

Guest Preacher Rev. Donald A Macdonald

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Preacher: Rev. Donald A. Macdonald

[0 : 00] Let us turn again to the passage that we read, the second book of Samuel, chapter 23. And we may read again at verse 15.

And David said longingly, Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate.

When David spoke the words, Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate.

He was a fugitive hiding in the cave of Adela. The first book of Samuel, chapter 22, tells how he came to be in this cave.

You, David, departed from Gath and escaped to the cave of Adela. You may remember from your Bible reading how David played the role of someone who pretended to be insane while in Gath.

[1 : 32] Not that everyone was taken in by his actions. And however one might view David's behavior while in Gath, the Bible states that David was much afraid of Achish, the king of Gath.

The statement could be understood to imply that David's fear was the real cause of a strange, irrational behavior in Gath.

However, in my own mind, I'm not wholly convinced of that as the reason. Why? Well, I suspect that there is more than a possibility that David was not entrusting himself wholly with his whole heart to the Lord at that particular time.

He was rather trusting to his own understanding. And because he was, that, in my view, accounts for the peculiar decision he made in going to Gath in the first place.

Yet, despite David's failure, what comes across very powerfully and strongly is that God's mercy never fails.

[3 : 05] And that is surely cause for thanksgiving on the part of every person who is indebted to the mercy of the Most High.

It is surely seen in the way in which David's life was preserved and delivered while he was living in the very heart of enemy territory.

Perhaps you might recall how he himself describes his deliverance in Psalm 34. This, he describes himself, this poor man cried.

And the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. His deliverance, you might say, was the fuel that fed his praise.

And praise is often like that. It rises almost spontaneously out of deliverances that are executed by the Lord.

[4 : 10] I think it is very likely that other believers can also relate to this experience of merciful deliverance, giving rise to praise in their own lives.

It certainly appears to be implied in Psalm 34. Those who look to him, says the psalmist, are radiant.

They are no longer despondent. They have brightened up. And David in that psalm goes on to explain how his protection and deliverance was effected.

It was by enjoying the protection of the vigilant angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.

The angel of the Lord. I once read a description of the angel of the Lord and it stayed with me.

[5 : 20] Maybe you might agree. Maybe not. Yahweh with his working clothes on. And it gave me much food for thought.

Yahweh, the Lord with his working clothes on. He camps around them. And perhaps you can relate very well this evening to the deliverance and protection of the angel of the Lord.

When you too have behaved, perhaps, irrationally and trusting to your own understanding, rather than placing your trust in the Lord alone.

Chapter 22 of 1 Samuel also records for us what I think is a very touching and descriptive word picture of family love.

When his brothers and all his father's house heard it, that is that David was in the cave at Adela, they went down there to him.

[6 : 25] Surely evidence of the strength and love of the family bond that bound them to one another.

What was more natural than that they would go to see the youngest member of the family. No evidence of their being afraid of being identified with David or of ostracizing him on their part. Despite the fact that he was then a fugitive. Many more, the Bible tells us, also gathered to David in the cave.

Everyone who was in distress. Everyone who was in debt. Everyone who was bitter in soul. Gathered to him. And he became commander over them.

And there were with him about 400 men. Everyone who was in distress. Everyone who was in debt. Everyone who was bitter in soul.

[7 : 31] All describing great needs. Why did they gather to David? Well, the simple answer, I think, is because they needed him.

And the chapter from which we read this evening sets before us when this strong, nostalgic desire arose in the mind of David.

It was around harvest time. How do we know? Well, the chapter tells us. And three of the thirty chief men went down and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Adelaam.

When a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. David was then in the stronghold. And the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem.

About harvest time. Harvest time for them, much earlier in the year than we're used to, would be around May or June.

[8 : 43] That would be the hottest time of the year. The sun at its height. Is it possible that there was a shortage of water at the cave of Adelaam?

Was that the reason that David gave utterance to this yearning for a drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate?

There is no evidence to support the thought that there was any shortage of water at the cave of Adelaam. So we can rule that out.

As a factor in arousing this desire in the mind of David. The fact that a garrison of Philistines was stationed in Bethlehem could have been a cause of great concern to David.

It was not easy for him to move around his own country. As one who had been chosen by God and anointed by Samuel to be king.

[9 : 49] Perhaps a vessel containing water from the well at Bethlehem might act as a source of encouragement that he would not perish by the hand of Saul.

It could act as a source of God. It could act as a further token that the promise of God would be fulfilled. But it may just have been voiced out of a sense of nostalgic homesickness and the sheer weariness of a fugitive lifestyle.

And so I'd like to suggest three thoughts from our text this evening. First, the situation in Bethlehem. Second, a strong desire.

And third, the sequel to the matter. First, the situation in Bethlehem. Bethlehem, as you know, was David's hometown.

You may remember the genealogical line from which he was descended. There were notable figures among his ancestors.

[11 : 02] Boaz was his great-grandfather. And Ruth, his great-grandmother. They were the parents of Obed, who had a son by the name of Jesse, who was the father of David.

Godly ancestry, of course, does not necessarily mean that succeeding generations will be godly too.

Godliness does not run in our natural veins. However, we can say that David's roots run deep in this town.

Since there was a Philistine garrison in the town, that may have accounted for many thoughts arising in the mind of David.

A place where he himself imbibed the sincere milk of the word. And it now under the command of hostile Philistine forces.

[12 : 07] Bethlehem occupied by a garrison of Philistine forces. Those who were the enemies of the Israelite people. So, I want to ask a question at this stage.

Do similar situations from your own background give you food for thought? I don't mean by that that a hostile army has occupied places that are dear to you.

But think of it in this way. Homes that once were occupied by believers. Perhaps even frequented by yourself when these believers were alive.

But today these homes occupied by those who have no place for the gospel in their lives. The walls of these houses could they but speak.

Could testify to hearing the sound of praise to the Most High. And to the fervent pleading of the children of grace at the throne of grace.

[13 : 22] But today a silence of worship in homes that once echoed to vibrant praise and no believing witness in them.

Again, think of places that were erected for the worship of God. Where the glorious message of salvation was proclaimed.

Places where the Holy Spirit dealt savingly with sinners. But these buildings today closed down, sold, and used for other purposes.

Now, I would not want you to think of the buildings themselves as being the source of blessing. But that the Holy Spirit blessed the message of truth proclaimed in these buildings to the salvation of some.

And to the upbuilding of his church in the world. Places where the presence of the Lord was experienced in a very real way.

[14 : 32] And I'd like to suggest another thought. What about buildings that are still used, at least nominally, for worship. But another gospel being taught that is not the gospel.

That too is surely cause for deep sadness and mourning before the Lord. Remember what the Apostle Paul taught and wrote.

But if even we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you. Let him be accursed.

And he went on to write. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

And he gives the reason. For I did not receive it from any man. Nor was I taught it. But I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 36] That is very significant. Is that not the message that we would all love to continue hearing until the present hour?

But the Bible does not say that such thoughts arose in the mind of David. That is but speculation on my part.

But I do believe that he would not be happy in the knowledge that the Philistine forces had a garrison in Bethlehem. So that's a little about the situation in Bethlehem.

Secondly, a strong desire. Sometimes when something you would like is unobtainable, you desire it even more.

That's the kind of grasping nature that belongs to man. Given the situation that prevailed in Bethlehem, water from the well seemed most unlikely.

[16 : 46] Did that make the water from the well even more alluring, more attractive to the mind of David? I'm not altogether sure.

But what I can say is that his desire speaks of a nostalgic longing for something that was precious to him in the past.

Water from various sources can have a different taste. David would have been very familiar with the area of the well as one who grew up in Bethlehem.

He may even have been a regular visitor to the well. Without spiritualizing, it was a place where thirst was quenched.

A place you would associate with refreshing. The well was an essential part of life in the town for man and animal.

[17 : 51] Older people present will remember how essential a well was in the lives of people in the island prior to receiving piped water into homes.

I well remember in the village where I was born, where I spent many happy holiday periods as a youth, how important the local well was.

It was a daily chore to draw water from the well. The well was an essential part of life.

And perhaps you remember from your Bible knowledge of good examples from the Bible of the place wells played in the lives of people, particularly in the Old Testament.

For example, in the days of Isaac. Again, the Philistines are involved. They stopped and filled with earth all the wells that Isaac's father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham.

[19 : 10] And the Bible tells us that envy lay behind this act of sheer vandalism on the part of the Philistines.

They were jealous of the wealth of Isaac. But in acting in that way, they were trying to erase or suppress what was essential to sustaining natural life, water.

Famine had caused Isaac to settle in Gerar. And there the Lord had prospered him, causing us, I said, great envy, resulting in acts of vandalism against Isaac's wells, which were necessary to sustain his large flocks.

The Philistines carried out a program of sustained harassment. And we are told in the Bible, Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham.

And that, in my view, is illustrative of what the enemies of the gospel are doing to the present hour, trying to suppress the very message that poor, needy sinners require.

[20 : 39] Often done under the cloak of something else. Often not done directly, but indirectly and covertly, trying to suppress the influence of the message of the gospel.

Water was essential to sustain life, hence the need for wells. Isaac believed he would find water in the same places as his father before him found water.

And for maintaining spiritual life, we need the teaching of the Word of God. So, in applying the lesson, where will you and I get the spiritual sustenance that we require?

Is it not in the foundational truths of Scripture? These are the truths that were blessed to our forebearers. And it is still his own Word that God has promised to bless today and to the end of time.

There is always the temptation to dilute the truth. And replace it with something else. But you know there is no substitute for the infallible Word of God.

[22 : 03] So let us ask ourselves the question, is there in our individual lives an insatiable thirst for the Word of God?

The desire to drink from the well at Bethlehem was in the mind of David. I am not convinced that every person who has legitimate desires are willing to make their desire public.

You may keep that desire hidden from your fellow men, but you bring it in prayer to the Lord. For example, the psalmist, O Lord, all my longing is before you.

My sign is not hidden from you. And perhaps you are grateful to find these experiences set before us in the Psalms because they encourage you to bring your own longing and your sign before the Lord.

But in this instance, David did not hide his longing. Although he did not hide his longing, we're not told that he brought his desire before the Lord.

[23 : 24] Of course, that does not mean that he didn't bring it before the Lord. But he did make his desire known to his companions in the cave. And if I remember correctly, Matthew Henry, the commentator, is very critical of David for making this desire known.

Henry was persuaded that it was some kind of weakness that caused David to speak as he did, that he was dissatisfied with his providence.

And that may be so. Who am I to disagree with such a distinguished commentator as Matthew Henry? But I will say this, that although the word longingly often denotes an improper craving, that is not how it is used in this context.

It speaks of a legitimate desire. There are legitimate desires which are in accord with the mind of God.

For example, we sang it here this evening, as a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

[24 : 45] When shall I come and appear before God? Now, that must not be misunderstood as a desire to be glorified on the part of the psalmist in the first instance.

It speaks of the psalmist's desire to be in a place where his thirst, his spiritual thirst, might be satiated.

His acute longing was not so much for the ceremonial aspect of worship, important as that may have been to him. But his yearning spoke of a longing for the presence of God himself.

As one commentator expresses it, truly pious people are never satisfied with the ordinances of God without the God of the ordinances.

the psalmist's thirst in that instance arose from the effect of the grace of love in his soul.

[26 : 00] And in applying our reflection on David's acute longing, let me suggest that it is illustrative, symbolic at the very least, of the kind of nostalgic yearning that arises in the hearts of God's children in life.

Those who have experienced in past times the effect of the power of God's right hand in their own lives, and have also seen that power at work in the lives of others.

You know that you cannot turn the clock back and relive those days. If you are in the older age bracket, many of those with whom you shared those times have been removed from the scene of time.

But is this not true? You still pray fervently that you might see similar displays of God's power at work to what you saw in the past.

The psalmist certainly had that prayer in his own life. In the metrical psalm, that I thy power may behold brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place.

[27 : 23] And I am sure that there are those present here this evening who can follow that. That your soul may again know and experience rich, refreshing showers from on high, removing your feeling of drought so that your parched soul is refreshed again.

The Bible tells of the location of this well. It was the well by the gate. That suggests the possibility, at least, that there were other wells in Bethlehem.

But it was from this specific well, the well by the gate from which David desired a drink. If that reference of gate refers to the gate of the town, that was a very important and significant place in Old Testament times.

that is where the elders of the town would gather, transact the business of Bethlehem. It was at the gate of the city all the official business was conducted.

You may remember that is where Boaz met with the elders in his day to resolve the matter of Naomi's inheritance and the place of the Moabitess Ruth.

[28 : 47] That was where justice and righteousness were upheld, where judgments were transacted. At the gates of the city, the claims of God's law were applied to the lives of his people.

And so you find the psalmist telling in Psalm 87, the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. He delights in the gates of Zion because he is a just God and righteousness, justice, and truth belong to him.

The gates, you might say, corresponding to the gathering of the church on the Lord's day. because when people came into the place, they came through the gates.

And you don't need great powers of imagination to imagine how they would greet one another as they filtered into the streets of the town through the gates.

And so that is why I say it corresponds to the gathering of the church on the Lord's day. I stated that a well was a place where thirst was satiated.

[30 : 09] This well had a specific location. Let me try to apply that spiritually. Let me ask the question, is there anyone present this evening or listening through the online link who remembers with great delight and yes, even with a sense of nostalgia places or times where your spiritual thirst was ministered to?

Times when your soul was revived and refreshed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in applying the truth to your life. You could say that such places and times were like spiritual wells.

Perhaps even places where you erected a memorial stone and written on that stone the Lord met with me.

For through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit you learned that only Christ could satiate the spiritual thirst in your life.

And it may be this evening that you are more aware of drought in your life than refreshing. And that my friend can be a most painful experience to be in spiritual drought.

[31 : 33] If that is the case your whole being is crying out with the psalmist Oh God you are my God alone. I seek your face with eagerness my soul and body thirst for you in this dry weary wilderness.

You may remember how the Bible tells of a certain woman who was expelled from the family home. Bible tells us she wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba when the water in the skin was gone the skin was just for holding water she put the child under one of the bushes.

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water and she went and filled the skin with water gave the boy a drink. Let me suggest that there are times in our experience when we are oblivious to the close proximity of the source of life so prone to conclude that there is nothing for us and time and again we are so wrong in our conclusions.

One can imagine the well to be a place of much conversation when people gathered to draw water and that was true even in the village wells are not the means of grace places of fellowshiping for the Lord's people one with another.

Often times of fellowship together and I don't mean a cup of tea or a cup of coffee by fellowship. It's much more than that. Often times of fellowship together can be a means of refreshing and encouraging one another in the life of grace as you exchange your varying experiences of your Savior's love in your own life with others.

[33 : 44] Can you not testify how that frequently was the means of arousing a further desire to drink from the well of truth as you continued your journey along the path of life to your sorrow and perhaps even your shame.

There may have been times when you did not appreciate the value, the privileges that were yours then and perhaps this evening you are mourning their loss.

Strangely the Lord permits his people to suffer deprivation in order to appreciate more the richness of his provision for you.

He brings his people into the wilderness and speaks tenderly to them or as it may be translated speaks heart to heart with them and one of the reasons he does so is that they may really understand who alone is able to satiate their thirst and how.

You may remember how the prophet Isaiah wrote of a group to whom a precious promise was given. He designates them as the poor and needy.

[35 : 13] A people who have nothing and are in desperate need. Is there anyone here this evening or listening online who can find themselves among that group?

What message did the Lord give to his prophet about such a grouping? And this is the message. When the poor and needy seek water and there is none and their tongue is parched with thirst, I, the Lord, will answer them.

I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. And the picture that is set before us is that they are even incapable of putting their plight into words.

Their tongue is parched with thirst. But the Lord, as one from whom their desire is not hidden, answers their wordless prayer in most unexpected ways.

Do you remember what the prophet wrote about the Lord? I will open rivers on the bare heights, fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water.

[36 : 23] What a generous response on the part of the Lord. Rivers on the bare heights. That is in the most unpromising locations that were once characterized by a lack of water.

Now they have it in copious quantities. And the basic reason that the Lord acts as he does, that they may see and know, may consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this.

The Holy One of Israel has created it. All has our perception of our depth of need constrained us to cry out to the God of great power, the God of creative potential, giving us the assured conviction, along with the psalmist when he penned these lines, because of life, the fountain pure remains alone with thee, and in that purest light of thine, we clearly light shall see.

A well, physically a place to satiate thirst, a place of refreshment, a well so essential to life. Does the truth and Christ have the place of a well in our life, bringing satiation and refreshing to our needy soul?

A well even symbolic of times when you met with Christ and you rest to tell others like the nameless woman of Samaria.

[38 : 04] You see, there is always the danger that you turn your back on the means, on the well, that we forsake the Lord and be like those of whom God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and so on. The situation in Bethlehem a strong desire, even a nostalgic desire, my time is going, and the sequel to the matter.

Three of the companions of David went to procure what he desired. It was an act of devotion, an act of great love to their leader.

You could even describe it as a zealous, sacrificial act on their part. And I'm sure we all know of some who will bypass their own needs to minister to the needs of others.

That, too, flows from the grace of love. The New Testament reminds us love is patient and kind. It is more than likely, given that living as a fugitive, David required a ministry that was affectionate, considerate, and selfless.

[39 : 25] He required encouragement. Perhaps we are prone to think of David as a kind of superhuman individual, one who fearlessly confronted giant Goliath, but we must remember that he was but a man with all the frailties of a man.

God's love. The Bible speaks of another prominent, fearless servant of the Lord, the Apostle Paul. When he was a prisoner at Rome, he wrote to Timothy, Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas in love with this present world has deserted me.

The impression you get is that Paul longed for the touch of human friendship and help in his journey. don't we all need such friends?

The Bible reminds us to whom Christ will extend a warm welcome on the day of his second coming. Not necessarily those who are brave in battle although not excluded, but to these.

Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food.

[40 : 47] I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me sick and you visited prison and you came to me.

And the impression you get is that they didn't recognize themselves in the description he gives of them because they're asking the question, when did we see you in these ways?

Well, you cannot help but wonder how the three who had put their lives on the line reacted to what David did with the water which they brought back.

Were they amazed? He didn't drink it. He didn't drink it. He poured it out to the Lord. And the Holy Spirit has not seen fit to disclose their reaction.

devotion. But what David did surely tells us two things briefly. How humbled David felt as one who acknowledged his complete unworthiness of such a selfless sacrificial act of devotion.

[41 : 59] His desire led these three to place their lives in acute danger, running the risk of death. death. But secondly, what I would highlight is that in pouring the water out as a drink libation to the Lord, David wasn't despising what they had done.

When he poured it out, it was an act of worship, an act of praise. And that was a higher use of the water than drinking it. He made a special consecration of the event in offering it to God.

water for David was the equivalent of the blood of the man. He could not drink it. He must give it in worship to the Lord.

And what I see in what he did is that his action parallels the action of the woman who broke the box of alabaster and poured its contents on the head and feet of the Savior.

You remember what Christ said about it when others were highly critical of her act of devotion and love. She has done a beautiful thing to me.

[43 : 14] How much it still pleases the heart of the Savior. Though he is now exalted to heaven when we pour out precious things for his glory in showing our devotion to him.

When the infusion of grace into your heart makes you willing to give yourself in service to him, he gives you much more in return.

If David was worthy of such courageous service as shown by the three mighty men, how much more worthy is Jesus Christ to receive our all in all, so that we be like the apostle when he stated, I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.

His selfless sacrifice in joyously seeking the best for others and gladly spending self. So this evening can we say, if Jesus Christ be God, and he is, and he died for me, and if you have trusted in him, he did, then no sacrifice can be too great for you to make for him.

He gave the supreme sacrifice for you. The situation in Bethlehem, a strong, even nostalgic desire, and the sequel to the matter.

[44 : 49] Let us pray. O eternal and ever blessed one, we bless your name that we know a little of the thirst of which your servant speaks when he speaks of thirsting after thee.

May we know more of that thirst in our individual lives, and may we also know what it is to have that thirst quenched in Christ alone, and the glory shall be thine.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Let us conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 65, page 297 of the Psalter.

Psalm 65, page 297, verse 4. Blessed is the man whom thou doest choose, make approach to thee, that he within thy courts, O Lord, may still a dweller be.

We surely shall be satisfied with thy abundant grace, and with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy place.

[46 : 10] And we'll sing to the end of the double verse, marked five, four verses. Blessed is the man whom thou dost choose. Blessed is the man whom thou dost choose, and makes approach to thee, that he be.

Within thy courts, O Lord, may still and weather be.

We surely shall be satisfied with thy abundant grace, and with the goodness of thy house, given of thy holy place.

O God of our salvation, love in thy righteousness, thy fearful words, unto your creation, thine answer does express.

Therefore, for the ends of all the earth, and those of our and be, upon the sea, their confidence, will praise in thee.

[48 : 40] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you all, now and forever.

Amen. Amen.