

CHAPTER 16

At this chapter begins the story of David, one that makes as great a figure in the sacred story as almost any of the worthies of the Old Testament, one that both with his sword and with his pen served the honour of God and the interests of Israel as much as most ever did, and was as illustrious a type of Christ. Here

- I.** Samuel is appointed and commissioned to anoint a king among the sons of Jesse at Bethlehem (v. 1-5).
- II.** All his elder sons are passed by and David the youngest is pitched upon and anointed (v. 6-13).
- III.** Saul growing melancholy, David is pitched upon to relieve him by music (v. 14-23). Thus small are the beginnings of that great man.

<DIGIT>1 SAMUEL 16:1-5

SAMUEL GOES TO BETH-LEHEM

Samuel had retired to his own house in Ramah, with a resolution not to appear any more in public business, but to addict himself wholly to the instructing and training up of the sons of the prophets, over whom he presided, as we find, ~~<DIGIT>~~ 1 Samuel 19:20. He promised himself more satisfaction in young prophets than in young princes; and we do not find that, to his dying day, God called him out to any public action relating to the state, but only here to anoint David.

I. God reproves him for continuing so long to mourn for the rejection of Saul. He does not blame him for mourning on that occasion, but for exceeding in his sorrow: *How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?* v. 1. We do not find here that he mourned at all for the setting aside of his own family and the deposing of his own sons; but for the rejecting of Saul and his seed he mourns without measure, for the former was done by the people's foolish discontent, this by the righteous wrath of God. Yet he must find time to recover himself, and not go mourning to his grave,

1. Because God has rejected him, and he ought to acquiesce in the divine justice, and forget his affection to Saul; if God will be glorified in his ruin, Samuel ought to be satisfied. Besides, to what purpose should he weep? The decree has gone forth, and all his prayers and tears cannot prevail for the reversing of it, ^{<0122>}2 Samuel 12:22, 23.

2. Because Israel shall be no loser by it, and Samuel must prefer the public welfare before his own private affection to his friend. “Mourn not for Saul, for I *have provided me a king*. The people provided themselves a king and he proved bad, now I will provide myself one, *a man after my own heart*.” See ^{<0380>}Psalms 89:20; ^{<0432>}Acts 13:22. “If Saul be rejected, yet Israel shall not be *as sheep having no shepherd*. I have another in store for them; let thy joy of him swallow up thy grief for the rejected prince.”

II. He sends him to Bethlehem, to anoint one of the sons of Jesse, a person probably not unknown to Samuel. *Fill thy horn with oil*. Saul was anointed with a glass vial of oil, scanty and brittle, David with a horn of oil, which was more plentiful and durable; hence we read of a *horn of salvation in the house of his servant David*, ^{<0169>}Luke 1:69.

III. Samuel objects the peril of going on this errand (v. 2): *If Saul hear it, he will kill me*. By this it appears.

1. That Saul had grown very wicked and outrageous since his rejection, else Samuel would not have mentioned this. What impiety would he not be guilty of who durst kill Samuel?

2. That Samuel's faith was not so strong as one would have expected, else he would not have thus feared the rage of Saul. Would not he that sent him protect him and bear him out? But the best men are not perfect in their faith, nor will fear be wholly cast out any where on this side heaven. But this may be understood as Samuel's desire of direction from heaven how to manage this matter prudently, so as not to expose himself, or any other, more than needed.

IV. God orders him to cover his design with a sacrifice: *Say, I have come to sacrifice*; and it was true he did, and it was proper that he should, when he came to anoint a king, ^{<0115>}1 Samuel 11:15. As a prophet, he might sacrifice when and where God appointed him; and it was not all inconsistent with the laws of truth to say he came to sacrifice when really he did so, though he had also a further end, which he thought fit to

conceal. Let him give notice of a sacrifice, and invite Jesse (who, it is probable, was the principal man of the city) and his family to come to the feast upon the sacrifice; and, says God, *I will show thee what thou shalt do*. Those that go about God's work in God's way shall be directed step by step, wherever they are at a loss, to do it in the best manner.

V. Samuel went accordingly to Bethlehem, not in pomp, or with any retinue, only a servant to lead the heifer which he was to sacrifice; yet *the elders of Bethlehem trembled at his coming*, fearing it was an indication of God's displeasure against them and that he came to denounce some judgment for the iniquities of the place. Guilt causes fear. Yet indeed it becomes us to stand in awe of God's messengers, and to tremble at his word. Or they feared it might be an occasion of Saul's displeasure against them, for probably they knew how much he was exasperated at Samuel, and feared he would pick a quarrel with them for entertaining him. They asked him, "*Comest thou peaceably? Art thou in peace thyself, and not flying from Saul? Art thou at peace with us, and not come with any message of wrath?*" We should all covet earnestly to stand upon good terms with God's prophets, and dread having the word of God, or their prayers, against us. When the Son of David was born king of the Jews all Jerusalem was troubled, ⁴¹⁸⁸Matthew 2:3. Samuel kept at home, and it was a strange thing to see him so far from his own house: they therefore concluded it must needs be some extraordinary occasion that brought him, and feared the worst till he satisfied them (v. 5): "*I come peaceably, for I come to sacrifice, not with a message of wrath against you, but with the methods of peace and reconciliation; and therefore you may bid me welcome and need not fear my coming; therefore sanctify yourselves, and prepare to join with me in the sacrifice, that you may have the benefit of it.*" Note, Before solemn ordinances there must be a solemn protestation. When we are to offer spiritual sacrifices it concerns us, by sequestering ourselves from the world and renewing the dedication of ourselves to God, to sanctify ourselves. When our Lord Jesus came into the world, though men had reason enough to tremble, fearing that his errand was to condemn the world, yet he gave full assurance that he came peaceably, for he came to sacrifice, and he brought his offering along with him: *A body hast thou prepared me*. Let us sanctify ourselves, that we may have an interest in his sacrifice. Note, Those that come to sacrifice should come peaceably; religious exercises must not be performed tumultuously.

VI. He had a particular regard to Jesse and his sons, for with them his private business lay, with which, it is likely, he acquainted Jesse at his first coming, and took up his lodging at his house. He spoke to all the elders to *sanctify themselves*, but he *sanctified Jesse and his sons* by praying with them and instructing them. Perhaps he had acquaintance with them before, and it appears (^{<0101>}1 Samuel 20:29, where we read of the sacrifices that family had) that it was a devout religious family. Samuel assisted them in their family preparations for the public sacrifice, and, it is probable, chose out David, and anointed him, at the family-solemnities, before the sacrifice was offered or the holy feast solemnized. Perhaps he offered private sacrifices, like Job, *according to the number of them all* (^{<0105>}Job 1:5), and, under colour of that, called for them all to appear before him. When signal blessings are coming into a family they ought to sanctify themselves.

^{<0106>}1 SAMUEL 16:6-13

DAVID ANOINTED BY SAMUEL

If the sons of Jesse were told that God would provide himself a king among them (as he had said, v. 1), we may well suppose they all made the best appearance they could, and each hoped he should be the man; but here we are told,

I. How all the elder sons, who stood fairest for the preferment, were passed by.

1. Eliab, the eldest, was privately presented first to Samuel, probably none being present but Jesse only, and Samuel thought he must needs be the man: *Surely this is the Lord's anointed*, v. 6. The prophets themselves, when they spoke from under the divine direction, were as liable to mistake as other men; as Nathan, (^{<0107>}2 Samuel 7:3. But God rectified the prophet's mistake by a secret whisper to his mind: *Look not on his countenance*, v. 7. It was strange that Samuel, who had been so wretchedly disappointed in Saul, whose countenance and stature recommended him as much as any man's could, should be so forward to judge of a man by that rule. When God would please the people with a king he chose a comely man; but, when he would have one after his own heart, he should not be chosen by

the outside. Men judge by the sight of the eyes, but God does not,
^{<3118>}Isaiah 11:3. *The Lord looks on the heart*, that is,

(1.) He knows it. We can tell how men look, but he can tell what they are. Man looks on the eyes (so the original word is), and is pleased with the liveliness and sprightliness that appear in them; but God looks on the heart, and sees the thoughts and intents of that.

(2.) He judges of men by it. The good disposition of the heart, the holiness or goodness of that, recommends us to God, and is *in his sight of great price* (^{<6104>}1 Peter 3:4), not the majesty of the look, or the strength and stature of the body. Let us reckon that to be true beauty which is within, and judge of men, as far as we are capable, by their minds, not their mien.

2. When Eliab was set aside, Abinadab and Shammah, and, after them, four more of the sons of Jesse, seven in all, were presented to Samuel, as likely for his purpose; but Samuel, who not attended more carefully than he did at first to the divine direction, rejected them all: *The Lord has not chosen these*, v. 8, 10. Men dispose of their honours and estates to their sons according to their seniority of age and priority of birth, but God does not. *The elder shall serve the younger*. Had it been left to Samuel, or Jesse, to make the choice, one of these would certainly have been chosen; but God will magnify his sovereignty in passing by some that were most promising as well as in fastening on others that were less so.

II. How David at length was pitched upon. He was the youngest of all the sons of Jesse; his name signifies *beloved*, for he was a type of the beloved Son. Observe,

1. How he was in the fields, *keeping the sheep* (v. 11), and was left there, though there was a sacrifice and a feast at his father's house. The youngest are commonly the fondlings of the family, but, it should seem, David was least set by of all the sons of Jesse; either they did not discern or did not duly value the excellent spirit he was of. Many a great genius lies buried in obscurity and contempt; and God often exalts those whom men despise and gives *abundant honour to that part which lacked*. The Son of David was he whom men despised, *the stone which the builders refused*, and yet he has *a name above every name*. David was taken *from following ewes to feed Jacob* (^{<1987>}Psalm 78:71), as Moses from keeping the flock of Jethro, an instance of his humility and industry, both which God delights to put honour upon. We should think a military life, but God saw a pastoral life

(which gives advantage for contemplation and communion with heaven), the best preparative for kingly power, at least for those graces of the Spirit which are necessary to the due discharge of that trust which attends it. David was keeping sheep, though it was a time of sacrifice; for there is mercy that takes precedence of sacrifice.

2. How earnest Samuel was to have him sent for: “*We will not sit down to meat*” (perhaps it was not the feast upon the sacrifice, but a common meal) “*till he come hither*; for, if all the rest be rejected, this must be he.” He that designed not to sit at table at all is now waited for as the principal guest. If God will exalt those of low degree, who can hinder?

3. What appearance he made when he did come. No notice is taken of his clothing. No doubt that was according to his employment, mean and coarse, as shepherds' coats commonly are, and he did not change his clothes as Joseph did (~~Gen~~ Genesis 41:14), but he had a very honest look, not stately, as Saul's, but sweet and lovely: *He was ruddy, of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to* (v. 12), that is, he had a clear complexion, a good eye, and a lovely face; the features were extraordinary, and there was something in his looks that was very charming. Though he was so far from using any art to help his beauty that his employment exposed it to the sun and wind, yet nature kept its own, and, by the sweetness of his aspect, gave manifest indications of an amiable temper and disposition of mind. Perhaps his modest blush, when he was brought before Samuel, and received by him with surprising respect, made him look much the handsomer.

4. The anointing of him. The Lord told Samuel in his ear (as he had done, ~~1 Sam~~ 1 Samuel 9:15) that this was he whom he must anoint, v. 12. Samuel objects not the meanness of his education, his youth, or the little respect he had in his own family, but, in obedience to the divine command, took his horn of oil and *anointed him* (v. 13), signifying thereby,

(1.) A divine designation to the government, after the death of Saul, of which hereby he gave him a full assurance. Not that he was at present invested with the royal power, but it was entailed upon him, to come to him in due time.

(2.) A divine communication of gifts and graces, to fit him for the government, and make him a type of him who was to be the Messiah, the anointed One, who received the Spirit, not by measure, but without

measure. He is said to be anointed *in the midst of his brethren*, who yet, possibly, did not understand it as a designation to the government, and therefore did not envy David (as Joseph's brethren did him), because they saw no further marks of dignity put upon him, no, not so much as a coat of divers colours. But bishop Patrick reads it, *He anointed him from the midst of his brethren*, that is, he singled him out from the rest, and privately anointed him, but with a charge to keep his own counsel, and not to let his own brethren know it, as by what we find (~~0173~~1 Samuel 17:28), it should seem, Eliab did not. It is computed that David now was about twenty years old; if so, his troubles by Saul lasted ten years, for he was thirty years old when Saul died. Dr. Lightfoot reckons that he was about twenty-five, and that his troubles lasted but five years.

5. The happy effects of this anointing: *The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward*, v. 13. The anointing of him was not an empty ceremony, but a divine power went along with that instituted sign, and he found himself inwardly advanced in wisdom, and courage, and concern for the public, with all the qualifications of a prince, though not at all advanced in his outward circumstances. This would abundantly satisfy him that his election was of God. The best evidence of our being predestinated to the kingdom of glory is our being sealed with the Spirit of promise, and our experience of a work of grace in our own hearts. Some think that his courage, by which he slew the lion and the bear, and his extraordinary skill in music, were the effects and evidences of the Spirit's coming upon him. However, this made him the sweet psalmist of Israel, ~~0120~~2 Samuel 23:1. Samuel, having done this, went to Ramah in safety, and we never read of him again but once (~~0108~~1 Samuel 19:18), till we read of his death; now he retired to die in peace, since his eyes had seen the salvation, even the sceptre brought into the tribe of Judah.

~~0164~~ 1 SAMUEL 16:14-23

SAUL TROUBLED BY AN EVIL SPIRIT

We have here Saul falling and David rising.

I. Here is Saul made a terror to himself (v. 14): *The Spirit of the Lord departed from him*. He having forsaken God and his duty, God, in a way of righteous judgment, withdrew from him those assistances of the good

Spirit with which he was directed, animated, and encouraged in his government and wars. He lost all his good qualities. This was the effect of his rejecting God, and an evidence of his being rejected by him. Now God took his mercy from Saul (as it is expressed, ^{<0075>}2 Samuel 7:15); for, when the Spirit of the Lord departs from us, all good goes. When men grieve and quench the Spirit, by wilful sin, he departs, and will not always strive. The consequence of this was that *an evil spirit from God troubled him*. Those that drive the good Spirit away from the do of course become prey to the evil spirit. If God and his grace do not rule us, sin and Satan will have possession of us. The devil, by the divine permission, troubled and terrified Saul, by means of the corrupt humours of his body and passions of his mind. He grew fretful, and peevish, and discontented, timorous and suspicious, ever and anon starting and trembling; he was sometimes, says Josephus, as if he had been choked or strangled, and a perfect demoniac by fits. This made him unfit for business, precipitate in his counsels, the contempt of his enemies, and a burden to all about him.

II. Here is David made a physician to Saul, and by this means brought to court, a physician that helped him against the worst of diseases, when none else could. David was newly appointed privately to the kingdom. It would be of use to him to go to court and see the world; and here his doing so is brought about for him without any contrivance of his own or his friends. Note, Those whom God designs for any service his providence shall concur with his grace to prepare and qualify for it. Saul is distempered; his servants have the honesty and courage to tell him what his distemper is (v. 15), *an evil spirit*, not by chance but *from God* and his providence, *troubleth thee*. Now,

1. The means they all advised him to for his relief was music (v. 16): “Let us have a *cunning player on the harp* to attend thee.” How much better friends had they been to him if they had advised him, since the evil spirit was from the Lord, to give all diligence to make his peace with God by true repentance, to send for Samuel to pray with him and to intercede with God for him! then might he not only have had some present relief, but the good Spirit would have returned to him. But their project is to make him merry, and so cure him. Many whose consciences are convinced and startled are for ever ruined by such methods as these, which drown all care of the soul in the delights of sense. Yet Saul's servants did not amiss to send for music as a help to cheer up the spirits, if they had but withal sent for a prophet to give him good counsel. And (as bishop Hall observes) it

was well they did not send for a witch or diviner, by his enchantments to cast out the evil spirit, which has been the abominably wicked practice of some that have worn the Christian name, who consult the devil in their distresses and make hell their refuge. It will be no less than a miracle of divine grace if those who thus agree with Satan ever break off from him again.

2. One of his servants recommended David to him, as a fit person to be employed in the use of these means, little imagining that he was the man whom Samuel meant when he told Saul of a neighbour of his, better than he, who should have the kingdom, ~~(153)~~ 1 Samuel 15:28. It is a very high character which the servant of Saul's here gives of David (v. 18), that he was not only fit for his purpose as a comely person and skilful in playing, but a man of courage and conduct, a mighty valiant man, and prudent in all matters, fit to be further preferred, and (which crowned his character) *the Lord is with him*. By this it appears that though David, after he was anointed, returned to his country business, and there remained on his head no marks of the oil, so careful was he to keep that secret, yet the workings of the Spirit signified by the oil could not be hid, but made him shine in obscurity, so that all his neighbours observed with wonder the great improvements of his mind on a sudden. David, even in his shepherd's garb, has become an oracle, a champion, and every thing that is great. His fame reached the court soon, for Saul was inquisitive after such young men, ~~(145)~~ 1 Samuel 14:52. When the Spirit of God comes upon a man he will make his face to shine.

3. David is hereupon sent for to court. And it seems,

(1.) His father was very willing to part with him, sent him very readily, and a present with him to Saul, v. 20. The present was, according to the usage of those times, bread and wine (compare, ~~(108)~~ 1 Samuel 10:3, 4), therefore acceptable because expressive of the homage and allegiance of him that sent it. Probably Jesse, who knew what his son David was designed for, was aware that Providence was herein fitting him for it, and therefore he would not force Providence by sending him to court uncalled, yet he followed Providence very cheerfully when he saw it plainly putting him into the way of preferment. Some suggest that when Jesse received that message, *Send me David thy son*, he began to be afraid that Saul had got some intimation of his being anointed, and sent for him to do him a mischief, and therefore Jesse sent a present to pacify him; but it is probable

that the person, whoever he was, that brought the message, gave him an account on what design he was sent for.

(2.) Saul became very kind to him (v. 21), *loved him greatly*, and designed to *make him his armour-bearer*, and (contrary to the manner of the king, ~~1~~1 Samuel 8:11) asked his father's leave to keep him in his service (v. 22): *Let David, I pray thee, stand before me*. And good reason he had to respect him, for he did him a great deal of service with his music, v. 23. Only his instrumental music with his harp is mentioned, but it should seem, by the account Josephus gives, that he added vocal music to it, and sung hymns, probably divine hymns, songs of praise, to his harp. David's music was Saul's physic.

[1.] Music has a natural tendency to compose and exhilarate the mind, when it is disturbed and saddened. Elisha used it for the calming of his spirits, ~~2~~2 Kings 3:15. On some it has a greater influence and effect than on others, and, probably, Saul was one of those. Not that it charmed the evil spirit, but it made his spirit sedate, and allayed those tumults of the animal spirits by which the devil had advantage against him. The beams of the sun (it is the learned Bochart's comparison) cannot be cut with a sword, quenched with water, or blown out with wind, but, by closing the window-shutters, they may be kept out of the chamber. Music cannot work upon the devil, but it may shut up the passages by which he has access to the mind.

[2.] David's music was extraordinary, and in mercy to him, that he might gain a reputation at court, as one that had the Lord with him. God made his performances in music more successful, in this case, than those of others would have been. Saul found, even after he had conceived an enmity to David, that no one else could do him the same service (~~1~~1 Samuel 19:9, 10), which was a great aggravation of his outrage against him. It is a pity that music, which may be so serviceable to the good temper of the mind, should ever be abused by any to the support of vanity and luxury, and made an occasion of drawing the heart away from God and serious things: if this be to any the effect of it, it drives away the good Spirit, not the evil spirit.