

Who Am I? — Humility, Devotedness, and the First to See Him

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The Shovel and the Swelling Words

Deuteronomy 22 contains a series of commandments that can seem, at first reading, almost comically practical — including the instruction that when Israel went out to battle they should take a shovel with them and bury their waste outside the camp, because Jehovah their God walked in the midst of the camp. What kind of a people must you be dealing with, that you have to be told to take a shovel? What utter children that the Lord has to exercise such patience in explaining things they ought to have been able to figure out for themselves.

But that is precisely who we are. The Scriptures say of Job's three friends that they had great swelling words and no wisdom. And they had a great deal to say — they spoke at length and with apparent theological sophistication. And yet they were wrong about God, and the Lord was angry with them. Only Job, who arrived at the end of himself and said I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes, spoke rightly.

Solomon said: God is in the heavens and thou upon the earth — therefore let thy words be few. That is the right posture. Not the swelling words of those who think they understand, but the few, humble words of a man who has seen who God is and has learned his own nothingness in consequence.

Job's Discovery — What He Actually Learned

The end of Job is not primarily about the restoration of his material prosperity, though that comes. What is most striking about Job 42 is what it reveals about what Job learned through his suffering. He did not learn how miserable or how low he was. He learned how wonderful God was.

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.

Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes. — Job 42:5–6

This is the proper order. Self-abhorrence is not the starting point — it is the consequence of seeing God clearly. A man who has truly seen who God is will inevitably see himself in accurate proportion. And having arrived there, what happens to Job? He is given the privilege of interceding for his friends. The Lord told Eliphaz: my anger is kindled against thee and thy two friends, for ye have not spoken rightly of me like my servant Job. Go to my servant Job and he shall pray for you.

Abraham the friend of God was given the privilege of interceding for any righteous in Sodom because God had revealed His mind to him. Job, at the end of himself, was given the privilege of interceding for his friends. This is not the path the world calls success. A man is formed by his object. Job's object, at the end of God's dealings with him, was God — and God made use of him.

Jonathan — Faith Working by Love, and What Was Not Given

First Samuel 18 records one of the great friendships of Scripture. When David had finished speaking with Saul after the defeat of Goliath, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. He stripped himself of his robe and his garments and gave them to David — along with his sword, his bow, and his belt.

Jonathan was in line to be the next king. He had already shown his own faith and courage at the pass of Michmash, where he and his armour-bearer attacked a Philistine garrison alone, saying, it may be that the Lord will work for us, for

there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few. He was a man of faith. And Galatians 5:6 speaks of faith which worketh by love — a faith that does not merely believe but is expressed through devotion and action. Jonathan's soul being knit to David was that faith working by love, his heart drawn to the one who was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet Jonathan did not give himself wholly to David. He gave his robe, his sword, his bow — but not himself. He went back to his father's house. He met David in the wood and strengthened his hand in the Lord, and then went back again. He did not follow David into the wilderness. And when the end came, Jonathan was slain on the mountains of Gilboa with Saul and the men of Israel. Had he been with David, it would not have been so.

This speaks to the conscience. Jonathan loved David as his own soul — there is no question of that. But he gave David everything except himself. And that is a question for each of us in our relationship to the Lord. We can give many things — time, service, gifts, words of testimony — and yet hold back the one thing He most desires: ourselves, wholly committed, dwelling with Him rather than returning to our own house.

Ruth and Ittai — Complete Devotedness

Two figures in Scripture stand as the counterpoint to Jonathan's partial devotedness. Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi: entreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee — for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. She gave herself completely. She was a Moabite — excluded from the congregation of Israel to the tenth generation according to the law. And yet she attached herself to Naomi and to Naomi's God with a humility that asked nothing and offered everything.

Ittai the Gittite, a foreigner who had come to David only recently, gave the same answer when David urged him to return to his own place. As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. He did not calculate the risks. David was at that moment a deposed king fleeing from his own son. None of that mattered to Ittai. Where David was, there he would be. Both Ruth and Ittai were not Israelites by birth, and both gave a completeness of devotion that put natural Israelites to shame.

David — Who Am I? — at Beginning and End

When Saul offered David his daughter in marriage, David's response was disarming: 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? He was a youth and he knew it.

Decades later, at the end of his life, David spoke to the congregation of Israel as he committed the resources for the temple to God's care. His words carried the same spirit across an entire lifetime: who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.

Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. — 1 Chronicles 29:14

The man after God's own heart said the same thing at twenty and at seventy. He made grievous mistakes in the years between. But he was always willing to repent and take God's side against himself when he failed — and through it all, his fundamental posture before God was one of acknowledged nothingness. Are we content to have Christ only? A sister of a previous generation, when someone drew attention to how little she had materially, said simply: I have Christ. What

more would I want? That is the spirit.

Mary Magdalene — The Commission Given to the Wholly Devoted

Mark 16:9 records that the risen Lord appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. John 20 fills in the detail. The other disciples had been to the tomb and gone home. But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping. She stooped and looked in, saw the angels, turned and saw Jesus — and did not recognise Him. He said one word: Mary. That was all it took. My sheep hear my voice.

Mary had not given a great speech. She had not asked intelligent questions. She had stayed when the others left. She was looking for Him when she could not find Him, asking the gardener if he had moved the body. There was an entireness of devotion in her that the Lord recognised and rewarded.

The commission He gave her was one we might have expected to go to Peter or John: Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. The most blessed announcement of the resurrection age — that He was risen and ascending to the Father — was entrusted first to a woman out of whom He had cast seven demons, because she loved Him most completely. She did not go home. She stayed. And because she stayed, she was the first to hear His voice.
