1 Chronicles 11, Revelation 2 & Luke 22

David's Mighty Men, First Love, and Knowing the Lord's Heart

Scripture Readings

> *"David longed and said, O that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" — 1 Chronicles 11:17*
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> *"I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." — Jeremiah 2:2*
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> *"I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love… remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent." — Revelation 2:4–5*
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> *"With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." — Luke 22:15*
>
> *"Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved." — John 13:23*

The Three Mighty Men: Close, Listening, and Loving

1 Chronicles 11 gives us the list of David's mighty men — a remarkable catalogue of valour. One killed three hundred Philistines with a spear in a single day. Another killed two lion-like champions of Moab. Another defended a plot of barley when the rest of the people had fled. That last exploit is easy to overlook, but the Holy Spirit saw fit to record it. It sometimes takes discernment to recognise that the Lord's people might survive a battle but have nothing to eat afterward. There are men like him in church history too — men who defended food for God's people, who fought for the truth of Scripture against false

teaching so that the saints could be nourished. Such men should find an honoured place in our regard.

But the story that arrests us is that of the three chiefs of the thirty who went down to David at the cave of Adullam. The Philistines had their garrison at Bethlehem, and David was in the stronghold. And David was musing aloud — not issuing a command, not sending out a call for volunteers — just thinking about his beloved Bethlehem, now in enemy hands. He said, “Oh, that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem.” And those three men heard it.

Two things stand out immediately. First, they were close to David. They were not at the far end of the camp. They were near him — near enough to catch a quiet longing spoken aloud. Second, they were listening. Not merely present, but attentive. And why were they listening? Because they wanted to know what was precious to David. That is why: they wanted to know his heart, so that they might do something that would bring him joy. And when they heard it, they did not hesitate. They broke through the Philistine camp and drew that water from the well and brought it back to him.

And David poured it out to the Lord. When I first heard this story as a child, that seemed a disappointment — all that risk, and he pours it on the ground. But is there any way David could have honoured what they did more highly? He said, This is too precious for me. This is the Lord’s. He gave it to Him as a sacrifice. Nearly four thousand years later we are still reading the story. The Holy Spirit preserved it. The devotion of those three, their nearness to David and their desire to delight his heart, was so great that David could not accept what it cost them as something merely for himself.

Jeremiah 2 and Revelation 2: The First Love Left Behind

The Lord’s message to Israel through Jeremiah begins with a remembrance: “I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when

thou wentest after me in the wilderness." There was a time when Israel had that kind of love for the Lord — a responsive, following love, like those three mighty men for David. And then comes the searching question: "What injustice have your fathers found in me, that they have gone far from me?" The Lord is not accusing them of doing anything wrong. He is asking: what did I do? Why is that love gone?

The address to Ephesus in Revelation 2 says the same thing in a New Testament setting. Go through the Lord's commendation of Ephesus: their works, their labour, their endurance, their discernment in testing false apostles, their patience for His name's sake, their refusal to grow weary. There is nothing wrong in any of it. You could not visit Ephesus and find fault. And yet: "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love." One charge. One thing. That love that was there at the beginning — the love of a new-married couple, of the espousal, of the heart freshly set free by the knowledge of salvation — had gone.

It is possible to do all the right things without love. We see it in the world now — a kind of fashionable religious respectability that produces moral behaviour, generosity, talk of God, but no reality in the heart. The Lord is not fooled. And it is possible for a believer to carry on with all the outward marks of faithfulness while the first love has quietly cooled. The Lord's remedy is plain: remember whence thou art fallen, repent, and do the first works. Go back to the beginning — to the wonder of a free salvation, to the gratitude that was there when you first understood what He had done.

Truth Informs Conduct: 2 Timothy

In 2 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul points Timothy to two things that had marked his own life — but notice the order. He says, "Thou hast been thoroughly acquainted with my teaching, conduct." Teaching comes first. Conduct follows. The truth of Scripture informs conduct; conduct does not inform the

understanding of truth. If I do not know what the Lord has said, I cannot know how to behave as a member of the body of Christ. And if I have love for the Lord but no knowledge of what is in His heart, I am like someone who wants to do what will please him but does not know what that is. I am not like those three mighty men.

Both things are needed together. Love without knowledge may mean well but will miss the mark. Knowledge without love will produce the Ephesian condition: all the right actions, the heart gone cold. The three mighty men had both — they were near David and listening to learn what was in his heart, and they had a love for him that sprang them into action the moment they heard it. The Bible tells us what is in God's heart. There is no further revelation. There is no new Jeremiah. What I need to know, it is all here.

The Upper Room: Where Do You Want Us to Go?

Luke 22 gives us one of the most instructive details in the account of the Passover. The Lord said to Peter and John, "Go and prepare the Passover for us." They could have said: we are grown men, we have celebrated the Passover every year of our lives, leave it with us. They did not. They said, "Where wilt thou that we prepare?" They expressed dependence immediately upon receiving the command. Where? We need your instruction.

And the Lord had already taken care of it. There was a man carrying a pitcher of water — a figure of the Holy Spirit — who would lead them to a house. There they would find a large upper room already furnished, already ready. They simply needed to ask the Lord where, and He could point them to what He had already prepared. The lesson for us in the matter of how and where we remember the Lord is not a small one. The room exists. The Lord knows about it. We need to ask the Lord where, rather than arranging something ourselves.

After the Passover was finished — that ancient feast of remembrance for the night when blood on the doorpost turned aside the judgment of God — the Lord took a loaf and said, “This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me.” He took the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.” And this is like David saying, “Oh that I had a drink from the well of Bethlehem.” The Lord said to His own, with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. This was what was in His heart.

For nearly eighteen centuries, this supper of remembrance was buried under the layers of man’s religion. In 1827, the Lord exercised several believers — one of them a clergyman who had left the Church of England — with the conviction that what the Lord desired was this: to be remembered in His death by His own gathered together on the first day of the week. They had no pattern to look at. No one around them was doing it. But they were close to the Lord, they were listening, and they knew His heart. That is how it began.

Mary and John: Knowing the Lord’s Heart

There are two people in the Gospels who were so near to the Lord that they understood His mind in a way that the other disciples did not. The first is Mary of Bethany. In Luke 10 she sat at the Lord’s feet and heard His word while Martha was distracted with much serving. The Lord commended Mary: she had chosen the one needful thing, and it would not be taken from her. And then in John 12, six days before the Passover, Mary took a pound of very precious ointment of spikenard and anointed the Lord’s feet and wiped them with her hair. Judas Iscariot objected. But the Lord said, Let her alone — against the day of my burying she kept this.

How did Mary know to do this? She had sat at His feet and heard His word. She was listening. And she had a measure of understanding that none of His other

disciples had yet reached — that He was going to die. When the Lord had spoken of His death to Peter, Peter had said, Lord, this shall not be to thee. He did not have God's mind. Mary, through listening and loving, had entered into it in some measure that the rest had not.

The second is John. At the last supper, as the Lord was troubled in spirit about the betrayal, it was John who was leaning on Jesus' bosom. Peter, wanting to find out who would betray the Lord, beckoned to John to ask Him. Peter could have asked the Lord himself. But he knew who would know — the one who was closest to Him. John was leaning on His breast. He knew His heartbeat. And this is the first of five times in John's Gospel that the apostle refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. The intimacy was real. His head was on the Lord's bosom. He knew His heart.

God has a heart. Satan does not — that is a stark contrast. But God has a heart, and God's heart is love. He is light first; but He is love. And at the cross we learn that these two do not conflict — that the Lord Jesus satisfied and vindicated all that God is as light, so that the floodgates of God's love could flow out to all mankind. But the Lord desires more than our being saved. He desires that we would lean on His breast, that we would know His heart.

In 1 Thessalonians the assembly is commended for the work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope. Ephesus had the work and the labour and the patience — but the love that was once there had gone. The difference shows. If we would go on to the end without leaving our first love, we need the same thing those three mighty men had: to break through the enemy's forces by staying near the Lord, listening to His word, and knowing His heart. And His love toward us never changes. Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end — and that end is not a point in time. His love is going on today, unchanging, and it will seek to restore us if we have gotten away. May we love Him more, being occupied with His unchanging, unending love.

“We need grace from Him. He says, My grace is sufficient — grace to walk in the good of this, to be near Him, to listen, and to know His heart.”