

The well of Bethlehem

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[0 : 00] So we turn now for a little to the second book of Samuel, second book of Samuel chapter 23, in verses 15 to 17, but we read especially verse 15.

David longed and said, O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate. This very familiar and moving story of King David has captured the imagination of people all down the center.

It shed considerable light on David's own character and personality. David had a very eventful life, as you all know.

David was a man who had considerable ups and downs in his fortune and also in his character. He was capable of thinking as he did at one stage, as everybody knows, to very low depths indeed.

But he was also capable of story to the most magnificent height. He was obviously a magnetic character.

[1 : 40] A man who was capable of winning and retaining the love and the loyalty of his fellow men to a mass degree.

And nowhere does the magnetism of his personality display itself more than in this story. A man who could inspire such heroism, such devotion, such self-sacrifice, was obviously a man of outstanding strength.

A man who could inspire such heroism, such as a man who could inspire such heroism, such as a man who could inspire such heroism. In all his vicissitudes, David never got far away from the well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate.

He could always return there. He, in spite of everything, he never lost his faith.

His faith that God had made with him an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things ensue. David had an anchor.

[3 : 08] David had an anchor. An anchor sure of the gate. Entering into that which was in the vein. Oh, he said that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate.

I had an anchor who died in the city very many years ago. He had lived a very healthy life until he was in his middle sixties.

And then things began to go wrong with his health. He was taken to hospital and examined. And the diagnosis was a malignant tumor.

They could do nothing about it. And his days were numbered and his days were short. And he was seized with a longing to spend at least a few of those last weeks while he still had a little strength left in his old home up in Sutherlandshire.

To see once again the mountain ranges, the fields, to hear the sound of the cuckoo and the babbling of the burn.

[4 : 28] And savour the scent of the peat and the fresh grass. On the top of a field, in this cross where he had been brought up, there was a well.

A well where no doubt he had often refreshed himself in the hot summer days in his youth. And he must have felt that there was no water in all the world that tasted like the water of that well.

And I remember every day during those sad days when he was back in his old home, kind hands brought into the house a jar of water from that well.

Oh, that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem. It may be an irrational yearning, but we can well understand it and we can sympathize with it.

And so David, parched in the heat of the sun, beset by his enemies, exclaims, Oh, that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate.

[5 : 40] We can think of it first as just natural nostalgia for the days of youth. David had travelled a bit since those early days in Bethlehem.

And the journey hadn't always been pleasant. And he was going to travel a good deal farther yet. That was of course a critical day in David's experience, when the prophet Samuel had called the house of Jesse in Bethlehem with that cruise of oil, and anointed David as the future king of Israel.

I wonder if we can imagine David's feelings on that occasion. Was he thrilled? Or was he just utterly bewildered?

The thing had come so suddenly, so utterly, unexpectedly. I imagine it must have seemed to him like a dream out of which he was going to awaken. It must have seemed indeed like a fairy story.

But he awoke from his dream and it was real. And it wasn't just like a fairy story ending that they all lived happily ever afterwards.

[6 : 57] You and I don't know what life has in store for us. We don't know what. We don't know where life is leading.

We may start off with rosy prospects. Perhaps not as rosy as David in being king of Israel, but we may dream of success and happiness in home and in business.

Men, life never seems to go just as we pictured it. The days passed in David's life. And before long the reality of the situation began to dawn upon him.

He found himself in what must have been an embarrassing position as a sort of court musician at the court of Saul, knowing what nobody else at that time knew, that he was destined to be Saul's successor.

And then there was the jealousy of Saul, the insensitive jealousy over David's growing popularity with the people.

[8 : 08] Hated by Saul whom he loved and wanted to serve, he found himself an outlaw, wandering on the hills of Judea.

And perhaps many a day he wondered why he had ever left his father's sheep, why he had ever left the quiet pasture of Bethlehem, the purity and the peace and the godly atmosphere of his father's home, all that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is by the gate.

And there are many people in the world, many who are sick of the hurly-burly of life, the sordidness of the rat race, perhaps caught up against their better judgment in the scheming and counter-scheming of business life.

And there are times when they yearn for the innocent pleasures and the simple life of days gone by, and perhaps they feel it was better with them then than now.

And yet let us remember that David was being led by God. He wasn't to live all his life in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was too small a place for David.

[9 : 36] And we dare not shirk the responsibilities of life. And if we miss the quiet and the peace of Bethlehem, we can enjoy opportunities of doing good that Bethlehem would never have given to us.

There's no need. There's no need to be led astray by the world. We can if God leads us. Many of us have to have God if life takes us that way.

Many of us have to leave home and go out into the world for ourselves. But still out in the world we can retain the uplifting and restraining influences of youth.

It's not our fault if the world is full of disturbing features and confronts us with temptation. It is our fault if we yield to these temptations.

And we can be kept closer to the best things if we don't forget the water of the well of Bethlehem.

[10 : 57] If we don't forget the upbringing of our old homes. We can still maintain high ideals and purity of life. And integrity of character.

And reverence for the things of God. And the reading of God's word. And prayer. And family religion. So sadly lacking in these days.

So crowded out by the pressure of 20th century life. We can still retain those things that we cherished.

But in the second place. We can look upon this as a prayer for the spiritual fervor of youth.

A prayer for the spiritual fervor of youth. We don't know very much about David's history. But it's quite clear that he early in life trusted in the Lord.

[12 : 10] That he was from his youth a man of a true and a vital faith. A faith by which he lived. A faith by which he was able to meet and kill a lion and a bear when he was feeding his father's sheep.

And no doubt also was able to meet the attacks of the devil. A devil. One likes to think that it was in those early days.

It's not altogether certain. One likes to think that it was in those early days. That he wrote these familiar words. As he fed his sheep.

On the hills of Bethlehem. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. And if some would think it wasn't in his early days.

No doubt the memory of those early days came back to him. As he did write the words. We see the faith of David in full exercise.

[13 : 22] As he faced Goliath the Philistine. Thou comest unto me with a sword and with a spear. But I come to thee in the name of the God of the armies of Israel.

Whom thou hast defied. That was a faith that carried David right down through the years. Through all the vicissitudes of his life.

And yet we know that there were days when that faith was clouded over. There was a day for example when he said I shall now perish one day.

By the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me. Than that I should speedily escape. Into the land of the Philistines.

Ah yes and later on as we know. He fell and with less. And with a greatly less excuse. Into sin. Far more deplorable than that.

[14 : 21] There are chapters. With which you're all familiar in this very second book of Samuel. That we would. That. Would.

Fain wish. Never had to be written. They leave us a dark, dark blot on David's character. And yet they are written.

And these things are written for our learning. And among other things. Not only to warn us. But also to save us from despair.

And maybe there are some here. Who in early youth gave their lives to Jesus Christ. Christ. And perhaps in those early days showed great promise.

Whether it was early in life or later on in life. You can look back and remember. The warmth of your first love. The wonder of those days.

[15 : 28] When first you tasted. That the Lord was gracious. When first you saw Jesus crucified for your offenses. And when you yielded your heart and your life to him.

You remember the desire that you had to please Christ. The tenderness of your conscience. Your love of the Bible and of the throne of grace.

Of prayer. The longing that you had to win others for Jesus Christ. I wonder if I'm speaking to any.

Who has to confess that over the years. Love has grown cold. The demands of your calling perhaps. The weariness of overwork.

Of crowded prayer. Into a steadily shrinking corner. Of your life. And taken away the reality. Out of what is left. It may be that the pressures of life.

[16 : 37] Have pushed you even into some. The more dubious ways of the world. And you have perverted your conscience. In trying to square it.

With things that one day. You would have roundly and unhesitatingly. Condemned. Perhaps the temptations. Of the world.

And of the flesh. May have proved too strong. For you. Perhaps not going to the same extent. We trust not as David did. But at least going to the extent of harboring illicit thoughts in the heart.

And it may be that there are times when you wonder if the root of the matter was ever in you at all. You seem to have moved so far from those early days.

You wonder if you have been deceiving yourself all along. Oh it's a sadly familiar story. It's a story of very many I'm afraid of most Christian lives.

[17 : 46] At some stage or other in their lives. There come times. There comes over us all I'm afraid. Times of coldness. Times of disobedience.

Times of backsliding. And perhaps tonight you're longing for the warmth of your first love. You're longing for the tenderness of conscience that you once enjoyed.

Longing for the blessedness you knew when first you saw the Lord. Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem.

Which is by the gate. Ah but the Philistines are in Bethlehem now. You've let them into Bethlehem. You'll be lax and unwatchful.

And once they get in there it's not an easy thing to get them out of it again. And it's not an easy thing to get there. And yet remember this. The Philistines hadn't filled up the well.

[18 : 53] The well was there still. The well is there still if we have the courage. And the perseverance to seek it. And as I say there may be some here who are seeking tonight.

And thank God if you are seeking. Thank God if you are saying where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord. It means that God has not yet left you alone.

He's not yet left you. He hasn't left you to yourself. You're not hardened in sin. And thank God for that. And take courage that God will restore you again.

The water of the well of Bethlehem. The words are emotive are they not? The story of the opening of the well of salvation begins at Bethlehem.

It doesn't end there of course. It's not to Bethlehem you and I have to go but to Calvary. It wasn't at Bethlehem that our salvation was wrought.

[20 : 06] It was at Calvary. It wasn't at Bethlehem that our Lord paid the price of our sin but at Calvary. But yet it is to him who was born in Bethlehem that we must go.

David's mighty men risked their lives in order to bring water from the well to David. But Jesus Christ gave his life in order to bring to you and me the water of the wells of salvation.

He met our enemies. He vanquished and overcame them. He died but he rose again from the dead. And he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him.

There is a fountain open for sin and for uncleanness. To the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins.

And sinners planned beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. We can never get back the days of youth.

[21 : 24] We can never live our life over again. And there is no guarantee that it will be any better the next time than it was the last time. Because Dan cannot be undone.

And yet we can find one. Who will heal our backsliding. Who will restore our souls. And make us to walk in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Who will make our lives perhaps not what they once were. Perhaps not what they might have been. David's life never was what it might have been.

Humanly speaking. Had he not had that terrible fall. But nevertheless. A life that God can use to his own glory.

And remember that God can transform even our failures. He can take even our failures.

[22 : 34] And while that never excuses the failures themselves. Yet he can use even these to make us.

To make us more sensitive. More loving and more sympathetic to others. You remember what our Lord said to Peter.

Just as he foretold the sad denial. Thou shalt deny me thrice. But he said when thou art converted.

Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted. Strengthen thy bread.

And what a strength Peter must have been. To many a poor repenting sorrowing soul.

[23 : 42] As you remember how the Lord had dealt with himself. But remember the only way.

Is to go back. Back. Back to where we first found peace. Back to the one.

Who restores the years that the locust has eaten. Back to him who first. Back to him in whom we first found peace.

To him who was born in Bethlehem. Who died on the cross of Calvary. And see him afresh. Crucified for your offenses. And keep your eye upon him.

Until he restores you the joy of his salvation. Until he softens the hardness of your heart. Till he humbles your proud spirit. Till he adjusts the balance of your conscience.

[24 : 48] And fills you with adoring wonder. A wonder greater and more mature than that. At your first conversion.

And makes you exclaim. Who is a God like unto thee. That pardoneth iniquity. That passes by the remnant of the transgression of his heritage. He retaineth not his anger forever.

Because he delighteth in mercy. And my friends one purpose surely. Of a communion season. Is to bring us back.

To Christ. If we have been straying from. What if there has been even. Any coldness. Beginning to creep over our hearts.

After all the time. The time to deal with these things. Is at the beginning. The time to deal with. Anything that goes wrong. Is the. The time to deal with anything.

[25 : 47] That goes wrong. Whatever it may be. In machinery. Or anywhere else. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. When. When. When you see the first. Sign of it. And the same is true of our.

Of our spiritual lives. How much. Trouble. And how. Much remorse. Will be saved. If only.

If only. We realize. At the beginning. When. We're becoming a little less watchful. A little. More. Lacks. When we're moving a little bit. Farther away.

From Christ. Well the communion season. Among other things. Is intended to bring us back to him. To bring us back to ourselves. To ourselves as we.

As we were. And if our heart has grown cold. To restore it. To restore to us. Our first love. But now let us think for.

[26 : 47] Just a moment. Of David's reception. Of. The answer to his prayer. An amazing. Answer. That these three men.

Cut their way. Through the ranks of the Philistines. And brought David. A jar of water. From the well of Bethlehem. And what did David do? Did he drink it? No. He poured it out.

To the Lord. God. I sometimes wonder. How the men. What the men thought. When they saw David doing this. Did they feel.

Perhaps feel a greed. That he. Hadn't. Drunk the water. That he procured. That he procured. At so. Cost. Or did they understand. Did they understand.

His delicacy. The sensitiveness. Of his spirit. He felt. That he would be drinking. Nothing less. Than the blood. Of valiant men. He felt.

[27 : 45] There would have been. Sacrilege. If he drank that water. Oh of course. It was. It was the reason. It would have been. The reasonable thing. On David's part. To drink the water.

But we know. That there's a mysterious. Sense of fitness. In all of us. That can take precedence. Over cold reason. And we can surely. Appreciate. We can surely. Appreciate.

David's feelings. But you know. My friends. In our case. We can do both. We can drink. And we can pour it out.

As well. We're told. To drink. To drink. To drink. Nothing less. Than the blood.

Of the son of God. And yet. We're told. To drink. And as we sit. At the table. Of the Lord. And drink. And drink. The wine. May we.

[28 : 39] See. With the eye. Of faith. And may we. Taste. With the lips. Of faith. The blood. That was shed. For us. And taste. Afresh. The blessedness.

Of sins forgiven. And go forth. Into the world. Refreshed. And reinvigorated. Let us.

Seek. To receive. Christ. Afresh. As he reveals himself. So. Clearly. So. Wonderfully. In the sacrament.

Of the Lord's. Supper. And let us eat. And drink. To our spiritual. Nourishment. And growth. In grace. For although. Christ is not. Present. After.

A corporal. And carnal manner. Although we're. Not. Handling. The. Actual. Body. And blood. Of. Christ. As some would. Have us believe. We are in a spiritual sense.

[29 : 36] Feeding upon him. Feeding upon him. To our spiritual nourishment. And growth. In grace. But at the same time.

We must realize. We must realize. The price that was paid. For this forgiveness. Nothing less than the blood. Of the son of God.

We can drink. Of this well. But we must also. Pour it out. And as we go out. Into the world. That's the one thing.

That's required of us. I beseech you. Therefore. By the mercies of God. That you present. Your bodies. A living sacrifice. Holy.

And acceptable. To God. Which is your reasonable service. You are not your own. You are bought. With a price. Therefore. Glorify. God. In your bodies. And spirits.

[30 : 33] Which are his. Take my life. Take my love. Oh Lord. I pour at thy feet. Its treasure store. Take myself. And I will be. Ever. Only. All. For thee. For thee. That's the way in which. You and I. Can do. What David did. Pour out. Not just a glass of water. But pour out ourselves.

And to the Lord. Let us pray. O Lord. We. We. Pray thee that.

Thou. Dest prepare us. Each one. As we look forward. To the morrow. Enable us to examine ourselves. To search our hearts. In the light of thy word.

[31 : 33] May we go. To thy house. And to thy table. With due preparation. Of heart and life. Search us and know our hearts. Try us and know our ways.

And see if there be any wicked way in us. And lead us in the way everlasting. Enable us to. Go forward. With honesty of heart. Ready to hear what thou wilt speak to us.

Help us to go. Forth prayerfully. Help us to go forward. Expectantly. Believing that thou wilt. Meet with us. And do thou in thy mercy.

Meet with each one of us. At thy table. And make thyself known. In the breaking of bread. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Let's be gracious. Thank you.