sermon index

Adam Clarke Commentary 2 Samuel 12

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The Lord sends Nathan the prophet to reprove David; which he does by means of a curious parable, 2 Samuel 12:1-4. David is led, unknowingly, to pronounce his on condemnation, 2 Samuel 12:5, 2 Samuel 12:6. Nathan charges the guilt home on his conscience; and predicts a long train of calamities which should fall on him and his family, 2 Samuel 12:7-12. David confesses his sin; and Nathan gives him hope of Godâ€s mercy, and foretells the death of the child born in adultery, 2 Samuel 12:13, 2 Samuel 12:14. The child is taken ill; David fasts and prays for its restoration, 2 Samuel 12:15-17. On the seventh day the child dies, and David is comforted, 2 Samuel 12:18-24. Solomon is born of Bath-sheba, 2 Samuel 12:25, 2 Samuel 12:26. Joab besieges Rabbah of the Ammonites, takes the city of waters, and sends for David to take Rabbah, 2 Samuel 12:27, 2 Samuel 12:28. He comes, takes it, gets much spoil, and puts the inhabitants to hard labor, 2 Samuel 12:29-31.

Verse 1

There were two men in one city - See a discourse on fables at the end of Judges 9:56 (note), and a discourse on parabolic writing at the end of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew.

There is nothing in this parable that requires illustration; its bent is evident; and it was construed to make David, unwittingly, pass sentence on himself. It was in Davidâ€s hand, what his own letters were in the hands of the brave but unfortunate Uriah.

Verse 3

And lay in his bosom - This can only mean that this lamb was what we call a pet or favourite in the family, else the circumstance would be very unnatural, and most likely would have prevented David from making the application which he did, as otherwise it would have appeared absurd. It is the only part of this parable which is at variance with nature and fact.

Verse 5

The man - shall surely die - Literally בxŸ מוx² (ben maveth), "he is a son of death,― a very bad man, and one who deserves to die. But the law did not sentence a sheep-stealer to death; let us hear it: If a man steal an ox or a sheep, he shall restore Five Oxen for an ox, and Four Sheep for a sheep, Exodus 22:1; and hence David immediately says, He shall restore the lamb Fourfold.

Verse 7

Thou art the man - What a terrible word! And by it David appears to have been transfixed, and brought into the dust before the messenger of God.

Thou Art this son of death, and thou shalt restore this lamb Fourfold. It is indulging fancy too much to say David was called, in the course of a just Providence to pay this fourfold debt? to lose four sons by untimely deaths, viz., this son of Bath-sheba, on whom David had set his heart, was slain by the Lord; Amnon, murdered by his brother Absalom; Absalom, slain in the oak by Joab; and Adonijah, slain by the order of his brother Solomon, even at the altar of the Lord! The sword and calamity did not depart from his house, from the murder of wretched Amnon by his brother to the slaughter of the sons of Zedekiah, before their fatherâ€s eyes, by the king of Babylon. His daughter was dishonored by her own brother, and his wives contaminated publicly by his own son! How dreadfully, then, was David punished for his sin! Who would repeat his transgression to share in its penalty? Can his conduct ever be an inducement to, or an encouragement in, sin? Surely, No. It must ever fill the reader and the hearer with horror. Behold the goodness and severity of God! Reader, lay all these solemn things to heart.

Verse 8

Thy masterâ€s wives into thy bosom - Perhaps this means no more than that he had given him absolute power over every thing possessed by Saul; and as it was the custom for the new king to succeed even to the wives and concubines, the whole harem of the deceased king, so it was in this case; and the possession of the wives was a sure proof that he had got all regal rights. But could David, as the son-in-law of Saul, take the wives of his father-in-law? However, we find delicacy was seldom consulted in these cases; and Absalom lay with his own fatherâ€s wives in the most public manner, to show that he had seized on the kingdom, because the wives of the preceding belonged to the succeeding king, and to none other.

Verse 9

Thou hast killed Uriah - Thou art the Murderer, as having planned his death; the sword of the Ammonites was Thy instrument only.

Adam Clarke Commentary 2 Samuel 12

Verse 11

I will take thy wives - That is, In the course of my providence I will permit all this to be done. Had David been faithful, God, by his providence, would have turned all this aside; but now, by his sin, he has made that providence his enemy which before was his friend.

Verse 13

The Lord - hath put away thy sin - Many have supposed that Davidâ€s sin was now actually pardoned, but this is perfectly erroneous; David, as an adulterer, was condemned to death by the law of God; and he had according to that law passed sentence of death upon himself. God alone, whose law that was could revoke that sentence, or dispense with its execution; therefore Nathan, who had charged the guilt home upon his conscience, is authorized to give him the assurance that he should not die a temporal death for it: The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. This is all that is contained in the assurance given by Nathan: Thou shalt not die that temporal death; thou shalt be preserved alive, that thou mayest have time to repent, turn to God, and find mercy. If the fifty-first Psalm, as is generally supposed, was written on this occasion, then it is evident (as the Psalm must have been written after this interview) that David had not received pardon for his sin from God at the time he composed it; for in it he confesses the crime in order to find mercy.

There is something very remarkable in the words of Nathan: The Lord also hath Put Away thy sin; thou shalt not die; x'x• xTMx"x•x" x"x¢x'xTMx" x—x~x•x²x* xœx• x²xžx•x² (gam Yehovah heebir chattathecha lo thamuth), Also Jehovah Hath Caused thy sin To Pass Over, or transferred thy sin; Thou shalt not die. God has transferred the legal punishment of this sin to the child; He shall die, Thou shalt not die; and this is the very point on which the prophet gives him the most direct information: The child that is born unto thee shall Surely die; xžx•x² xTMxžx•x² (moth yamuth), dying he shall die - he shall be in a dying state seven days, and then he shall die. So God immediately struck the child, and it was very sick.

Verse 16

David - besought God for the child - How could he do so, after the solemn assurance that he had from God that the child should die? The justice of God absolutely required that the penalty of the law should be exacted; either the father or the son shall die. This could not be reversed.

Verse 20

David arose from the earth, and washed - Bathing, anointing the body, and changing the apparel, are the first outward signs among the Hindoos of coming out of a state of mourning or sickness.

Verse 22

Who can tell - David, and indeed all others under the Mosaic dispensation, were so satisfied that all Godâ€s threatenings and promises were conditional, that even in the most positive assertions relative to judgments, etc., they sought for a change of purpose. And notwithstanding the positive declaration of Nathan, relative to the death of the child, David sought for its life, not knowing but that might depend on some unexpressed condition, such as earnest prayer, fasting, humiliation, etc., and in these he continued while there was hope. When the child died, he ceased to grieve, as he now saw that this must be fruitless. This appears to be the sole reason of Davidâ€s importunity.

Verse 23

I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me - It is not clear whether David by this expressed his faith in the immortality of the soul; going to him may only mean, I also shall die, and be gathered to my fathers, as he is. But whether David expressed this or not, we know that the thing is true; and it is one of the most solid grounds of consolation to surviving friends that they shall by and by be joined to them in a state of conscious existence. This doctrine has a very powerful tendency to alleviate the miseries of human life and reconcile us to the death of most beloved friends. And were we to admit the contrary, grief, in many cases, would wear out its subject before it wore out itself. Even the heathens derived consolation from the reflection that they should meet their friends in a state of conscious existence. And a saying in Cicero De Senectute, which he puts in the mouth of Cato of Utica, has been often quoted, and is universally admired: -

O praelarum diem, cum ad illud divinum animorum concilium coetumque proficiscar, cumque ex hac turba et colluvione discedam! Proficiscar enim non ad eos solum viros de quibus ante dixi; sed etiam ad Catonem meum quo nemo vir melior natus est, nemo pietate praestantior: cujus a me corpus crematum est; quod contra decuit ab illo meum. Animus vero non me deserens, sed respectans, in ea profecto loca discessit, quo mihi ipsi cernebat esse veniendum: quem ego meum catum fortiter ferre visus sum: non quod aequo animo ferrem: sed me ipse consolabar, existimans, non longinquum inter nos digressum et discessum fore. Cato Major, De Senectute, in fin.

"O happy day, (says he), when I shall quit this impure and corrupt multitude, and join myself to that divine company and council of souls who have quitted the earth before me! There I shall find, not only those

Adam Clarke Commentary 2 Samuel 12

illustrious personages to whom I have spoken, but also my Cato, who I can say was one of the best men ever born, and whom none ever excelled in virtue and piety. I have placed his body on that funeral pyre whereon he ought to have laid mine. But his soul has not left me; and, without losing sight of me, he has only gone before into a country where he saw I should soon rejoin him. This my lot I seem to bear courageously; not indeed that I do bear it with resignation, but I shall comfort myself with the persuasion that the interval between his departure and mine will not be long.―

And we well know who has taught us not to sorrow as those without hope for departed friends.

Verse 24

David comforted Bath-sheba - His extraordinary attachment to this beautiful woman was the cause of all his misfortunes.

He called his name Solomon - This name seems to have been given prophetically, for x©xœxžx" (sholomah) signifies peaceable, and there was almost uninterrupted peace during his reign.

Verse 25

Called - Jedidiah - xTMx"xTMx"xTMx", literally, the beloved of the Lord. This is the first instance I remember of a minister of God being employed to give a name to the child of one of his servants. But it is strange that the name given by the father was that alone which prevailed.

Verse 26

And took the royal city - How can this be, when Joab sent to David to come to take the city, in consequence of which David did come and take that city? The explanation seems to be this: Rabbah was composed of a city and citadel; the former, in which was the king†s residence, Joab had taken, and supposed he could soon render himself master of the latter, and therefore sends to David to come and take it, lest, he taking the whole, the city should be called after his name.

Verse 27

And have taken the city of waters - The city where the tank or reservoir was that supplied the city and suburbs with water. Some think that the original, $x \in x^0 \times x^0$

Verse 30

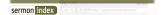
The weight whereof was a talent of gold - If this talent was only seven pounds, as Whiston says, David might have carried it on his head with little difficulty; but this weight, according to common computation, would amount to more than one hundred pounds!

If, however, xžx©x§xœx" (mishkalah) be taken for the value, not the weight then all is plain as the worth of the crown will be about £5075 15s. 7d. sterling. Now this seems to be the true sense, because of the added words with the precious stones; i.e., the gold of the crown, and the jewels with which it was adorned, were equal in value to a talent of gold.

Verse 31

He brought forth the people - And put them under saws. From this representation a great cry has been raised against "Davidâ€s unparalleled, if not diabolic, cruelty.― I believe this interpretation was chiefly taken from the parallel place, 1 Chronicles 20:3, where it is said, he cut them with saws, and with axes, etc. Instead of x•x™x©x" (vaiyasar), he sawed, we have here (in Samuel) x•x™x©x• (vaiyasem), he put them; and these two words differ from each other only in a part of a single letter, x" (resh) for x• (mem). And it is worthy of remark, that instead of x•x™x©x" (vaiyasar), he sawed, in 1 Chronicles 20:3, six or seven MSS. collated by Dr. Kennicott have x•x™x©x• (vaiyasem), he put them; nor is there found any various reading in all the MSS. yet collated for the text in this chapter, that favors the common reading in Chronicles. The meaning therefore is, He made the people slaves, and employed them in sawing, making iron harrows, or mining, (for the word means both), and in hewing of wood, and making of brick. Sawing asunder, hacking, chopping, and hewing human beings, have no place in this text, no more than they had in Davidâ€s conduct towards the Ammonites.

It is surprising, and a thing to be deplored, that in this and similar cases our translators had not been more careful to sift the sense of the original words by which they would have avoided a profusion of exceptionable meanings with which they have clothed many passages of the sacred writings. Though I believe our translation



Adam Clarke Commentary 2 Samuel 12

to be by far the best in any language, ancient or modern, yet I am satisfied it stands much in need of revision. Most of the advantages which our unbelievers have appeared to have over certain passages of Scripture, have arisen from an inaccurate or false translation of the terms in the original; and an appeal to this has generally silenced the gainsayers. But in the time in which our translation was made, Biblical criticism was in its infancy, if indeed it did exist; and we may rather wonder that we find things so well, than be surprised that they are no better.