

A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART¹

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The inscription on a grave marker is called an epitaph, which is basically a short composition in prose or verse written as a tribute to a dead person.

Written in memory of the English poet Shakespeare are these words: "He was not of an age, but for all time."

Of a scientist who died at the age of 85 it is written "He Died Learning."

One epitaph reads: "All dressed up and no place to go."

Or, "Remember, friend, when passing by,

As you are now, so once was I.

As I am now, soon you will be,

Prepare for death and follow men."

To which someone later added:

"To follow you I'm not content.

Until I know which way you went."

The epitaph that is the most inspiring of all is the tribute to King David by God Himself:

"I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do" (Acts 13:22).

It almost seems contradictory that God would choose a shepherd to lead His people and be their king. A shy, retiring, country-bumkin, with no sophistication, placed in the responsibility of administering a government from a big city capital. What could God have been thinking?

But, then again, why would God call you to His kingdom, for such a time as this? You lack confidence among people. You are unsure about your status with God and the body of Christ. You sometimes waver back and forth regarding your assurance of salvation. Why would God call you?

To understand the wider significance of David's call to the kingdom his predecessor was King Saul. He was the king that the people had chosen. In their unbelief of God's promise to lead them and be their King, they wanted someone they could see, like all the other nations around them. The prophet Samuel was greatly disturbed over their clamor for the tall, angular, muscular, striking figure of Saul.

God reassured Samuel that they had not rejected him as a prophet, but they had rejected God as their king. "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee" (1 Sam. 8:7, 8).

But the choice of Saul soon proved to be a disaster. The exaltation of Saul and adulation poured upon him corrupted his heart deceiving him to trust in human strength rather than in God. His mind was constantly filled with conspiracy theories. In a desire to control and consolidate his power he became tyrannical like all the kings of the nations round about. The people suffered greatly under the consequent lack of spiritual leadership. "Saul had

¹ Acts 13:22-23. 341; 298.

been after the heart of Israel, but David is a man after God's own heart" (ST June 15, 1888).

It became apparent that dynastic change must occur, but how? The church and nation were becoming more and more worldly. The gospel was not proclaimed. The principles and statutes of God were neglected. The knowledge of the true God was fast fading from Israel's national consciousness. Would God instigate a *coup d'etat* and overthrow Saul? Or would God's love win back the kingdom with Him acknowledged as King by all?

During times of revolutionary change, particularly in government, the danger is for anarchy to prevail and everyone does what is right in his own eyes. When there is no figure of leadership and the people lack a sense of purpose, then everyone seems to spin off in all directions.

God was the true King of Israel. But the people were not satisfied with just that. They wanted someone who could provide a visible presence and a functioning bureaucracy. The people have always wanted to be taken care of and defended. So God needed someone who acknowledged His primary leadership of the people and yet could be a king for the people who would submit to the Lord.

David is the only person in the Bible whom God called a man after his own heart. Both the Old and the New Testaments record this fact. In 1 Samuel 13:14 Samuel said, "The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart," and in Acts 13:22 Paul said, "After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart." God

seemed to be saying, "I really like David," and God was clearly involved on a personal and emotional level with David.

Why did God share with David what was on His heart? Even more personal for us, How can I become a person after God's own heart?

Here's what we know of the youthful days of David. These were spent at Bethlehem. We see David as a shepherd, minding his father's sheep.

Bethlehem was a small town, built on one of the highest hills in Palestine, about four miles to the south of Jerusalem. Its name signifies "The House of Bread," and was probably bestowed on it on account of the fertility of the surrounding country.

It was an ancient city in David's time. The patriarch Jacob had sojourned there in his wanderings and it was near by that Rachel had died and was buried. The monument erected by Jacob to the memory of his beloved wife was still standing. It was in Bethlehem, too, that David's great grand-parents, Ruth and Boaz, had their homes; and it was there, a thousand years later, that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was manifested in sinful flesh to save His people from their sins. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:2).

Jesse, David's father, was counted a very old man. He had eight sons, of whom David was the youngest, and two daughters, both of whom had children of their own. These, although David's nephews, would be about the same age as himself.

They were doubtless among his youthful companions, and we can imagine how, as they minded their sheep together, or practiced with their slings, they would talk of what they hoped to do when they grew to be men. It is not likely, however, that they anticipated becoming so famous as they afterwards did. One of them became a great king, and all grew up to be famous warriors. Joab, the great general and statesman, brave but crafty and unscrupulous; Abishai, the mighty men of valor; Asahel, "as light of foot as a wild roe;" and Amasa, who afterwards commanded the army of Absalom and was slain by Joab in treachery, were among these nephews of David. Then there was Elhanan who became one of the chief mighty men of Israel. He also lived at Bethlehem. These were the youthful playmates of David.

David was not only a shepherd boy, able to run races with the fleet-footed Asahel, and to sling stones like Joab and the others, but was also a musician and a poet. As he listened to the voice of Nature, speaking all around him, and thought upon the Word of God, he sang promises to his Maker, and made sweet music on the harp. He had carefully stored up the instruction received from his father Jesse, Samuel the prophet, and other good men, and had hidden the words of God in his heart that he might not sin against Him.

The shepherd's work was not done at sunset. The sheep had to be guarded from the attacks of hungry wild beasts, or these would come and destroy the flock, so that David sometimes had to remain out at night, and watch the sheepfold. It was not always

pleasant, but instead of complaining, he composed verses on the beauties of the star-lit heavens. The eighth Psalm was one of the songs he wrote on this subject.

"O Lord, our Lord,
How excellent is Thy name in all the earth!
Who hast set Thy glory upon the heavens. . .
When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy
fingers,

The moon and the stars, which Thou hast
ordained

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"

David knew that although he was young and simple, the Lord could reveal in him the same glory that made the heavens beautiful, and so we find these words in the same psalm:—

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast
Thou established strength."

When Jesus reminded the Jews of these words He said, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou has perfected praise;" so that when God was doing this with David, He was "establishing strength" in him. That this was a real strength was seen in David's case. More than once while he was guarding the sheep at night, fierce beasts came prowling round, and on one occasion a lion, emboldened by hunger, seized one of the lambs, and was dragging it away. David might have thought of the great danger he would run by interfering with the lion, and perhaps reason that he could not hope to save the lamb, and his own life was more precious. But no, he had the true shepherd heart. He loved his sheep, and his only

thought was that the lamb was in danger and must be rescued. Besides, God was his strength, and even though the lion was much stronger than himself, God was stronger still. So he went in God's strength to do his duty, taking only a shepherd's staff. He overtook the lion and struck it until it dropped the lamb and turned on David. Then it was seen that God really girded him with strength, for in spite of its superior strength the lion was slain. Another time a bear attacked the fold, but David pursued it and fought it with the same result.

In all the experiences of his life the youthful shepherd learned to see the working of God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses also, had tended sheep, and as David studied the records of the past, he saw how all men were like sheep, and God was a great Shepherd, feeding and guiding His flock, and leading them to the fountain of the water of life.

He knew how the very helplessness of the sheep appealed to his own heart, and how carefully he sought to lead them where the pasturage was best and the way was easiest. So the Lord was guiding him, only with infinitely greater love and wisdom.

So the shepherd boy was learning the ways of the Lord. By faithfulness in the discharge of the duties allotted to him, he was developing a character that God could use anywhere. One who does everything to the glory of God, even if it be only minding-sheep, is achieving true and lasting greatness.

Christ is a Good Shepherd who is seeking His lost sheep even though we have not sought Him. A misunderstanding of God's character causes us to

think He is trying to hide from us. There is no parable of a lost sheep that must seek and find its Shepherd. This truth flows naturally and logically from the gospel as Good News (Luke 15:1-10).

The false idea is that like a shopkeeper, the Lord regards us indifferently until we take the initiative to ferret Him out from His hiding place. The truth is that He seeks us (Ps. 119:176; Eze. 34:16).

If anyone is saved at last it will be due to God's initiative; if anyone is lost at last, it will be due to his own initiative (Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16-19).

Our salvation does not depend on our maintaining a relationship with God; it depends on our believing that He stands at the door and knocks—seeking to maintain that relationship with us unless we break it off (Rev. 3:20).

When Christ gave His blood for the sins of the world, *He redeemed the lost human race*. No one is exempt from intimate involvement, because "He, by the grace of God, [tasted] death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). He died every person's *second* death, His final punishment for sin.

And He did all this before we had any chance to say yes or no. Jesus has involved Himself with every human soul at the deepest level of his being, that hidden source of his intimate personal fear of eternal death. Christ's sacrifice has already "delivered" him from that fear which has enslaved him through "all [his] lifetime" (Heb. 2:14, 15). (The sinner can resist and reject, and thus be lost; Christ will force no one to be saved.)

Isaiah says, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Paul says He is *already* "the Savior of all

men, especially of those who believe.” And John adds that He is the “propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (Isa. 53:6; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 2:9). It is astounding!

Does Christ do nothing for us until we initiate the process and elect Him to be our personal Savior? Is He only a possible Savior, with a big *if*. . . ? Must the sinner do something first, like believe, or obey the commandments? We often get the idea that we must function as our co-savior, helping to save ourselves. No, says God: Christ’s sacrifice is more than merely *provisional*. It is *effective* in that He has purchased our present life and all we possess and are; and more, He has purchased eternal salvation for us and *given us the gift in Himself*. But we can reject it after He has done His part.

The spiritual paralysis of lukewarmness comes from thinking of Christ like a bank that does nothing for you until you first make a deposit. In contrast, He has already deposited eternal life and all its blessings to the undeserving credit *of your account*. It is yours already “in Him;” now cash the check and realize the blessing *by faith*. Such “faith works by love” and itself produces inward and outward obedience to the One who has given all for us.

This means that the only reason any soul can be lost at last is that he has resisted and rejected what Christ has already accomplished for him. By unbelief he has deliberately thrown the gift away. Such unbelief is the sin of sins. It’s our universal sin. If anyone is saved at last, it will be due to *God’s*

initiative; if he is lost at last, it will be due to his own initiative. *Stop resisting His grace!*

Why is this so important to understand? Because fear is a motive not strong enough to prepare people for the coming of Christ. It may wake someone up, but that’s all. There is a higher motive which Ellen White describes:

“The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness and to make Christ our friend. This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? This ought not to be. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion.”²

“It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour’s matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, . . . and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul.”³

Christ’s sacrifice has reversed for all men the “condemnation” which came upon us all “in Adam.” He literally saved the world from the premature suicide that sin would have brought upon us. So every loaf of bread is stamped with His cross. When this grand truth comes into focus, we see it in the Bible:

“God’s act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam’s wrongdoing. . . . And again, the gift of God is not to be compared in its effect with that one

² *That I May Know Him*, p. 320.

³ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 480.

man's sin; for the judicial action, following upon the one offence, issued in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace, following upon so many misdeeds, issued in a verdict of acquittal. . . . It follows, then, that as the issue of one misdeed [Adam's] was condemnation for all men, so the issue of one just act [Calvary] is acquittal and life for all men" (Rom. 5:15-18, NEB).

Here is power to motivate! The practical result of believing this Good News? We experience justification by faith, which is a change of heart. We were on the outs with God, at enmity with Him; now we see Him as a Friend. In other words, we have "received the atonement," which means we are reconciled to Him (Rom. 5:7-11). We've been redeemed from eternal death! It's like someone on death row who gets a last-minute reprieve. So, says Paul, "present yourselves to God *as being alive from the dead.*" The burden is lifted from the weary heart when such "peace with God" flows in. From now on, no sacrifice is too difficult to make for the One who you know has already saved you from hell itself (Romans 6:13; 5:1).

Such love constrains one to live for Him, so that it becomes actually easy to be saved and hard to be lost. This Good News idea is an essential part of the message of Christ's righteousness.

We have the account of the first public appearance of David. The prophet Samuel had been directed by the Lord to go and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king in the place of Saul, whom He had rejected. Seven sons of Jesse passed before the prophet, but the Lord's choice was not among them.

"And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep." At Samuel's order, he was sent for, and as soon as he appeared, the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he" (1 Sam. 16:11, 12).

Immediately "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David." What did David do then? Did he assume a lordly air, and demand to be treated as a king? Did he at once place himself before the public, proclaiming the fact that the Lord had chosen him king, and attempt to seize the authority, or demand at least to be consulted in regard to public affairs?—Nothing of the kind; he made no claim whatever in his own behalf, simply because the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. If he had put himself forward, he would have shown himself unfit to lead the Lord's people.

Some time afterwards a musician was needed to play before Saul. Then some one recommended the son of Jesse, and Saul sent messengers, saying, "Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep" (1 Sam. 16:19). So we see that David had returned to his sheep, after he was anointed king, as though nothing had happened. An anointed king keeping sheep! How natural it would have been to persuade himself that he was wasting his talents, and that it was his duty to be leading men instead of sheep. But he did nothing of the kind, because he was a man according to God's heart, and the Lord is "meek and lowly in heart." "It was when he was walking in the counsel of God that he was called a man after God's own heart" (CC 180). Here we

have a sample of the kind of men whom God uses in His work.

“And David came to Saul, and stood before him; and he loved him greatly; and he became his armor-bearer” (1 Sam. 16:21). At last David is at court. It looks as though there was now more prospect that he might fill the position for which he had been anointed, than when he was tending sheep. But still he is only an armor-bearer, a servant. Now we shall expect to see him begin to work himself forward and push his claims to the allegiance of the people. Ah, that’s because we don’t know the Lord. David was a man according to God’s own heart, and God’s heart is love, and love “vaunteth not itself,” and “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:4, 5).

Instead of seizing upon the throne, which was his by Divine right, “David went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem” (1 Sam. 17:15). The special object for which he was called to Saul seems to have been accomplished, and the anointed king returned contentedly to his father’s sheep in the wilderness.

But he did not stay there. There was war, and three of his brothers were in Saul’s army. The brothers, who had been passed by in the choice of a king, were in the army, where there was some chance of distinguishing themselves and becoming known while David, the one chosen and anointed, was an unknown shepherd boy. At last he also was sent to the army, but only as a messenger to carry provisions, and to come again. See 1 Sam. 17:17, 18.

Suppose that David had proudly refused to do such menial service. Why should he, the anointed king, act as an errand boy? Thousands of people do far less ability than he, and having no such evidence as he had that the Lord has called them to the work, have refused to do humble work that they thought was beneath them, and have complained bitterly that they were not elevated to the position to which they felt sure that God had called them. But then they were not chosen ones, according to God’s heart. If David had refused to perform that humble task, he would have missed the opportunity of doing a thing which brought his name before all Israel, and fastened the eyes of the nation upon him. We often miss a high place, because we think ourselves already too high to occupy a low place.

Goliath was slain, and David was in high favor. “And Saul took him that day, and would let him no more go home to his father’s house.” “And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul’s servants” (1 Sam. 18:2, 5). Here at last was a position more in keeping with his real calling; nevertheless he was only a servant.

But “favor is deceitful,” and Saul’s regard for David soon cooled. The people’s regard for David aroused Saul’s jealousy, and so “Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand” (1 Sam. 18:13). Although called upon to step down to a lower position than he had occupied, there was no complaint; but “David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him” (1 Sam. 18:14). That was why David behaved so wisely; for

Christ, when He was in the form of God, “counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:6, 7, R. V). By his willingness to serve, David was demonstrating his fitness to reign.

Finally, David was compelled to flee for his life from the presence of Saul. But why did he submit to such injustice? Why did he not stand his ground, and claim his rights? The throne was his by right, and the people respected and loved him. Why did he not assert his right to the throne, rally the people around him, and take possession of the place to which God had anointed him? The reason why is that “God was with him,” and he was a man after God’s heart. Christ was the manifestation of God to men, and He, “when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

Twice Saul was completely within his power, yet no advantage did he take of it. It was not because David restrained himself, that he did not kill Saul, but because he had no desire to do so. At one time he had cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe, his heart smote him even for that. The Lord hath anointed David to be king, and David was determined to leave it wholly with the Lord to bring him to the throne.

It is easy for folks to say that their case is in the Lord’s hands, and at the same time to persuade themselves that God has left all the details to them. The pagan idea that “God helps those who help themselves,” has a large place in the thinking of

many Christians. So the friends of David tried to persuade him. When Saul was in the cave where David was, they said, “Behold, the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee” (1 Sam. 24:4). But David was not to be persuaded to take the Lord’s work out of His hands. God had said that David should be king, and it was the Lord’s business to perform His own promise.

David’s manner of conducting himself was a revelation of God’s character to the people of his time and ours.

Why is God alone among “many gods” the holy One? Why does He demand exclusive worship? Is He divinely selfish? Why not share His worship with “lesser gods”?

But look at Philippians 2:5-8 at an x-ray of *agape*, the character of God. There are seven steps that the Son of God (who alone can reveal the Father) took in stepping down, lower and lower: (1) gave up His “equality with God,” (2) “emptied Himself,” (3) “took upon Himself the form of a slave,” (4) “was made in the likeness of [fallen] man,” (5) “humbled Himself,” (6) “became obedient unto death” (the only being in the wide universe of God who has ever become “obedient unto death”; no suicide is “obedient unto death,” for death is Reality, and suicides flee Reality), and lastly (7), “even the death of the cross.”

That’s the death that involves “the curse of God,” the awful condemnation of final conscious ruin, a death infinitely worse than the physical pain

involved (which itself was terrible!). See Gal. 3:13 to learn what is “the death of the cross.” It was the concentrated death of humanity, for He “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9), the total, final, giving of Himself, the “pouring out of His soul unto death” until there wasn’t a drop left, “numbered with the transgressors, bore the sin of” everybody (Isa. 53:12).

If a picture is worth a thousand words, there we have it: this is *agape*, and “God is *agape*” (1 Jn. 4:8). No other being in the wide universe of the heavenly or earthly cosmos has ever made such a Sacrifice! Any “other god” is therefore an anti-*agape* “god.” That means, to worship any “lesser god” is to worship Satan himself.

No, God, our heavenly Father, our Saviour and Redeemer, is not divinely selfish-refusing to share His throne with “lesser gods.” He knows that to worship any “other god” means death to us; and He loves us too much to allow that. The final crisis of earth’s history will be a challenge to “worship the Lamb” alone, or to worship Baal. All worship of self which is disguised as the worship of “christ” is Baal-worship. Time to think!

It is self that has caused all of the mischief and all of the evil and all of the distress in the universe; and it leads in the showdown of the world’s iniquity. 2 Tim. 4:2. The great contest of the universe and of the ages is of self against God. Micah 6:8.

The great question with all the intelligence in the universe and through all the ages is, *God or self*—which shall reign? Which shall be the way of the universe?

This way of self is sin. The way of God is Righteousness. Every person readily will say that the way of Righteousness is the preferable way. But when to take that way it is found that self must surrender and be put down and out, and even to be crucified and die.

He *is* the Way Righteousness against the way of sin: the Way of God against the way of self. Let this mind be *in you*, which was also in Christ Jesus who emptied Himself. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

We have churches filled with people who are there to get God to solve their problems and make them happy. Do they want their problems solved so that they can more effectively glorify and serve God? No, they want their problems solved so that they can enjoy a happy life. Unlike David, they have no burden for God and His purpose. Instead of being focused on God, they’re focused on trying to get God to meet their own needs for their own gratification. They’re focused on self.

Jesus didn’t say, “If anyone wants to follow Me, I’ll meet his every need so that he can live a happy, comfortable life.” He said, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” If you want to be a person after God’s own heart, get your focus off yourself and your happiness and put your focus on His cross.

It is the way of the Cross: the way of crucifixion. But O joy! *He* is ever the Way; and when our old man is crucified with Him, it is “that the body of sin

may be destroyed, that henceforth we shall not serve sin.” Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who emptied Himself that God might be manifest in the flesh. “This mind” in you will also empty yourself, and God will be manifest in the flesh again: God instead of self, *in you*.