaps the last phrase of verse 22 sheds light on this *'for he (David) hath found favour in my sight'*. Saul is satisfied! It is not that Saul is inherently gracious, far from it, but rather that David has pleased him and has solicited from Saul his *favour*. Here is *merited* favour - not grace! David has answered to Saul's need. David has what it takes to relieve Saul of his troubled spirit. In response Saul would favour David as it is written *'for he hath found favour in my sight'* (vs.22). In such circumstances Saul is of a mind to appear *gracious*. And in such a frame of mind Saul will, apparently, humble himself in soliciting Jesse's assent to the continuing presence of David in the King's court. But had not Jesse already declared his hand to Saul (vs.20) in taking *'an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul'*? Jesse's consensual response was never in doubt. Indeed the narrative continues apace without any regard or reference to any response whatsoever from Jesse as if to suggest that such was indeed, at best, a foregone conclusion - and probably irrelevant to Saul whatever.

'And it came to pass' (vs.23). Such a phrase, sprinkled throughout scripture, would remind us that, in the predestined will of God, whatsoever

unfolds before us in providence is but the fulfilling of His eternal purpose in Christ. God, having foreordained all things whatsoever comes to pass, reminds us of this often in the words ... *'and it came to pass'*. In the context of vs.23, however, the focus is very much upon the temporal setting rather than upon the eternal significance thereof. The verse begins with an *'evil spirit from God'* **coming** upon Saul and ends with the same spirit having *'departed from him'* i.e. *'and it came to pass'*.

The chapter ends on a note of significant irony. The one who had been chosen by God to replace Saul as King of Israel, and who had only recently been anointed to the task, was the one now called upon to refresh and recover Saul from the tormenting of the evil spirit (sent) from God to trouble him. From henceforth all who would look to the advancement of the kingdom of God must look to David. All who would see evil (spirits) banished must look to David. All who would seek the heart of God must look to David - a man after God's own heart

'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God' (Psalm 42:1).

W.M.B. (to be continued).