

## WANTING THE IMPOSSIBLE

### II Samuel 23:14-17

Few, if any, of the Old Testament characters attract us as does David, the shepherd-king. From the days of our early childhood we have revelled in his exploits as the slayer of Goliath, as the friend of Jonathan and as the king of Israel. Tucked away in the seldom read book of II Samuel is a striking incident from the life of this most lovable character. There we have the record of the last words of King David in which he reminisces about God's past dealing with him in mercy and grace. He recalls the many instances of divine providence and deliverance and records one experience which seems to stand out from all the rest. This interesting and intriguing story is taken from the darkest period of his life.

Years before David had been chosen and anointed as the king of the great nation of Israel, but here we find him in exile, defeated and downcast, hiding in fear in the cave of Adullam. He was a king without a crown, a ruler without a kingdom, a potentate without a throne. His native town of Bethlehem was in the hands of Israel's traditional enemies, the Philistines.

We may infer that the cave in which David was hiding from Saul was not a great distance from Bethlehem. Perhaps almost within sight were the slopes where David as a shepherd lad had watched his father's sheep. Not far from the cave he had fought the famous battle with Goliath which had marked him as the future king of Israel. One naturally sympathizes with David, so honored of God and so hated by Saul, in the extremely trying circumstances in which he was placed.

In that dark and dismal cave, which was a place of disappointment, danger and judgment, David had ample time for sober reflection. A strange feeling of homesickness overtook him. He had an all-consuming longing for his boyhood days. He remembered those carefree days when he shepherded the flocks. Tired and with his lips parched with thirst, David remembered the old well by the gate at Bethlehem, where he had slaked his thirst hundreds of times in the happy days of his youth. He recalled how that at the close of day, weary, dusty and thirsty he had lowered the old oaken bucket into the depths of the well and brought it up dripping and overflowing with fresh, cold water from the sparkling depths, and then lifted the water to his lips and drank long.

Many of us know how strong is the desire for the scenes of our youth, and frequently for the water of some favorite spring or well. In the great struggles and experiences of our lives it is natural for our thoughts to go back to the scenes and comforts and anchorages of our childhood. David remembered the old well at the gate. No other water tasted like that. So every man remembers something precious in that early time to which, when he is tired, or weary with the struggle of life, he turns in his thoughts. Don't try to forget the old well out of which you drew your childhood's blessings. It is not good for you to forget it. If you will cherish it in your hearts, it will keep heaven nearer to you and hell farther away.

There is no greater heritage than the memory of a Christian home and well-spent youthful years. Oh, that all of our lives might be worthy of the teaching of the Christian home and answer the prayers of lips that have long since turned to silent dust. The time will come when we shall meet face to face the father and mother who toiled and prayed for our temporal and eternal welfare. Shall we meet them with honored memories of the old home? Or, as with David, shall there be the haunting memories of sinful years?

The memories of a Christian home have been the stay and comfort of many a dark and lonely hour. The light of long ago may cheer the present and brighten the far-off years. Even in death we are loath to break the tie that binds to the old home. The boy leaves the old home for the big city to strive with the scrambling multitude for riches and power. The busy years pass by with scarcely a visit to the home of his childhood. He becomes rich and lives in a mansion, but by and by pays the debt that bank balances can never discharge -- he dies. The paper announces that the last rites will be conducted at the residence or the funeral home, and the remains will be buried in the cemetery near his old home. The cradle and the grave are joined in the last sleep.

As a man grows older his thoughts turn more and more toward the place where his loved ones dwell. Even if they have gone to be with the Lord, he cherishes recollections of the place where they used to dwell.

David was not far from the place where he first saw the light of day. Compassed by many sins and sorrows, it was but natural that the scenes of his childhood should pass in solemn review. Memory may sleep long, but at unexpected times and places it will wake to bless or to curse. Happy is he whose childhood has been spent so that it may soothe and sustain him in after years. Truly, the man is to be pitied whose past comes as a ghost to haunt and hamper the present. Though many years separated the shepherd-king from the scenes of his childhood, yet "fond recollection brings them to view."

During his childhood and youth David had partaken often of the water from the well at Bethlehem, but, due to the trying circumstances in which he was placed, its value seemed greatly increased. However refreshing the water of the well at Bethlehem, there were many other wells just as pure and healthful.

Deep in his soul David actually longed for the innocency that was his as a shepherd lad. Many and grievous had been his sins since his boyhood days. He had wandered far in forbidden fields, and on his soul sin had left many a scar. In striking and tragic contrast, his youth and manhood came before him. There was a gulf, deep and wide, between the David of Bethlehem and the David of Jerusalem. It was homesickness of soul from which he suffered. His youthful days, however blessed, would never return again. Wearied with the weight of the responsibility he carried, David was lost in dreams of bygone days. I am sure that the longing which swept over him was more than one of mere physical thirst. This sudden wave of memories of his boyhood days, its scenes and its faces, stood in such marked contrast to the life he was living. At that moment David would have given anything to have been a boy in Bethlehem again. Like many of us, David was a man with memories he would have given anything to have forgotten. His past held moments he would have given anything to have undone. He wished and longed for the chance to live his days over again and avoid the mistakes he had made. He coveted the fair promises of his youth, and a life without the strain of sin upon it. Doubtless he thought of how carefree his Bethlehem days had been, and how light the burdens were which he had carried there. He was no king then. His tasks were simpler and his needs were met by his father, Jesse, whereas now the burdens were heavy. But David was simply wanting the impossible. There are no back moves. It is never possible to turn back the hands of the clock and recapture the years that have been lost. So, the chief encouragement is that God can so use the years that remain that the quality of living achieved will more than compensate for the quality that has been lost. After all, it does not matter so much how long you live; the vital matter is how you live.

David remembered the time when that good well at Bethlehem was in the possession of his ancestors. His father and mother drank therefrom. He remembered how the water tasted when he was a boy, and came to the well from play. We never forget the fountain from which we drank in youth. Alas for the man who has no early memories!

David had known many wells of water, but he wanted to drink from that particular one. He did not think that any of the others could slake his thirst like that one. As David's parched tongue moved through his hot lips he said, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" He was merely expressing a desire. But there were attentive ears that hearkened to his words. Three brave staff officers did not misunderstand David. As soon as they heard his expressed desire, they resolved, "He shall have it." Without a moment's hesitation they sprang to their feet, girded on their armor and went forth to satisfy the craving thirst and burning desire of their dethroned king. These strong, valorous and daring men, who loved David with all their hearts, determined to accomplish what seemed to be impossible and bring to him water from the old well. That this task was perilous and might cost them their lives did not matter with them.

When David expressed a desire for a drink of water from the old well, he afforded three of his followers an opportunity to show their loyalty. As soon as they heard him speak about water they went to get it, without waiting for a command from him. They did not tarry to consider the wisdom or the folly of what they were about to do. Loyalty doesn't pause to count the cost. Without calculating the cost, these lieutenants acted from a sense of duty, an impulse of unselfish devotion and a spirit of chivalry which shrinks from no sacrifice in order to render a service for the object of its devotion. They exhibited a strong attachment to their leader, an intense love for his person, a deep sympathy with his need and an undying desire to do the things that would please him. It was enough for them that their beloved leader had expressed a desire for water from the well of Bethlehem. So absorbed were they in seeking to please David that fear of the enemy lacked any place in their hearts.

Those three men spontaneously responded to the known wish of their leader. Not counting their lives dear unto themselves, they had -- whether by use of the sword or by strategy we are not told, but most likely the former -- made their way to the well at Bethlehem, drawn water and brought it to David.

Stunned and amazed by the devotion of the men who brought him a cruse of water at the peril of their lives, David accepted their costly gift. What did he do with it? He refused to use it for himself. He might have used it to quench his thirst, but he didn't. Had David been a man without a heart, he might have rebuked them for imperiling their lives and jeopardizing the cause. He might have told them that he needed their living powers and not their dead bodies.

As David looked at the water his heart was touched by the devotion of his men. Hear his words as he asks, "Is not this the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?" One can hear him rebuking himself for entertaining and expressing a natural though foolish desire. One can visualize him expressing his sorrow for the wish which might have cost the lives of these brave men. With grace and tact David acknowledged the priceless gift.

He was so touched by their love and moved by their devotion that he refused to drink the water. He deemed that water too costly a sacrifice for any but God Himself. Because it had been procured at the hazard of the lives of these men, David considered the water peculiarly sacred. He said, "This water is gotten at too great a cost. I will pour it out as a sacrifice unto God."

A very small man would have taken the water as a matter of course. An average man would have been deeply touched by and grateful to these men for gratifying his wish. But David was neither a little man nor an average one. To him it was not enough merely to thank the men. He decided to thank God for having bestowed upon him such gifts as to make it possible for him to win the love and devotion of such gallant men. Even though he was thirsty, and the water was tempting beyond description, he poured it out on the ground as a libation before the Lord. How those men must have admired and loved him all the more! A deed like that showed that he was worthy of their devotion.

"Take my life, and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my love: my Lord, I pour  
At Thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for Thee!"