

**Readings:** 2 Samuel 23:13-17; Hebrews 12:1-3

**Theme:** Devotion to and of the King.

World War 1 is still fixed into the national consciousness - thanks largely to Remembrance Sunday. Most people, even those who might not consider themselves to be students of history, will know the general themes of that conflict: the huge loss of life and the gruelling trench warfare. There were many accounts of heroism - US Sergeant Alvin York was one of the most decorated American soldiers. In the Meuse Argonne Offensive (1918) he led an attack on a machine gun nest killing 28 enemy and capturing 132. He was awarded the Medal of Honour. We'll learn from some heroes in one of the passages we read and see they took their loyalty to incredible heights, to the level of devotion, but note it is set in a passage about David's mighty men – with wonderful names and amazing incidents and all devoted to David:

While it is Remembrance Sunday today, come with me to a harvest time some 3035 years ago (*that's a rough calculation - it may have been a few years earlier!*) It is in Israel and David is in the cave Adullam again – it's the situation we read of in 2 Samuel 23v13-17 and commentators can't agree whether it was before David was king, or it occurred after he was king. Maybe the Philistines invaded the land to sort out the new king – we can read of their invasion in 2 Sam 5:17 & 18. Personally, I feel this event was after he was king and so will use that title in my headings; you can always substitute 'anointed one' instead of king. Let's see 5 main areas from this incident:

### **1. The devotion to their king**

It is harvest time - a very hot and dry time in Israel. The land has been invaded by the Philistines probably to snuff out the new king and his kingdom; having a garrison, maybe headquarters at Bethlehem as well as camping in the valley of Rephaim. David is in the cave of Adullam as a stronghold – proved useful before and he knew it and the area. His troops have come down to him and these

three chief or mighty men had come down to him also – even though it was harvest time and they had much work to do or organise for their well being. Their devotion to their king caused them to leave all and serve him.

David was under pressure, even hot, thirsty and he remembers the water at Bethlehem - perhaps how on a hot day as a child or a young man he'd be there and drink that water and he longed for such. Some commentators say it expresses his desire for a victory over the Philistines so he could go back to his home town in peace and his kingdom be established.

David expressed his thoughts and musings - they were heard and known. These three got to talking '*David has said....*' They decide to take action – get him that water or die trying! David had not commanded anyone; had not asked for volunteers for what looked like a suicide mission, but these ones without command or compelling, embarked on this dangerous mission - the 3 men went 13 miles east to Bethlehem, through enemy territory, broke through their lines to Bethlehem and filled a skin-bottle full of water from the well and returned through all the same hazards!

What dangers and difficulties they must have faced, even encountered! Why? Was their king a tyrant who commanded them on this insane mission? Not at all! They did so because they were devoted to their king and wanted to please him no matter the cost. They were motivated by devotion and love for their king. The Lord blessed their devotion with success and safety. They arrived back at camp, went to David and said –something like '*King David, we heard you wanted some of the water from the well at Bethlehem, so we went and got it for you. Enjoy!*' and gave him the skin bottle of water!

## **2. The devotion of their king**

David must have looked at them with astonishment. Their devotion thrilled and moved him. This was not cold duty, he never expected this and he had not asked or commanded it of any of his men. Yet to his surprise, they had brought him water from Bethlehem!

It is great to have nice surprises – to be so delighted with something and then respond accordingly with an appropriate thank you. As delighted as David was with this surprise gift; with all around being surprised, amazed and even shocked at the bravery and devotion of these three, yet David then did something even more shocking and amazing - he poured the water out onto the ground! Imagine all around, including these 3 soldiers, watching it drain into the dry ground. What would we have felt like? Haven't we done things for people, put ourselves out, sometimes rearranged things and not even a thank you or an acknowledgement that it was appreciated or even noticed!

As all must have been staring with open mouths, as one or all these three must have been ready to explode at David's ungratefulness, but he explained what he had done or was doing. It was an act of devotion on his part. It was poured out before the Lord as an offering - possibly a thank or drink offering (*usually wine*), but here was something viewed as more refreshing than wine. He viewed this as the very lifeblood of these brave devoted men who risked their lives to please him, so he had to give it up in worship to the Lord. Even though he was nostalgic for water from his home town, he could not just drink it as if it was just any old water. This was precious, precious water – showing the love and devotion of his men – not just these three, but all with him. Perhaps taken as a token from God of the coming success against the Philistines – God helped these three against the odds. David and the Israelites would know their God's help in the battle - incidentally, they did know God's direct help and enabling in the battle (2 Sam 5:17-25). Maybe it was taken as a pledge of success that Bethlehem would again be David's once more.

David was not proud, high handed or arrogant at this thrilling token of their love and devotion, but is humble and treasured it as a gift from the Lord - so treasured and was offered to the Lord in worship. Speaking personally for Siân and myself, we are moved at the love and care we know from the people of God here and do not take it for granted, but thank God for you and your love, support and encouragements. So here in this list of David's mighty men is this specific record of the devotion of these men **to** their king and the devotion **of** their king to them. If we had the details, we might see more of this throughout the chapter - until the very last verse (v39) and sadly we note:

### **3. The deviation of their king**

The mention of Uriah the Hittite (v39) is like torrential downpour at a BBQ; or arguing family at a wedding. It is not wanted, is unpleasant and leaves a bitter taste in the passage. We read of Uriah in 2 Sam 11 - we probably know of the shocking story - David was king in Jerusalem, ruled over the kingdom. It is the spring season - when kings go out to battle. David's troops were fighting the Ammonites, attacking the city of Rabbah. David no longer felt he must lead his troops. His general Joab was a seasoned commander, well able to conquer Rabbah. David relaxes on the roof of his palace one evening, and sees a beautiful woman bathing in on an adjacent rooftop or in her garden.

David has Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite (*one of his 37 mighty men*) brought to him – wrong events happen! She becomes pregnant. David mounts operation cover-up - Uriah is called home from active service, in the hope it will be thought he is the father. This devoted soldier doesn't go home to his wife, because he is on duty. He supposes David must have a reason for summoning him and will probably send new orders to Joab. Battles were won through faithful messengers who were trusted for instant missions with secret

orders. David provides a royal dinner for Uriah; but still he does not go home. David sends Uriah back to Joab with a secret message and Uriah carries his own execution orders - as Joab arranges to have Uriah and others slaughtered by the battle plan. When David hears from Joab that Uriah is dead, Bathsheba mourns, then David marries her. Later Nathan the prophet confronts David with his sin. Psalms 32 and 51 express David's genuine repentance.

Can this be David, the king so sensitive to the devotion of his men? Could he order the murder of a soldier devoted to him to cover up his own adultery? Water from Bethlehem has now no place in David's thinking - only lust and murder, laced with horrifying hypocrisy! How could people be devoted to such a monster? He has deviated from the path he knew was right – Ps 32 and 51 tells us of the anguish of heart he knew. David is not worth following, being devoted to and serving - but then no man or woman, no human organisation or team is. Sooner or later they will let us down or fail us. No one or nothing on earth deserves our own unquestioning devotion because they not only let us down, but turn around and hurt us in so many ways.

Thankfully David's God was and is the God of mercy. David's devotion to his Lord was not misplaced and he knew forgiveness, restoration, but also consequences from his sin. For us there is One who is worthy of our total devotion - David's greater Son - the Anointed One, the Messiah or Christ, the One who is King of kings and the One who is King of most of us here.

#### **4. The devotion of our king**

Many in battles have given their lives in heroic deeds of self-sacrifice and are honoured. In the account we read, king David poured out water as an act of thankfulness and devotion to his men for what they had done for him. Yet our King had to pour out His lifeblood for **what we** had done **against Him**. Our wrong thoughts, words and

actions are done against the very King of Heaven, against God Himself and done in His very presence – He is everywhere and sees and knows all things. The Bible calls them most simply ‘sins’ – pictured as an arrow falling short of its target; or a turning out of the right way or a deviation from the true and right.

No one is perfect – we own that so easily, yet fail to realise what this means in terms of us and God. God is perfect. He, Himself is the standard by which He measures perfection and any falling short, or turning out of the right way or deviation from it deserves punishment from Him. He cannot tolerate such, but even though we deserve to be wiped off the face of the earth the moment we sin, He spares us, keeps us alive and keeps on being good and kind to us.

Our King didn’t just go on a 13-mile hike into enemy territory to get us some water. He left all the beauty, worship and bliss of heaven, came down to earth, hid away all His glory and was confined to a real human body and allowed Himself close contact with pain, suffering, hunger, frailty, death, sinners and their sin. He voluntarily chose to do all this and die in our place. That is what we mean when we say His lifeblood was shed for us – He took the punishment our sins deserved upon Himself on the cross on Calvary. Paul wrote of this in a **personal sense**, but is true for all who trust Him as their Saviour Gal 2:20 *‘the Son of God, who loved **me** and gave himself for **me**.’*

Realise the Son of God, the King of heaven was so devoted to you and me that He did this and did it willingly. Yes, it cost Him and hurt Him, but we read in Heb 12:2 *‘who for **the joy** set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame,’* Incredible that He loved us so much, that all the horrors and sufferings of the cross were endured with joy - to have us as His child.

Do we understand He did this for us? It has to be seen as personal as Paul wrote of in Gal 2:20 *'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'* If not, then question why Jesus came and died and who He died for. *'There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only could unlock the gate of heaven, and let us in.'*

If we are Christians, if He is our King because He is our Saviour, then do you and I *'stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how He could love me a sinner condemned unclean.'*? That He should love us and give Himself for us should cause to be astonished! Now we see our final area:

### **5. The devotion to our king**

We have considered in John 14, the basis of our living for Christ is that the love of Christ compels, constrains us. Why do we live as we do as Christians? Why try and be moral, be good and do good? It is not fear – as if God will zap us if we step out of line. It is not cold duty – I have to... It is not pride – I will live and do so because I am better than... We are to live our lives as Christians **out of love and devotion** for our God and Saviour.

He has done so much for us and we are to appreciate it, to be amazed by it, with hearts full of love for Him. What He has commanded is to be our delight and pleasure, we are to be totally devoted in love to Him and want do what He wants and if possible, we would surprise Him with **our** acts of devotion!

Yes, there are times when something of that strikes home and anything and everything He'd want us to do, we would do it. Sadly, there are times when King Jesus gets deposed in my life and king Gareth reigns - I want what I want and I'm devoted to myself, my pleasures and ways. I become my own idol and depose my God and Saviour. Such can be done by anyone of us – for wrong or good things. Some do it with their reputations or achievements. People

who are religious and good, may put those in place of Jesus and worship them and are devoted to them. Anything that displaces King Jesus off the throne of our lives, love and devotion are misplaced, are an idol and breaks the first commandment not to have any other god before Him.

In our lives as Christians, there should be a spontaneous delight of doing all He desires of us – we bring water from our own Bethlehem’s and surprise Him! The love of Christ should constrain and compel us to live for Him – not out of fear, but devotion and whatever He asks of us – where to go, live, work, serve, go through, endure, suffer, lose or gain as He desires; we would willingly do so - as those did who went for the water in Bethlehem for David - with love and devotion to serve our King.

They could have lost their lives, yet we will be no loser in serving our King with devotion. We can do things in the Christian life for the wrong motives and wrong purposes, but to be devoted in love to our King will cause us to live and desire aright in all we do. We’ll not get it right all the time, but thankfully He takes the mucky waters of our life, love, devotion and service and transforms them by His grace and power into that which is pleasing to Him and acceptable to the great God of Heaven.

I hope and pray these thoughts will cause us to desire to serve the Lord out of true love and devotion and realise the wonder and privilege of that and more importantly the wonder of **the devotion of our King to us** and so it will generate thankful love and devotion to Him - for His praise and glory.