

## David—called to suffer

### ***A sermon on Mark 2:25***

Many charges were laid against our Lord Jesus Christ by those who wished to justify their opposition to him, and their rejection of his teaching. Here, it was the actions of the disciples in plucking ears of corn to eat on the Sabbath that gave rise to the response. While the main thrust of Christ's answer deals with what is and is not lawful, his words concerning David's situation are important. 'David...had need, and was an hungred.' Considering that David was Israel's anointed king, it is highly significant that he was for a time a man in need, suffering hunger, and sharing that condition with others.

#### **1. David suffered before he ascended his throne**

*David's life of suffering began with his anointing, 1 Samuel 16.* Even Samuel expressed fear at what he must do, v. 2. The act of anointing marked David out for suffering. Had he not been chosen by the Lord for the office of king, his life would have been very different. But what manner of life might it have been? The youngest son, he would have continued as a shepherd perhaps, facing lion and bear and protecting the sheep from threats. Would we know him as the sweet Psalmist of Israel? It is unlikely. Indeed, would any of the things for which we know him have happened, had he not been anointed? It is doubtful. Above all, who would have delivered his nation from their enemies, and won them the rest that Solomon, King of Peace, would enjoy? In the providence of Almighty God, the life, and the sufferings, of David were key to the subsequent history of Israel. And if of Israel, then of the whole world, since the Saviour must come from the tribe of Judah, Genesis 49:8ff.

*His real suffering began after he killed Goliath, 1 Samuel 17.* This was the great act of deliverance, by which David was thrust into the eye of his people. He was entirely unknown beforehand, and nationally famous thereafter. We may say that 'the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about' (Luke 4:37). Have you ever considered what would have happened if David had not defeated Goliath? The giant's proposition was simple: send out a champion to fight me, and whichever champion loses, his nation will serve the other. Had this happened the Lord's covenant with Abraham would have fallen, and with it the covenant of redemption. David's expression of faith, 17:34–37, 45–47, show where his trust lay. He won the fight. But his popularity made Saul jealous, 18:5ff, trying to kill him because he saw David to be a threat to his throne. David had done what Saul ought to have done, but would not for fear. David acted the part of the king, and saved his people: indeed, had David not already been anointed, would he have gone up against Goliath? But he knew the Lord's will for him, and he acted in faith. His faith brought him suffering. So the spiritual man is marked out and hated by the worldling.

*In his sufferings he still acted as king, 1 Samuel 22.* See v. 2. Though not yet on the throne, many could see that David was their hope, so they came to him, having no other hope. There was no justice in the land: why would there be, as the king was too busy chasing after his enemy, David? This was, to Saul, far more important than undertaking his kingly duties. Yet there was a king in Israel, David, who acted as king even though he was fleeing from Saul. In this he showed himself

to be a greater king than Saul, for his role as ruler came naturally to him. Men saw in him the ruler they desired, and, though the circumstances were far from ideal, trusted him to be their king. Of course, Saul had reason to fear David, since the younger man had the ear and heart of so many of the people, as well as the Lord's evident blessing on him. But David fulfilled the role of king because he was king, not in order to become king. He may not yet have sat on the throne, but true kingship does not require the trappings of majesty if the monarch himself is regal in spirit. David was regal in spirit, and people recognised this, and flocked to him accordingly.

*His suffering was made worse by the actions of others, 1 Samuel 23.* See vv. 10ff. They may have feared Saul, or desired a reward: either way, they were ready to betray David. David had already seen the way in which jealousy had moved a man against him, 22:9ff. The words of Doeg the Edomite resulted in the deaths of the priests at Nob, for giving David food and Goliath's sword. Men take sides. They do so for a variety of reasons. Some of those reasons are real, and some are not. We can easily pretend to be doing things for good reasons, when in fact we are doing them for bad ones. Doeg could claim he as being loyal to Israel's king, who had, after all, been chosen by lot. Who was David in comparison? But Doeg did not know that David was anointed at God's command, and may not have known that God had torn the kingdom from Saul. Would ignorance justify his actions? Indeed not, for, having betrayed David and the priests at Nob, Doeg showed his true spirit by putting the priests to the sword, 18f. He satisfied his own blood lust. This was not justice but wickedness, and it was David who bore the blame, v. 22: 'I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house.' Doeg was not satisfied with reporting the facts, but must wet his sword in the blood of the Lord's faithful ministers. He revealed the corruption of his heart, and David was the one who bore the suffering thereafter.

*In his sufferings he never once acted in revenge, 1 Samuel 24.* Saul was in David's power more than once, but David would not lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, v 6. This is a true lesson in grace, where a man, having his enemy under his hand, treats him with mercy. The reason why David treated Saul with mercy was that he knew Saul to have been anointed king over Israel. David too was anointed, and how would people have chosen between them if both had behaved in the same way towards each other? David showed grace and mercy, because he was an object of grace and mercy himself. The Lord had raised him up from leading sheep, and had given him the victory over Goliath, and had protected him this far. His suffering was not the result of weakness on the Lord's part, but was God's will for him. David knew this, and accepted it. Indeed, when at last he became king, and had removed the immediate threats to his rule, his first act was to look for any of Saul's descendants. In 2 Samuel 9:1 'David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?' Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, was brought into the king's house, and ate at the king's table, and had his grandfather's estates restored to him. In this, David showed true mercy.

## **2. Christ suffered before he ascended his throne**

*Christ's sufferings began at his birth.* Born in a stable, laid in a manger, forced to flee for his life, and many perished because of his coming, all recorded in the Gospels. We see in them a number of things. We see, in the first place, the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he should be born in a stable and laid in a manger. This poverty did not belong to him by nature, for he is the Lord of glory, Maker of heaven and earth. It was an assumed poverty, so that his coming in the form of a servant might be recognised by those to whom he came. When Jesus took off his garment and wrapped a towel around himself, prior to washing the disciples' feet, he was only continuing the life of service he had lived thus far. When the popes do this, it is an act: when Christ did it, it was a genuine act of service.

In the second place, he was forced to flee for his life. Of course, being a babe in arms, it was not his decision but that of his mother and her husband: but it was a wise and necessary one. Indeed, it was the Lord God himself who warned them to do this, Matthew 2:13ff. Had our Lord Jesus not been taken to a place of refuge, what would have become of our salvation? Yes, Christ came to die, but not as an infant, but as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.

In the third place, the return from Egypt was not triumphant, but resulted in Joseph settling his little family up in Nazareth of Galilee, far from Jerusalem and Herod's family. The whole family suffered for the sake of Jesus Christ, as David's brothers suffered for his sake, 1 Samuel 22:2. Nazareth may have been more comfortable than the cave of Adullam, but it was still a place of refuge rather than the natural home. This reminds us that the sufferings of Christ, as well as the sufferings we endure for Christ's sake, tend not to be brief but last a long time. Let us pray for grace to bear up under all afflictions, to which we are called for the name of our blessed Saviour.

*Christ's sufferings increased with his anointing.* At his baptism the Spirit came on him, a picture of anointing. Then was he driven into the wilderness to be tempted, Matthew 4:1f. We know that this temptation was real, and not a mere formality. Jesus Christ is God and man, and as a man he felt the full force of the tempter's arts. If Christ were not physically hungry, or if he lacked power to turn stones into bread, the first temptation would have been meaningless. If he had not looked to his heavenly Father to preserve him until the time appointed for his atoning death, he would not have been concerned by the devil's suggestion that he cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. As a man, putting God to the test may have seemed justified, but it is not the way of faith. And if Christ did not expect to come to the throne he would not have been moved by the devil's offer to give him the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. These temptations were real, but for our sakes Christ overcame them. Yet he came to them because he came first as our Redeemer. It was his coming to this earth as the strong man who would empty Satan's treasure store, Luke 11:22, that brought him into this conflict with the devil.

But of course this was not the end of our Lord's sufferings. The devil departed for a season, Luke 4:13, meaning he resumed his attacks on our Lord from time to time. By what power did the storm arise on the sea as our Lord was crossing it? Was not this an attempt by the devil to destroy his great enemy? By what power were the people convinced to stone Christ to death, contrary to their law, John 10:31, or to cast him headlong from the hill, 4:28ff? The devil continued to stir men up against Christ, hoping to bring him down before the time, that there would be no work of salvation completed by the only Saviour.

*Christ's sufferings increased more in his acting in majesty.* When he healed the sick, or taught the ignorant, his enemies had opportunity to accuse him, Matthew 9:1-8 etc. Our Lord acted openly in almost every instance, dealing with people in public and doing nothing in secret. He healed in the synagogues on the Sabbath day, knowing full well that his actions aroused the hatred and enmity of some. He kept company with publicans and sinners, knowing full well that his actions aroused the condemnation of some. Yet he went to those who knew and understood their need of him, who loved his teaching as well as his acts of compassion towards them. Take the woman with the issue of blood, who had spent all her living on physicians, Luke 8:43. The implication is that she had been a wealthy woman, but who had spent every penny she had seeking a cure. There were many who were prepared to line up to take her money, but not one who could improve her situation at all. And then she heard of Jesus of Nazareth, who could heal the sick and raise the dead. She came to him in trembling hope, and reached out to touch the hem of his garment. She was healed in that instant. But what drew her to him? Her need? Yes of course, but that had drawn her to spend everything she had on

useless doctors. Her knowledge of Christ? Yes of course, but what did she know? Presumably she knew no more than others: that he had power, and used that power to help the needy; that he did so in compassion, neither charging for his services nor condemning any who came to him; and all of this with the added feature of her own understanding of her great need. Put these things together, and we can easily see why this woman came to Christ for healing. But the more people came to him, the more his enemies hated him, but could not move against him because they feared the people, Matthew 14:5, 21:46.

*Christ's sufferings were made worse by the actions of others.* He was betrayed by Judas, deserted by his disciples, accused by his own nation, denied justice by Pilate. Christ knew Judas Iscariot would betray him when he called him to be a disciple: Christ knew his disciples would forsake him, and foretold the fact: Christ knew he would be rejected by his people, even though he was their long-expected Saviour: Christ knew he would be denied justice by Pilate, for he must die, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Judas showed no remorse when he betrayed the Lord, as if he knew Christ must be betrayed but was himself sorry that it should be he who did it. The disciples did not desert Christ as men who said, We know the Scripture says the shepherd is smitten and the sheep scattered, Zechariah 13:7, but as fearful creatures who wished to preserve their own skins. The Jews did not bring Christ to Pilate in tears, crying, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.' No, they cried, 'Crucify him, crucify him.' Pilate did not say, 'I find no fault in him but understand that he must die in the place of sinners, to reconcile us to God.' No, he said, 'Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.' Men acted towards Christ without compassion, love or justice. And yet he bore all this, and more, for our sakes.

*In his sufferings Christ acted for the good of his people.* He fulfilled what Isaiah said, 53:4–9. Our salvation depends on his suffering, in that he is the one whose death satisfies divine justice. This is why he came, to save sinners, Luke 19:10, 1 Timothy 1:15. We are sinners, and we need salvation. That we must be saved by a suffering Messiah is evidence of the wickedness of the sins from which we must be saved. Were sin as small a matter as most think, Christ need not have suffered, for surely it would be in our power to atone for our own sins. But we cannot, and the Saviour must undergo such suffering for us, in order to bring us to the Father. All this was intended, Luke 24:46. Christ did not suffer because his enemies were too strong, or he too weak. He did not suffer because of some miscalculation on the part of the Father or the Son, but because there was no other way of reconciling the righteous God with his unrighteous creatures. He was called to suffer, he chose suffering and he submitted to suffering, all for our sakes. This is in part what draws us to him, and is why we must be faithful in our preaching of Christ, that all may know him as the true and only Saviour.

## **Conclusion**

David's life of suffering prepares us for Christ's life of suffering. The son follows in his father's footsteps: Jesus is the son of David. David could have become king without suffering, had he used his popularity to ferment revolt against Saul, or the opportunities he had to kill Saul secretly. But he did not. Why not? Because David trusted in the Lord to bring to pass what he had ordained.

If Satan spoke the truth (he did not) Christ could have ruled all kingdoms by bowing down to the devil, Matthew 4:9. He could have summoned more than twelve legions of angels, Matthew 26:53, and have taken his throne without the cross. See also John 18:36. But Christ endured all for the joy set before him, Hebrews 12:2f. The contradiction of sinners could not dissuade him, nor the physical, emotional and spiritual suffering of the cross. He knew what lay before him, and he endured all for our sakes. Thanks be to God for the patient enduring in suffering of our Saviour Christ. AMEN.