

WHERE HEROES DRINK

"Is not this the blood of men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" II Samuel 23:17.

There is, you will agree, a fine flavor of the heroic about these earnest words. Even without knowledge of the circumstances, one might easily imagine that they belong to a story of splendid daring and noble purpose. And so they do. The story is one of the most impressive in the career of King David. It is told in connection with David's coronation as successor to Saul, king of Israel.

Only yesterday the young king, crowned and acclaimed by a consolidated Israel, stood at Hebron with great throngs applauding him and a host of warriors swearing allegiance to him. Today, with none to defend him but a small bodyguard, he stands virtually a prisoner in a huge cave, forced to this humiliating retreat by an attack of the Philistines so carefully planned and so cleverly executed that he has been cut off from the command and protection of his temporarily disbanded troops. From this hiding place in the wilderness of Judea, this cave of Adullam as it was called, the beleaguered king looks across some twenty-five miles to the Judean highlands where he sees his beloved Bethlehem, now in the hands of his foes. It is a hot, summer evening. He is weary and thirsty and homesick. He remembers the well at the city gate where so often, from its cool depths, he has quenched his thirst. And musing thus, his thoughts become vocal: "Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!"

Now comes the heroism that gives pulse and meaning to the language of the text. The king's wish is caught by eager ears.

One of the king's braves spoke to another saying, "Did you hear that?"

"Yes! The king thirsts. He is weary. He has done much for us. He must have his wish. I for one am ready to see to that."

"And I!"

"Yes, and I!" It is another speaking, and he proposes that the three shall make this adventure. It is agreed—a compact in the keeping of which they seem to be walking straight into the jaws of death.

The curtain drops. The record holds no details of how that tremendously hazardous journey was accomplished. We only know that it was.

And now the curtain rises again. Here they are, dusty, sweaty, battered braves, fatigued to exhaustion, kneeling at the feet of their chieftain, to present to him the goatskin bottle in which they have brought, at the risk of their lives, a draught of that longed-for water from yonder well at Bethlehem's gate.

"O King, we have brought thee the water for which thou didst thirst. Drink! And as thou drinkest, remember that we are men whose devotion stops at naught this side of death."

The king's voice is choked with emotion. His answer is addressed not alone to these men of valor, who kneel glorious in their grime and splendid with their scars, but to the God of heaven: "And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" And according to the further record, He would not drink it but poured it out unto the Lord, a symbol of the devotion, courage and sacrifice that it presented.

Now it is the basic proposition of the message of these moments that this vivid Old Testament story of David's "three mighty men" presents to us a magnificent illustration

of the divine law of love, and of the heroism which it prompts, particularly as that law operates in the lives of those who have in truth yielded themselves to its mastery, who have given themselves to God "spirit and soul and body." What I should like to have us see, by a revelation which only the Spirit of God can give, is that if we will only risk our all with Christ, and for Christ, as these warriors did for David, we shall find stretching welcomingly before us the open road to life's higher heroisms. There is a gallantry of grace that is not of this world, a valor, a nobility, a daring, an adventuresomeness, in which the prizes are not material but spiritual and back of which is the pulsing urge not of selfishness but of love. Paul and Barnabas, for example, were mighty men in the ranks of Christ Jesus. Of them it was said by the early church that they were men that "hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." That tribute instantly recalls the language of the text, "Is not this the blood of men that went in jeopardy of their lives?"

What kind of love is it that produces such heroism as this?

I. It Is A Responsive Love.

That is to say, it is a love that has been created in response to a higher and original love. The Word of God is very plain on this point. Let me give two passages that lie closely related in the first Epistle of John, chapter four. In the tenth verse we read: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And in the nineteenth verse, it is declared that "We love him, because he first loved us." This statement, which contains unsuspected depths of meaning, gives us, according to the judgment of one of the great Christians of the ages, the essence of true religion. When John and Charles Wesley journeyed sixty weary miles that they might counsel with William Law, that honest, earnest preacher, having listened patiently to the unfolding of their spiritual problems, looked at them straightly and issued this frank but sympathetic rebuke: "You are groping after a purely philosophical religion. There can be no such thing. Religion is the plainest and simplest thing in the world. It is just: "WE LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US."

The primary fact in Christian loving and living is not our love to Christ, for we are without that in any proper sense until we are born of His Spirit; the primary fact is His love toward us. That love, sealed and eternally symbolized by the Cross of His sacrificial passion and atoning death, beats upon us today, not forcibly like a burglar, but gently, appealingly, like the sunlight. If we will but let it in, and give it place, it will be infinitely more creative and life-giving than sunlight. His life within us will give birth to a new life for us, for life received means life reproduced, and love received means love reciprocated. John 3:16 is a classic statement of the primary fact of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. But have we noticed that in I John 3:16 we are given not only this primary fact but also the resulting fact of our love to Him, the latter created and sustained by the former. Here it is: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." It is this that we mean when we say that the love that gives its blood, that is willing to jeopardize life itself, the love that walks the royal road to spiritual daring and moral heroism is a responsive love.

II. It Is An Exclusive Love.

In our relation to God there is love and there is "perfect love," and "Perfect love," says the Apostle John, "casteth out fear." It excludes, and by excluding unifies. Fear disorganizes; love harmonizes. Fear paralyzes; love energizes. Fear weakens; love strengthens.

It should, of course, be borne in mind that the fear of which we are speaking is

primarily moral. There are instinctive fears that function for our physical well-being and self-preservation. But there is another class of fears. Fear of the consequences if we stand by our highest convictions, fear of the future if we give our all into the hands of God, fear of criticism or persecution for Christ's sake, fear of the coming judgment in the great day of God Almighty, fear of eternity-- these are the carnal, enslaving, weakening moral fears from which it is our high privilege as Christians to be gloriously set free. It comes by a baptism of love, the purifying, enkindling, impassioning love of God "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

How did it come that David's three mighty men undertook so perilous and exhausting a task when they were not commanded to do it, when it would have been justifiable on a dozen counts not to do it? How did it come that they risked so much merely to gratify an expressed longing of their chief? They did what they did, not because they were under orders, not even because it was their duty to do it, but they did it because they were so whole-heartedly committed to their King in the loyalty of a love whose noble impulses are more determining and demanding than the crack of a tyrant's lash.

When near the close of his remarkable career, distinguished alike for personal piety and public ministry, General William Booth was asked by Evangelist J. Wilbur Chapman for the secret of his fruitful life, the founder of the Salvation Army replied: "I long ago determined that God should have all there is of William Booth." We can't be a Booth, you and I, but we can love God with a heart as pure, a devotion as perfect and a consecration as complete as he did.

III. It Is An Expensive Love.

"The blood of men," says the text. No mistaking those words! They are terms of cost. "In jeopardy of their lives" is the rugged phrase with which the text closes. It is a phrase that is eloquent of investment to the limit.

What a truth is here, in this costly gallantry of love, for our day! This day when we pipe loudly for our rights and forget the higher call of our responsibilities! This day of mechanized ease and sleep, smug comfort! Your blood! God wants it! Not on the battlefield of hate! Not in the sporting arena of brutal combat! Not in the market-place of ruthless competition! Not there, but on the altar for Christ! Will you give it? In Heaven's name, will you give it? So shall you live out a day of toil and triumph at the dusk of which your King shall say, "Is not this the blood of men that went in jeopardy of their lives?"