

GOD-TOUCHED MEN

"And there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched."
I Samuel 10:26.

This verse is taken from the story of the coronation of Saul, the first king of Israel. Very much against the will of God, and against the warnings of God's prophet, the Jews had demanded a king to rule over them, in order that they might be like the other nations. God warned them against such a move, but nothing else would satisfy them. So, their wish was granted, and the outstanding young man of the nation was selected as their king and leader.

No man succeeds alone. The mighty Saul may have stood head and shoulders above the rest of the people in physical stature, but he needed more than that to bear big in the international scene of his day. His efficiency in gathering the people together as a united nation and developing them into a mighty force for God was due in great measure to that host of men whom he gathered around him. After his coronation as king, it is said that Saul went home, but he was not allowed to go alone. "There went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched." The secret of Saul's power was the fact that he was followed and supported by God-touched men.

I. The Company Who Went Home With Saul.

1. It was a band of men.

It was not a mob bent on mischief or destruction. Neither was it a crowd without wisdom, purpose or plan, but it was a band. The term "band" implies unity, organization, and solidarity. The emphasis was not laid upon the number but upon the compactness and unity of the group. They were united in purpose, plan, heart, and every element that goes to make up a great and successful movement. They were bound together by the unbreakable ties of brotherhood. They had joined their hearts, and hands, and lives, and strength together to aid and support the new king. They were as a solid wall of strength about him. How could he fail with such support?

2. It was a band of men whose hearts God had touched.

God had not touched their hands only, and made them into skilled warriors; nor had He merely touched their pocketbooks and made them generous in their material support of the government or work the young king initiated, but He had touched their hearts. It is the hearts of men that God is most concerned about. He did not touch their heads to make them wise and smart; He did not touch their hands to make them strong, skilfull or efficient; He did not touch their pocketbooks to make them generous; but He did touch their hearts. The heart is the seat and center of life. It includes one's love, confidence, spirit, fellowship and cooperation. In fact, when God has the heart of a man He has the whole man. When he deals with life He begins with the heart. By purifying the heart He corrects the tongue, the hand, the mind, the speech, and the behavior of a man. When He says, "Son, give Me thine heart," it is but another way of saying, Son, give Me your whole self, with the reservation of one faculty, or one secret of the life. When a man is right at heart, he will have the spirit of loyalty and faithfulness. He may not be so skilled, but he will be more reliable. If a man's heart is directed by the Spirit of God, he will not go astray in his thoughts, words, or deeds.

The touch of God's Spirit on the hearts of men is: ---

(1) An awakening touch.

It awakens toward God, and then towards ourselves. Moses saw the glory of God, and then his own feebleness. Isaiah saw God, high and lifted up, and cried, "Woe is me: for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." To the heart that is touched by the Spirit of God there comes the realization of the goddness and greatness of God an a realization of the woeful incompleteness and imperfection of life without God. The touch of God's finger upon our hearts awakens us to an understanding of something of God's wonderful goodness towards us, and fills life with a new glory and meaning. It brings light, joy, hope, and freedom for our hitherto thwarted spirits.

(2) An elevating touch.

It not only awakens us to see and know, but it lifts us to achieve and do; it lifts us out of sin, and lifts us to service, The Psalmist said, "He brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay; And he set my feet upon a rock, And established my goings."

"In loving kindness Jesus came,
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame,
Thro' grace He lifted me.

From sinking sand he lifted me,
With tender hand He lifted me,
From shades of night to planes of light,
O praise His name, He lifted me!"

No great service was ever rendered by any with an untouched heart. When God touches our hearts, it is as natural for us to want to render some service for His sake as it is for the flowers to bloom in the spring. The poor widow's heart was touched, and she gave her two mites. Mary of Bethany's heart was touched, and she unsealed her alabaster box and anointed the Master's head. Paul was overwhelmed by the light of Jesus and immediately said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And so by personal dedication of time and talents, by the surrender of ourselves, we will seek to do what we can for our Lord when He touches our hearts.

(3) A strengthening touch.

When God sends us out into the world to fulfil His purpose and to serve Him, He does not leave us to go alone in our own strength and without His help. He goes with us, as he did Abraham of old, to bless us and to make us a blessing, and assures us that He will never leave us nor forsake us. "I will uphold thee with the right hand of My power."

3. It was a band of men who went with Saul.

They did not stay at home and brag about what a fine king they had. They did not pass a resolution endorsing him as a great leader. On the contrary, they forsook their own business, their own homes, their

own comforts, and went with him to help him in his work, which was also dear to their own hearts. They did not go with him because it was popular to do so, for it was not popular. They went because of their love for the cause of life and liberty for themselves and their loved ones. They went with the king as workers. They went in order to make his burdens lighter. He needed somebody to get under the load with him and to help him to perform his task. Likewise, every pastor needs men and women who have been saved and who have true hearts, clean minds, consecrated wealth, and willing services. With such a band to help, to encourage, and to support any good pastor can succeed in the Lord's work.

Saul's men were characterized by a fanatical faithfulness. They went with him wherever he went. They stood for his cause and died in his battles. They believed that God had called him to lead them and that they had been called to follow. They remind us of the Roman sentinel who was found in the ruins of Pompeii, still at his post in the midst of terrible destruction. Such faithfulness and spiritual discernment do not come to men surveying the condition of their time unless they have unusual perspective.

When men are touched by God it is for time and eternity. As physical beings we are creatures of time. The first revelation of God to us when He touches our lives in a significant way is to make us aware of the elements of the time in which we live on this earth. The conditions of Israel were precarious, but never did they need a strong hand so much, as strong "band of men" to assist the new king. In their understanding of the conditions of the time, these men whom God touched for the hour had unusual spiritual discernment. They knew that God was with them and would give them wisdom and strength. God-touched men in every age have been men of deep spiritual insight.

This band of God-touched men followed Saul immediately. Realizing the brevity of the time, they did not go back to their homes, or have farewell parties, or discuss the issue with others, or get their business affairs in order. They had been touched by God and the urgency of the hour demanded that they leave immediately.

These men, whose hearts God had touched, were committed to their new king and all that he stood for in the destiny of Israel. They believed in his cause and his qualifications and were willing to give their lives for him and the kingdom. Their commitment was beyond that of the intellect or the physical. They were not following their new king for economic benefits, or for social acceptance, or for romantic thrills, but because their hearts had been touched by and moved by the Spirit of God. Every one of the men who followed Saul had to stand before God and give account of the stewardship of his life.

II. The Company Who Refused To Go With Saul.

It is said that "the children of Belial" would not have anything to do with him. That term is descriptive of their character. It means they were a bunch of objectors. They were the critics. They were the kickers. These fellows are found everywhere, in every organization and in every section. They speak every language, and are engaged in all trades and professions. They have kinsfolk living now. I found some of their grandchildren in every place I have been. When Christ was on earth He said,

"The poor ye have with you always," and He might have added, "And the children of Belial you will have with you always."

What was the attitude of these faultfinders toward Saul? They were true to their name and their history, they stayed at home and criticised while others went to do the tasks of life. They were badly needed, but they refused to help. They knew exactly what should be done, but God never consulted them about the kind of man to select for his business, so they just remained at home and objected, criticised, and found fault. I hope Saul didn't feel badly about their attitude, they had treated every leader before him the same way, and they have criticised every one since his day. There was no need for him to try to enlist them, the more he would plead with them, the louder they would object. There was no need to try to answer their objections. He might as well have tried to reason with the wind. Saul showed his wisdom in letting them alone, and in going on without them. He could not afford to wait for them to cooperate, that was a vain hope. The sons of Belial were born in the objective case, kickative mood, and plural number. It was far better to have them at home criticising him than in his army disturbing him. These sons of Belial are not builders, they are destroyers. They are always ready to tear down something, but never ready to build anything. They are experts in objections, but they know nothing about encouraging and helping. Every leader who ever risked vital matters in their hands found himself embarrassed and disappointed. They are not a dependable people. They make lots of noise, but they render very little service.

When Nehemiah rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem some of these fellows came and tried to tell him how to do it, and because he would not listen to them they turned loose their volley of criticism, and when he was unaffected by that, they invited him to a conference with them, but he told them that they had not part in his work, and he cared nothing about their work. The children of Belial today want to be leaders, but they can't get others to follow them. They are full of talk, but there is very little value to it. They object to the way the money of the church is spent and used, yet they never give any of it.

Saul's attitude was very commendable. It was said of him that, "He held his peace." The marginal reading says, "He stood like a deaf post." He acted just as if he did not hear them. He refused to be drawn into a controversy. Oh that Christians today might be as wise in meeting criticism as was Saul! Perhaps Saul's first impulse was to answer his critics, but his nobler self quieted him into silence.

Because of his silence Saul led Israel's army to victory while his critics dropped out of sight. It is often so helpful to remember the old proverb, "Silence is golden."