

"The Lord is With Him" (1 Samuel 16:18)**T. Austin-Sparks:**

"Then answered one of the young men and said, Behold I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is skilful in playing, and a mighty man of valour, and a man of war, and prudent in speech, and a comely person; and the Lord is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18).

This verse gives us six features of the life of David, the man who came to be described as being after God's own heart. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that there are five virtues and that the last, "the Lord is with him", is really explanatory of the rest.

1. "...skilful in playing..."

This introduces us to a main feature of David's whole life, which was worship. We owe many of the Psalms to him. The title for what we call 'The Book of the Psalms' was originally 'The Book of Praises'. It became the book of worship, first for the nation and then for the whole world. There is an indication of what was to be an outstanding characteristic of David in this description of him as a skilful player. Where had he learned? How had he developed this talent? In solitude. When these words were spoken, David was unknown, living out his days in the fields of Bethlehem where he cared for his father's sheep. It was there in obscurity, and perhaps in loneliness, that he developed his spirit of praise. Afterwards it became public and the whole people profited from it, but it had its first beginnings in a simple humble life with God. How was the young man who recommended him to king Saul aware of this gift? It seems that he had somehow overheard David, for he appears to be the only one who was informed about him. We do not want to make too much of this point, and yet it is clear that what happened way back in those fields of Bethlehem did produce the foundations of David's later life. He himself referred to this when he offered to go out and fight Goliath. It was in the ordinary affairs of life that he proved the reality of the presence of the Lord and learned the secrets of an anointed life.

From this fact there immediately emerges the reminder that in the Lord's work we neither need to push ourselves forward nor to be pushed by others. Our first concern must consist of exercise Godward. If in your secret history you minister to His good pleasure, without the stimulus which comes from public applause, it will sooner or later, become apparent. God will see to that. Do not worry too much about your lifework; if you have a hidden life of worship, then that will show itself in the outward service to which He has called you. God has always described His service as worship and regarded worship as basic to His service. "Let my son go, that he may serve me," He demanded (Exodus 4:23). And how did Israel serve Him? By worship. The important point is that this does not begin in public. David's life of song was the result of a heart attitude of worship, in songs of praise which expressed his heart devotion to the Lord. Sometimes, perhaps, it was a case of songs without words, inner melody to the Lord for which there were no words.

We note that this first mention of music in David's life is associated with evil powers in king Saul. Saul had been given the highest opportunity, but he had been disobedient, taking into his own hands those things for which he should have waited for God. "Tarry till I come unto thee" - but Saul could not tarry. He was restless, impatient; and in taking hold of the things of God for himself he had allied himself with evil powers. As Samuel told him: "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft..." (1 Samuel 15:23), for it links a man with that other evil world. So by seeking to grasp at things for himself, Saul not only forfeited them but allowed Satan to gain a foothold in his life. This has been Satan's objective from the first, to draw things away from God and to himself. In his ultimate manifestation in the person of the Antichrist, he will sit in the temple of God, giving out that he is God and being worshipped as God. That is his ambition. David was just the opposite, for the motive in his music was that everything should be for God's glory. That explains the clash. There are the two kingdoms, one taking from God and the other bringing everything to God. No wonder, then, that Saul became David's greatest enemy.

From the first beginnings of his life David turned everything into music. All his experiences, all his history, he turned into song. It is a most helpful study to look for those Psalms of his which have an introductory explanation of the circumstances in which they were written. Even when Absalom drove him from his throne, David turned that bitter experience into a song (Psalm 3). The whole value of his Psalms is that they arose from a vital experience of God. The volume of Psalms then became the book of Israel's praises, until at last David organised the whole thing for temple worship. He drew together a choir of four thousand voices, and so organised their singing into twenty-four courses that praise was never silent in Israel, day or night. No sooner had one course finished than the next took over, and so round the whole twenty-four hours of each day, every week and every month, throughout the entire year. In this way there was an unbroken flow of continuous worship to God.

Even the deep and dark things of his life were turned by David into Psalms of praise to God. He had his failures, his tragedies, and even his desperate sin, but in all this he found forgiveness and restoration as he turned back in heart to God. This is why he was so beloved by God, because he never failed to find his way up and out through worship. And worship has always proved a most powerful weapon against the kingdom of darkness. "The lion of the tribe of Judah... hath overcome" is part of the heavenly song, and since Judah means 'praise', this suggests that there is a victoriously militant power in spiritual praise. Many a time Martin Luther found his escape by this means. He knew much of the onslaught of satanic powers; he seemed sometimes to be engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with the Devil. His only but very effective answer at such times was to say: 'Let us sing, brother'!

Psalm 22 is one of David's great Messianic Psalms and, although it opens with a dismayed cry at being forsaken by God, it soon breaks through in an appeal to the one who inhabits the praises of Israel (verse 3). It seems that God is provided with a throne for ruling when His people worship and praise Him. This is no small thing. Again in Psalm 114:2, speaking of the glorious procession out of Egypt and on towards the inheritance, the psalmist tells us that: "Judah became his sanctuary". This is only a figurative way of saying that the praises of the Lord provide a holy dwelling place for Him. Praise brings God into a situation as nothing else can, and it puts Him in His right place which is over all. It is a tremendous thing to be able to put the Lord over everything, over breakdown, over perplexity and suffering, over your enemies, over your failures and even over your sins. That was what David did, and that is surely the spiritual reality which lies behind the description: "skilful in playing".

Praise, real praise, means that we are on the victory side. Of course there is a kind of singing which is really a confession of defeat, singing to keep up your spirits, whistling in the dark to pretend that all is well. There was no need for David to do that, for the final statement about him was: "the Lord is with him". That was both the reason for David's singing and the result of it. Yet worshipper as he was, provider of praise as he might have been, David sometimes went down into the depths of despair and had to confess that, as he sang, his soul was cast down and disquieted within him. But he had an answer for this. It was to look on to the day of deliverance which must surely come: "Hope thou in God; for I shall YET praise him..." (Psalm 42:5). The end of the story is written for us in the book of Revelation which gives us glimpses of the glorious choir of the redeemed in heaven. In that day we shall all be skilful in playing and it will be true in the fullest sense that the Lord is with us. So let us praise Him that we shall YET praise Him, and this in itself will bring us a present experience of victory.

2. "...a mighty man of valour..."

This brings us straight on to the second feature of this anointed man's life, namely that he was a great man of courage. David may not have been as impressive in physique as those brothers of his, but because he had spiritual and moral courage he was rightly considered as a mighty man. Valour begins by getting on top of ourselves, by conquering our own moods and feelings; it begins within and not in outward things. At times it is not so difficult when you have an audience, and are inspired to courage by the fact that people are looking on, but it is much more difficult to be brave when you are quite alone. Once again we note that David first acquired his claim to valour when he was in the background, largely unobserved.

Of course there are also new challenges to the man who is exposed to public testing, but when that came, David confirmed that the original assessment of his valour was a correct one, for by God's grace he kept true through many temptations to doubt and fear. When the Philistines seized him in Gath he declared: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalm 56:3). It is fear which robs a man of his courage. Fear entered the world when sin came in, and it has governed human behaviour ever since, just as it exercises a dreadful rule in the ranks of evil spirits (James 2:19). If sin brings in fear, then courage often depends on having a good conscience. The most fearless or courageous Man who ever walked this earth was the Lord Jesus, whose remarkable moral courage was based upon an absolutely clear way between Himself and His Father. A bad conscience makes us small and makes us cowards but a good conscience gives stature and boldness. David was far from being a sinless man, but he had learned the secret of getting right with God and a great theme of his Psalms is the blessing of forgiveness and justification by faith in our Saviour God.

Valour also depends upon a complete faith in the Lord. David believed God implicitly; he believed and he loved. The Psalms are full of this fact. Only perfect love can cast out fear. Every new experience of God which came to David made him the more ready to trust God's great love and to love Him in return, a fact which doubtless established him more and more as a mighty man of valour. The Lord built up his strength by taking him through difficult and adverse circumstances in which he proved the steadfast love of his God. Then as he grew in

courage, he was able to undertake things altogether beyond his measure in the interests of the Lord. Tremendous odds mattered nothing to him provided he could be sure that the Lord was with him. He also proved his courage in waiting for God and enduring without complaining when things seemed to be against him. For a man of action to be powerless, just to endure and be patient while he waits for God, demands very great courage. There were times when David could have acted in desperation to rid himself of his great enemy Saul, but he refused to do so. He was prepared to wait for God. When we learn such a lesson then we are learning valour of a very high order.

3. "...a man of war..."

In the third place David was a warrior. This reference is the first intimation of the constant warfare which was to be a feature of his life. David had to be a fighter, not because he was personally aggressive, not because he needed to be relieved of superfluous energy, and not because he was trained or qualified in military matters, but because he was jealous for the rights of God. It is quite clear that what stirred his spirit was both indignation that God's name should be dishonoured and concern for the good of God's people. It was a sense of responsibility for the Lord's interests which made him a fighter, and as we speak of this we seem to hear the words of that other great spiritual warrior, Paul: "Knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Philippians 1:16).

As we have said, it all began in the simple and humble affairs of David's daily life. His first fight was over a lamb. Only a lamb! Why risk your life for just a lamb? Your father is a man of some substance - witness his gifts to the king and the older brothers - and he would never miss one little lamb. Surely the lion could have that one! But no, that lamb was David's responsibility, it was part of the father's possessions which had been committed to his care, and it was this sense of concern for Jesse's interests which led him later into concern for God's interests and made him the fighter that he was.

Warriorship, however, demands utter selflessness. Those who have personal problems and interests may be fighters in a wrong way but they will never be good soldiers of the Lord nor fight the good fight of faith. Those who spend their time complaining and criticising are doing the enemy's work. In the wilderness Israel was defeated not by outward enemies but by their internal complaining and murmuring. You may think that you have plenty to murmur about; David himself had times when he felt that he was being very badly treated, but he found - as we shall do - that whole-hearted devotion to the Lord's interests is the sure way of victory. God's man of war is also a worshipper; his mouth is filled with the high praises of the Lord. If worship is to come first, then this will mean a turning aside from selfish or personal problems and a total concentration of the whole heart on the honour of the name of the Lord. Only so can God's man be a true warrior. This brings us to a very practical point which is that the first phase of spiritual warfare and every subsequent skirmish and battle calls for a new letting go to the Lord. This is very often the secret of success, and especially so for the Christian whose enemies are spiritual and who is called not to personal conflicts or triumphs but to share in Christ's battle with evil and to share His victory.

4. "...prudent in speech..."

David was known to be prudent in speech or, as the Authorised Version has it, "prudent in matters". David was a man of discretion, a man of wise counsel, and a man who could speak for God because he had first learned to listen to God. Perhaps teachableness was one of his outstanding qualities. The person who is self sufficient, who thinks that he knows so much, will never be able to speak wisely for God.

Some of you may have felt at times that God can make no use of you, since you lack the qualifications or natural abilities which men regard as necessary for serving Him. The prudence of which we are now speaking is not a natural quality at all, but that which becomes a spiritual feature of the one who truly knows what it is to have the Lord with him. The Lord is not looking for cleverness. Indeed He often cannot use people because they are too clever in their own estimation. Teachableness, however, is a quality which He greatly values, and this is a matter of the spirit as well as of the mind. There is often a big difference between knowledge and wisdom, or prudence. Knowledge may consist of a mass of correct information, but wisdom means the application of that knowledge in ways which are good. It is possible for a Christian to have a vast amount of spiritual information, information as to what the Bible teaches and what the commentators suggest, holding all this in the mind or in the notebook yet with little evidence of it in the practical values of life. Wisdom is a matter of using the information correctly by turning it to account for the glory of God.

What is more, such wisdom will always be constructive. There are those who seem to think that they show their superior wisdom by their ability to criticise. If they can put their finger on a fault or discover some flaws, then

they consider that they are being wise. But the effect of their activities is destructive, whereas the Scriptures make it plain that true wisdom is always constructive. Solomon, the wisest king of all, was a great builder, and it was he who wrote about wisdom building her house (Proverbs 9:1). So much is written in the New Testament about speech which is for building up or edification that the implication seems to be that if our tongues cannot contribute to positive helpfulness in this way then they had far better remain silent. Wisdom is always shown in its building values.

In fact wisdom is always actuated by the ability to discriminate as to what is for the glory of God. Nothing else matters. The Spirit's presence in a man is made evident by the ways in which he can avoid that which grieves God and devote himself to God's pleasure. If the Lord is with him then he will be prudent in matters.

5. "...a comely person..."

The final verdict on David was that he was a comely person, a man of good presence. It is clear that God intended that this should be true of every human being. From one standpoint this is the Bible's theme. "Let us make man in our image" God said. So far as man is concerned God always had perfection as His purpose. Through sin, however, man has become stunted, deformed and repulsive to God, and he would always remain so but for the fact that the Lord Jesus has brought a salvation which makes men perfectly whole. As the Saviour passed along the way He met the blind, the paralysed, the deformed, and He spoke the words of deliverance and transformation which left them whole again - they were saved. His eternal purpose in salvation is to have sons conformed to His eternal Son, who is indeed the Comely Person.

David is a foreshadowing of this mighty work of salvation. He who would by nature have been repulsive to a holy God (born in sin and shapen in iniquity) became a man after God's heart, a man of good presence who could be looked upon and admired. It may be helpful to consider some of his features, and the first one is undoubtedly meekness. David never claimed to be as good as the other man. He always thought himself to be the poorest of men. Emptiness of self is the very essence of meekness. See also how David suffered when things went wrong. Never for a moment did he blame someone else, but condemned himself outright. If ever a man was filled to overflowing with the consciousness of the marvellous mercy of God to a sinner, that man was David. See again how he suffered wrong without becoming vindictive. It is a mark of meekness to bear unjust wrong and not be embittered by it. For years David bore so much evil from Saul and yet he refused to take revenge, even when it could have been so easy. When Saul died in battle David did not gloat, he did not express relief but he made one of the most beautiful laments of grief over Saul as well as over his son, Jonathan.

Another thing which made David great was the way in which he accumulated wealth for the house of God. He took hold of every experience of suffering and wrung out of it something for God and God's people. Did he go into a deep and dark experience? Then he took hold of it and extracted from it that which would be for the enrichment of generations that were to follow. That is how we got our Psalter. That is not the little person's way of looking at things. He gets under his troubles, turns in on himself and gives way to self pity. The big man, however, does what David did, uses his own adversity to bring comfort and help to others.

One further feature of David's spiritual and moral stature was his single unifying passion. "...for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face... For the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up" (Psalm 69:9). David's supreme concern was for the Father's house, and in that he was a true type of the Lord Jesus to whom these very words are applied. He had a mighty concern for the Father's glory, and tremendous courage to carry that concern into action. David was like that. So much is written in the books of Samuel and Chronicles about his concern for the house of God. This was his one unifying passion. His life was a unity governed by a singleness of purpose, and that was what made him great. He had spiritual quality; he was a man of a good presence. God does not get glory out of our littlenesses, our petty jealousies and selfish pre-occupation. But when we grow up spiritually, leaving all those childish things behind, then the glory of God begins to be seen in us.

All this, then, because the Lord was with David. He himself was aware of that Presence, though at times he was tempted to question and doubt. What is more important, other people took note of it. This is what matters most. When people meet us, do they meet the Lord? When the Lord Jesus came to this earth He was called "Emmanuel" - God with us. The verdict upon His life after He had gone back to the glory was: "God was with him" (Acts 10:38). And the Holy Spirit has come to make this our experience. His anointing signifies that the Lord is with us, and this should make effective in our lives those five qualities which were observed in the young David. To have the Lord with him cost David dearly. It cost him his home; for a time it cost him his rightful place as king; it cost him comforts and popularity. But it gave him that which is more valuable than all earthly treasures. It gave him the supreme joy of bringing pleasure to the heart of God. The Lord was with him.

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