

The Cave, the Fixed Heart, and the One Body

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David Alone in the Cave — The Lord His Only Refuge

First Samuel 22 opens with David entirely alone. He had fled to the cave of Adullam after feigning madness before Achish king of Gath — a low point in his story. Everything had been stripped away: his position at court, his wife, his friend Jonathan, his standing. He was in a cave, hunted by the king of Israel. And Psalm 142, written in that cave, gives us the interior of that moment:

I looked on my right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know me. Refuge failed me. No man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord. I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. — Psalm 142:4–5

This is the man who had slain Goliath. This is the anointed king. He had been brought — God had brought him — to a place of utter stripping, where the only one left was God. And that was the point. If David was going to lead the nation of Israel, he had to learn what it meant to have no refuge but God. The lesson is not comfortable and cannot be acquired any other way.

The name Adullam itself carries a double meaning: testimony, and peaceful rest. From outside, a cave of hiding looked nothing like peaceful rest. From inside, once the soul has said Thou art my refuge and my portion — it is. The cave was not a detour in David's life. It was part of the formation that made him the king he became.

God Is Satisfied with Jesus — What That Means for Us

Psalm 57, another cave psalm, shows the same David in a different key. Whereas Psalm 142 is the cry of a man at the end of his resources, Psalm 57 moves toward something higher. My heart is fixed, O God — my heart is fixed — I will sing and give praise. That fixedness is not produced by improved circumstances. It is produced by an occupation with God that lifts the soul above circumstances.

A note from Mr. Wigram raises the question that connects these two things: God is satisfied with Jesus — what do I know of that? It is a searching question. We know what it is to be satisfied with Jesus personally — that He saved us, that He keeps us, that He is enough. But what does it mean that God is satisfied with Jesus? That is something deeper.

God was satisfied with the Lord Jesus before He ever came to earth — He was His delight, the one in whom the Father found all His pleasure. When He came to earth and walked through a world of sin without being touched by it; when He suffered daily in the presence of what was against God while maintaining perfect holiness; when He went to the cross and bore all our sins and satisfied God as to the question of sin forever — how much more was God satisfied in Him? That satisfaction is the ground of everything. It is the reason the veil was torn. It is why we can draw near.

If we understood more of what it means that God is satisfied with Jesus, our hearts would be more fixed. Not fixed by resolution, but fixed by occupation. As the Psalm goes on: I will praise Thee, O Lord, among the people — for Thy mercy is great unto the heavens and Thy truth unto the clouds. When a soul is occupied with the greatness of His mercy and truth, the circumstances that drove it to the cave become the background, not the foreground.

From the Cave — a Captain and a Company

David did not remain alone. Psalm 142 ends: the righteous shall compass me about, for thou shalt deal bountifully with me. And that is exactly what happened.

His family came down. Then everyone that was in distress, in debt, discontented — about four hundred men — gathered themselves to him, and he became captain over them.

What a company. Not the mighty ones, not the celebrated, not those with credentials or standing. The distressed, the indebted, the discontented. This is us. Born in sin, shaped in iniquity, each of us carrying something that speaks of our need. And the Lord Jesus — the antitype of David — became our captain. The captain of our salvation, as Hebrews calls Him. He leads those who have come to the end of themselves and have made Him their refuge and their portion.

David's example in the cave is also the example of 2 Kings 6–7, where four leprous men outside a besieged city became the instruments of Israel's deliverance. It was not the army captains or the city rulers who discovered that the Syrian army had fled. It was the lepers — put outside the camp by the law of Leviticus 13, those whom the law of God had placed beyond the normal life of the community. The Lord uses those who are nothing, and who know it.

The Leper Outside the Camp — And the One Body

Leviticus 13:45–46 is precise: the leper shall dwell apart, outside the camp shall his dwelling be. This was not cruelty. It was God's provision for the holiness of the camp, and it expressed in physical form the moral reality that sin — which leprosy typifies — separates from the community of God's people. Israel was one camp. There was no alternative camp. To be put outside was to be outside.

Ephesians 4:4–6 declares an equivalent truth for our day: there is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Every believer agrees with this when it is read. The question is whether we act consistently with it.

To meet on the ground of the one body means to recognise that any action taken in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in one place is binding everywhere. When an assembly gathered to the Lord's name had to put away a person in the manner of 1 Corinthians 5, that action — taken in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ — was not a local club decision. It was an action of the body of Christ. Whatsoever ye bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Where two or three are gathered to His name, He is in the midst — and it is His authority that acts.

There is one body and one Spirit, as ye have been also called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. — Ephesians 4:4–6

What happens when an assembly puts away someone for sin, and another gathering receives that person and allows him to continue? They are acting as though there is not one body. They are acting as though the leper who was put outside the camp of Israel could simply go to another camp of Israel — and be welcomed. There is no other camp. There is one body. And the assembly that refuses to honour the action of another assembly gathered to the Lord's name is not acting on the ground of the one body, whatever it may confess about Ephesians 4.

The Consequences — and What Is Precious

What happened in one documented case from 1903 illustrates the principle sharply. An assembly acting for the one body silenced a man whose teaching was unprofitable. He went to other places and was received and allowed to speak. Six years later, when the same assembly had to put him away entirely for conduct that had developed into wickedness, those other places refused to honour the action and departed from the assemblies gathered to the Lord's name. They did not see that the assembly had acted with the Lord's authority. And the division that followed revealed what had been working in those souls all along: a practical denial of the one body, however sincerely they may have confessed the words of

Ephesians 4.

To be here — in a small, unimpressive gathering, without a building or a program or anything that the world would call attractive — is not a failure. It is to be among the few who, like those who humbled themselves and came to Hezekiah's Passover, have come to where the Lord has put His name. It is to be where the loaf on the table represents every believer on earth and every week that reality is acknowledged. It is to be gathered to the Lord's name alone, on the ground that there is one body, with the Lord Jesus in the midst.

David's distressed, indebted, discontented four hundred eventually became the mighty men. The Lord deals bountifully with those who make Him their refuge and their portion. May we be those who, like David in the cave, come to say with settled conviction: Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.

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