

“THE GOSPEL AWAKENING.”

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Prayer Meeting Talks and Bible Readings,

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WITH THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE

CHRISTIAN CONVENTIONS OF MINISTERS AND LAYMEN.

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ALSO THE LIVES OF

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KING SAUL.

“Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel.” 1st SAMUEL 8:19.

I find in this 19th verse of the 8th chapter of 1st Samuel: “Nevertheless, the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel”—or you might say the voice of God, for God is speaking through Samuel —“and they said, We will have a king over us.” I want to call your attention to this disobedience; and the consequence. For between four hundred and five hundred years God had been their King; and when they obeyed his voice and did what he told them to do, none of the nations were able to stand before them. They had never been degraded while they were walking in God’s sight and obeying his voice; but now they got tired of God. They wanted to cast off his yoke. They wanted a king, like the nations around them had, who might lead their armies, and make them as imposing and splendid as the nations around them were. When God brought them into that land, he told them they should not have chariots of iron, and should not be trusting in horsemen, and in great armies; but he would be their defense; he would be their shield; he would protect them, if they would only look to him and trust him. But no. They have their eyes on the nations around them; and they come to the old prophet Samuel, who has grown very old and is about to retire from office; and they said, “We want a king.” And Samuel was very much displeased, heart-broken; and he took his trouble to the Lord, as we all of us ought always to do; and the Lord says, “Well now, Samuel, it is not you that they have rejected, but me. Don’t take it so to heart, but protest solemnly against it. Tell them the consequences; and then, if they insist upon it, I will give them a king.” He said this, very often, as mothers deal with their children. They let them have something, that they know will bring them into sorrow, just to show them how much better it would have been for them if they had obeyed without a murmur; but then, there are very few of us that can learn by other men’s experiences, and we want to try our own way; and God permits us, just to show how much better it is to take God’s way than our own.

Now, the Lord told Samuel he would send a man there whom he should anoint king; and it seems that a man in the tribe of Benjamin, by the name of Kish, lost his asses, and he sent one of his sons to hunt them up. Little did he know as he left home where he was going to. He hunted for the asses two or three days, but was unsuccessful; and as he came near Ramah his servant suggested that they should go up and see the seer or prophet, and he could tell them where to go. Now, the Lord had told Samuel, the day before Saul came, this was to be the man whom he should anoint to be captain over Israel. What was Saul’s surprise when the seer met him on the way, took him into his house, made him stay over night, and then took him up on the roof of his

house and told him what the Lord was going to do with him. Saul seems to have been full of humility, for he told Samuel that he belonged to the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and did not think that he was worthy; but God chose him, and the next morning when he left the town the prophet went with him to the outskirts of the town, and said to him, "Let your servant go on before you;" and after he had passed on and gone out of sight, Samuel anointed Saul king, and then told him what would take place on his way home, and where he would find his animals. And it all came to pass as he had prophesied. Saul went home and went about his work as usual, taking care of his father's sheep. But one day a messenger came into the town in great haste, bringing the startling tidings that the enemy had besieged a city, and the people had offered to surrender and become servants to the enemy, if they would only just spare their lives; and the commander of the besieging army said he would grant the request on condition that he might tear out their right eyes, and the elders of Jabesh said, "Give us seven days and we will decide." If the inhabitants of the city could not get help within seven days, they would have to have their right eyes dug out. And the people lifted up their voices and wept. And Saul came in from the field, and when they told him the tidings, the Spirit of God came upon him, and he was greatly angered. And he took a yoke of oxen and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, "Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen;" and the fear of the Lord came upon the people, and inside of three days Saul had three hundred and thirty thousand people; and in the night, about daylight, he moved upon the enemy, and fought them until midday with such vigor, that there were no two of them left together; and thus he routed the whole army and saved the city, and won his way to the hearts of the people.

You know there is nothing like success. He had been successful, and had already been proclaimed at Mizpeh, king; for Samuel had brought the people up to Mizpeh, and they had cast lots, and it had fallen upon the tribe of Benjamin and upon the house of Kish. And now he had had a successful battle, and everything looked very bright and hopeful for him and his people. Why, when they raised the cry at Mizpeh, "God save the king!" it looked as if everything was going to be in their favor. Saul was a head and shoulders above all men in Mizpeh; and they said: "We have got a fine-looking king. No nation around us has got a man like him." He was a grand man to look at. Men like to walk by sight, instead of by faith. They had got just the man, and they felt he was the one to meet the giants coming out against them; and they shouted for him, and the cry has been heard ever since in the earth, "God save the king." That was the first time that cry was ever heard, when they proclaimed Saul as king.

But now the trial comes. The next thing we hear is that the enemies are gathering again. After the defeat at Jabesh-Gilead, they called together their armies and nations. There were thirty thousand chariots of iron and six thousand horsemen, and the rank and file were like the sands of the sea-shore—a great multitude. And the heart of Saul began to sink within him, and he waited at Gilgal for Samuel to come, and the army began to be discontented; and instead of looking to God and trusting him—for he wanted them to put their trust in him—Saul gets a little discouraged and breaks the law of God. The law of God was that no man should offer sacrifices but those that were appointed. Saul had no right to do it, but he took that position himself, and began to offer sacrifices; and his friend Samuel, than whom no man ever had a purer, truer friend, said to him: “You have done very foolishly. Now your kingdom is departed from you, and it shall not be maintained. You have disobeyed the voice of God.” The old saying is, “Like priest, like people.” The people would not obey the voice of God. Samuel deals faithfully with him, and tells him the consequences. Saul cries, “My army is leaving me and is becoming demoralized.” And Samuel says, “You ought to obey God and let the consequences be what they will.”

And now it came to pass that Jonathan, Saul’s son, said to his armor-bearer: “Come, and let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us, for he can save by many or by few.” How the faith of Jonathan shines out here! He feels that, with the help of the Lord, he can save the whole army. Would to God we had a few Jonathans right here in New York! “Now,” says he, “we will just go up there; and if they ask us to come right into camp, we will take it as a sign that God is with us. And if they say, ‘Stand where you are,’ we will know the Lord is not with us.” And when they had climbed up the steep rocks, the Philistines saw them and shouted, “Behold the Hebrews come out of their holes where they had hid themselves.” And they said to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, “Come over to us.” And Jonathan said, “God is with us; he has given us the land.” And he and his armor-bearer went up and slew the people, and in that first slaughter were about twenty men within half an acre, and the people were frightened and trembled; and the watchmen of Saul beheld the multitude melting away like the snow upon a side hill, and Saul, who was afar off, began to inquire, “Who has gone out from us?” And they numbered the people, and found out that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were gone. Saul had given a rash order that no one should eat until he had destroyed his enemies; but Jonathan didn’t know anything of this. After the slaughter, when all the people had joined in the rout of the Philistines—there are a great many men who are willing when the battle goes against our enemies to join in pursuit of them, and then, after the work is done, say, “Didn’t we do good work?” but they hide themselves away in the caves and holes, and dare not meet the

enemy until some braver man has come to the front and done the work—after, I say, all the people had joined in the pursuit, they came to a wood, and there was honey upon the ground, but no one dared eat except Jonathan, who knew not of his father’s order. It is decreed that poor Jonathan must be slain. He has been disobedient and must die. Because Saul had disobeyed the Lord he did not die; but because Jonathan had disobeyed his father, he must die. But the army said, “We will not let him be put to death.” And they took the matter out of the king’s hands, and Jonathan was spared.

But the Lord gives Saul another chance, and sends him to destroy the Amalekites, and tells him through Samuel not to spare a single man, woman, child or beast. But Saul slew all of the Amalekites except the king and the best of the sheep and the oxen. And Samuel comes out and Saul says, “I have obeyed the Lord.” He had a guilty conscience, and was afraid Samuel would reprove him. “Ah!” says the old prophet, “what is the meaning of these cattle that I hear lowing, these sheep that I hear bleating? Did not God tell you to destroy them?” “Yes,” says the guilty Saul; “but I saved the best of the cattle to sacrifice to the Lord.” Is it sacrifices that the Lord wants, or obedience? That is the spirit of the present day. People say: “Oh, I know it is not just exactly right, still a man must be sharp to get along;” and if they get money somewhat dishonestly, and afterwards endow colleges and build churches with it, they think it is good enough. They think the Lord will accept it, if made dishonestly; that he will overlook it. Will he? See if he will. If we had not been disobedient, there would be no need of sacrifices.

Now Samuel says to Saul: “To obey is better than to sacrifice. What God wants is obedience, and you have disobeyed him again. Now, just listen, and I will tell you what God told me this night. God told me he has taken the kingdom from you, and will give it to your neighbor, who is better than you are.” And as Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the mantle of Samuel, and it rent; and Samuel said to him, “Your kingdom has been rent from you as you have rent my mantle.” And they separated and never met after that. A sad parting, for a truer friend than Samuel no man ever had. Samuel wept over him as a father over his son, for he loved Saul. But Saul tried to have Samuel stay and honor him before the people, like many of the present day, who care for the applause of the world rather than the approval of God. But Samuel went back to Ramah, and left him.

But now the enemy comes back again stronger than ever, thousands upon thousands, a great multitude, and the hour of battle comes on. There on that hill are the armies of the Philistines, and here on this are the thousands of Saul; and at last a giant warrior comes out from the camp of the Philistines and cries to Saul’s army: “Just select one man to come out and fight me; and if he will overcome me we will all be your servants.” And he defies them day after day; and there is not a man in all that camp that dare meet the giant of

Gath. They were all frightened, and the king trembled from head to foot. As he came out in the morning, I think I can see them looking so startled and saying: "Look! There he comes again." So he defies them again and again—"Show me a man that will dare to meet me." And so every morning, day after day, day after day, for forty days, he came out two or three times a day, and each army was afraid of the other, not daring to open fire. Just then up came a young stripling. (Some one has said he was the first delegate to the Christian Commission.) He had been sent up from the country round by his mother, to see how his brothers were getting on in the king's encampment. I suppose the mother made up some nice things for them to eat, some nice cakes, perhaps, and jelly. I can see him coming up; perhaps there was a servant along, and up they came on their asses. Just as they came into camp, out came the giant again, and defied them. The young man looks at him, and then asks: "What, what does that man say? Hark!" He hears the giant defy Israel, God's anointed, God's own people. His blood begins to tingle in his veins. He goes into camp and says to his brothers: "What does that mean? Why do not some of you go out to meet him?" "Why," they said, "you don't know much about fighting, or you would not talk of such a thing in that way." Said he, "I will go myself, then." "It's a nice thing for you to say you'll go. Why, one look at him will make you run faster than you ever ran in your life." They began to make sport of him, and mock him. He said, "If there is no one else to go, I will go." But they only mocked him. At last some one said to the king: "There is some one in camp who offers to go and meet the giant of Gath." And the king said, "Go bring him." And when the king saw David his heart sank within him at once. What could he do? He had not been used to using a sword. He did not know anything about it. The king said to him, "You are not able." He looked at David. He saw that he knew nothing of the use of weapons in battle. Said David: "I think I would like to meet him. A lion and a bear got into my father's fold one night, and I killed them both; and I believe that God will be able to deliver me from the giant, as he did from the lion and the bear." Some one has said, there were thousands of men in that camp who knew that God *could* use them; but David was the only one there who believed that God *would* use him. Said David, "Now I will go." So they took him and began to dress him for the fight. They began to put armor upon him, and a shield and a helmet. But in a few minutes it began to act upon him. He began to feel uncomfortable in it, and to twist himself and make wry faces, and at last he said, "I cannot fight in this armor." He was like a little boy in his grandfather's overcoat. It did not fit him at all. He said, "I have not proved it. I have proved the God of Israel. I have not proved this armor." It was like the way of the world. A great many are anxious to work in Saul's armor. If he had gone out in this armor and conquered, they would have said it was Saul's armor that did it. Then he said: "Let me take my sling. I am

used to that.” “What,” they exclaimed; “A sling to meet the giant of Gath! Why, he has a helmet, and a sword, and a shield, and an armor-bearer!” But David said, “Well, I will only take my sling.” I can imagine how they made all manner of sport of him. But they were driven to extremes, and must have some one; and so they let him go. Even his brothers must have thought he would surely be brought back dead.

So he went to the brook, and he picked up five smooth stones out of the brook. Oh, my friends, God uses the weak thing; God uses the little thing! You and I would have wanted some good big rocks to have slung at him; but David got a few little smooth stones, and went to meet his enemy. The giant came out full of indignation and wrath, saying, “Am I to take the consent of this man to meet me?” David said to him: “You come with a helmet, and a shield, and an armor-bearer. I come in the name of the God of Israel.” So if we come in the name of God will all giants fall. So he puts one hand behind him and raises the other right up and throws his sling, and the giant falls dead; and then he rushed right up to him and took his sword from him, and cut off his head, and with the sword and the giant’s head in his hand, went forward toward the king. Then Saul called to his cheering army, “Make haste, rush upon them!” And it was not long before the whole camp of the Philistines were falling before their enemy.

So God used the man who was willing to be used. He used the man that had faith to believe that God would use him. But soon Saul began to grow jealous of David. It might have been that the fires of envy were kindled in Saul’s soul by David’s success immediately; but first Saul wanted to show him off, that he had a man among his subjects who could accomplish what David could. So immediately after their success, they began to be happy and to sing; and at first they never thought about jealousy. But soon the fire began to burn in Saul’s pulses. He began to plan how he could put David to death, and get him out of the way. Oh, what a miserable enemy we all have in jealousy! How it does mar the work of salvation! It is one of the worst enemies of God and man. Well, three times God put Saul into the hands of David. Once when he was asleep in the cave, and David was left there in the cave: but he would not lift his hand against God’s anointed. But at last he drove him off into the wilderness, and finally he drove him out of his kingdom; and he went off into a foreign land. Samuel also died, and they buried him at Ramah. We are not told that Saul was there at his funeral. The enemy at last came again, as soon as they got strength after their defeat. The news came to Saul that the Philistines were marching upon his country. He brought out his own army again, and we see them there at Gilboa. Saul’s kingdom now is tottering. He is full of remorse and despair. God has left him; Samuel has died; David is gone. The noble Jonathan alone stands by him. At that last battle, he had three hundred thousand men at Gilboa. Only a few years before

he had three hundred men, who were enough then. Now, notwithstanding his three hundred thousand men, he is full of fear; and so are they. What are even three hundred thousand, full of fear and cowardice? The church has many who are full of fear and despondency, and they cannot work; God cannot use them.

Saul cannot keep the fight off any longer. God has left him. So, he says to the two men near him, "Go, take me to some medium, some witch—the witch of Endor." And they took him off down to Endor. How are the mighty fallen! One who had had Samuel and David for his counselors went to consult an old witch—an old medium! In the day when he took the advice of Samuel, he once had all these witches burned; but now he said, "Find me one." So he was led by some one away to Endor. He wanted Samuel brought before him. Yes, the time is coming when you who make light of the counsel of a loved friend, of a loved mother or a loved father—the time will come when you will cry: "Bring me my mother! Oh, that I could hear her counsel once more! "Would that I had taken her advice!" That was the cry of Saul, "Would to God I had never left Samuel, would to God I had obeyed!" So he said to that medium, "Bring me up Samuel." But Samuel was buried sixty miles away. Some persons think that at that time Samuel was brought before him; but I do not believe God would permit an old witch to bring a man like Samuel anywhere. A man came to me some time ago and said: "I want to know if you would not like to go to a place where I go, and see them materialize these spirits? If you go there you can see your father and shake hands with him." I said, No; that I would as soon put my hand in the fire. "In the last day shall come spirits, spirits from hell." I believe we are there today. I believe they would deceive the very elect, if they could. Thank God, we have the Holy Spirit for our guide and comforter. I never saw a man yet who believed in these things who was not an infidel, and who did not talk against the Bible. They come to see us, and want to know if we want our departed ones brought up. Let our friends rest with Jesus. Let us not think they are sleeping in the grave. God permits them to see something that I do not see. They will not be terrified and alarmed by being brought back here. God undoubtedly spoke to Saul there and told him of his doom—that he would not live twenty-four hours; that the next night he too would be in the arms of death. Then they tried to get him to eat. He had not eaten anything for many hours. After they had coaxed him for some time, he sat down upon the witch's bed and ate. Think of Saul, a friend of Samuel, taking his last supper in such a miserable place! At last the king arose and said, "We must go back." See him as he climbs the mountain side of Gilboa. His hour has almost come; only a few more hours, and he will be in another world. Oh, that he had cried to God that night to save his soul. But he does not say one word. He can, perhaps, as he goes on, see the enemy's fires burning on yon mountain side,

while he steals back to his army. At last the battle commences, and the enemy prevail. It is not long before the whole Israelitish army is routed. They are beaten. When Saul saw there was no hope of saving his crown and he must perish, fearing that his enemies would take him alive, and perhaps put him into some prison to die, he asked his armor-bearer to kill him; but the armor-bearer would not. He took his own sword and fell upon it, and died. Let us learn a lesson from Saul. Let us obey God. "To obey God is better than sacrifice." It is obedience that God wants. You may ask, "What may I do to obey God?" You are just to believe on his Son and be saved. Will you obey him today?