

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LOYAL TO THE CORE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be."—2 Samuel xv. 21.

ALTHOUGH the courage of David appears to have failed him when he fled from his son Absalom, yet certain other noble characteristics came out in brilliant relief, and, among the rest, his large-heartedness and his thoughtfulness for others. A man in such a desperate condition as he was must have earnestly coveted many friends and have been anxious to retain them all, but yet he would not exact their services if they were too costly to themselves, and so he said to Ittai, who appears to have been a Philistine—a proselyte to Israel, who had lately come to join himself to David—"Wherefore goest thou also with us? Thou hast newly come to me, and should I make thee wander with me in my sorrows? Return to thy place and abide with the new king, for thou art a stranger and an exile. May every blessing be upon thee. May mercy and truth be with thee." He did not send him away because he doubted him, but because he felt that he had no claim to the great sacrifices which Ittai might have to make in attending his chequered fortunes. "I do not know what may become of me," he seems to say, "but I do not want to drag you down with myself. Should my cause become desperate, I have no wish to involve you in it, and therefore with the best of motives I wish you farewell." I admire this generosity of spirit. Some men have great expectations: they live upon their friends, and yet complain that charity is cold. These people expect more from their friends than they ought to give. A man's best friends on earth ought to be his own strong arms. Loafers are parasitical plants, they have no root of their own, but like the mistletoe they strike root into some other tree, and suck the very soul out of it for their own nourishment. Sad that men should ever degrade themselves to such despicable meanness! While you can help yourselves, do so, and while you have a right to expect help in times of dire necessity, do not be everlastingly expecting everybody else to be waiting upon you. Feel as David did towards Ittai—that you would by no means wish for services to which you have no

claim. Independence of spirit used to be characteristic of Englishmen. I hope it will always continue to be so; and especially among children of God.

On the other hand, look at Ittai, perfectly free to go, but in order to end the controversy once for all, and to make David know that he does not mean to leave him, he takes a solemn oath before Jehovah his God, and he doubles it by swearing by the life of David that he will never leave him; in life, in death, he will be with him. He has cast in his lot with him for better and for worse, and he means to be faithful to the end. Old Master Trapp says, "All faithful friends went on a pilgrimage years ago, and none of them have ever come back." I scarcely credit that, but I am afraid that friends quite so faithful as Ittai are as scarce as two moons in the sky at once, and you might travel over the edge of the world before you found them. I think, however, that one reason why faithful Ittais have become so scarce may be because large-hearted Davids are so rare. When you tell a man that you expect a good deal of him, he does not see it. Why should you look for so much? He is not your debtor. You have closed at once the valves of his generosity. But when you tell him honestly that you do not expect more than is right, and that you do not wish to be a tax upon him, when he sees that you consult his welfare more than your own, that is the very reason why he feels attached to you, and counts it a pleasure to serve such a generous-hearted man. You will generally find that when two people fall out there are faults on both sides: if generous spirits be few, it may be because faithful friends are rare, and if faithful friends are scarce it may be because generous spirits are scarce too. Be it ours as Christians to live to serve rather than to be served, remembering that we are the followers of a Master who said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." We are not to expect others to serve us, but our life is to be spent in endeavouring to serve them.

I am going to use Ittai's language for a further purpose. If Ittai, charmed with David's person and character, though a foreigner and a stranger, felt that he could enlist beneath his banner for life—yea, and declared that he would do so there and then—how much more may you and I, if we know what Christ has done for us, and who he is and what he deserves at our hands, at this good hour plight our troth to him and vow, "As the Lord liveth, surely in whatsoever place my Lord and Saviour shall be, whether in death or life, even there also shall his servant be."

And so I shall begin by noticing first *in what form this declaration was made*, that we may learn from it how to make the same declaration.

I. IN WHAT FORM AND MANNER WAS THIS DECLARATION MADE?

It was made, first, at a time *when David's fortunes were at their lowest ebb*, and consequently it was made unselfishly, without the slightest idea of gain from it. David was now forsaken of everybody. His faithful body-guard was all that he had on earth to depend upon, and then it was that Ittai cast in his lot with David. Now, beloved, it is very easy to follow religion when she goes abroad in her silver slippers, but the true man follows her when she is in rags, and goes through the mire and the slough. To take up with Christ when everybody cries up his

name is what a hypocrite would do, but to take up with Christ when they are shouting, "Away with him! away with him!" is another matter. There are times in which the simple faith of Christ is at a great discount. At one time imposing ceremonies are all the rage, and everybody loves decorated worship, and the pure simplicity of the gospel is overloaded and encumbered with meretricious ornaments; it is such a season that we must stand out for God's more simple plan, and reject the symbolism which verges on idolatry and hides the simplicity of the gospel.

At another time the gospel is assailed by learned criticisms and by insinuations against the authenticity and inspiration of the books of Scripture, while fundamental doctrines are undermined one by one, and he who keeps to the old faith is said to be behind the age, and so on. But happy is that man who takes up with Christ, and with the gospel, and with the truth when it is in its worst estate, crying, "If this be foolery, I am a fool, for where Christ is there will I be; I love him better at his worst than others at their best, and even if he be dead and buried in a sepulchre I will go with Mary and with Magdalene and sit over against the sepulchre and watch until he rise again, for rise again he will; but whether he live or die, where he is there shall his servant be." Ho, then, brave spirits, will ye enlist for Christ when his banner is tattered? Will you enlist under him when his armour is stained with blood? Will you rally to him even when they report him slain? Happy shall ye be! Your loyalty shall be proven to your own eternal glory. Ye are soldiers such as he loves to honour.

Ittai gave himself up wholly to David *when he was but newly come to him*. David says, "Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us?" But Ittai does not care whether he came yesterday or twenty years ago, but he declares, "Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." It is best to begin the Christian life with thorough consecration. Have any of you professed to be Christians, and have you never given yourselves entirely to Christ? It is time that you began again. This should be one of the earliest forms of our worship of our Master—this total resignation of ourselves to him. According to his word, the first announcement of our faith should be by baptism, and the meaning of baptism, or immersion in water, is death, burial, and resurrection. As far as this point is concerned, the avowal is just this: "I am henceforth dead to all but Christ, whose servant I now am. Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. The watermark is on me from head to foot. I have been buried with him in baptism unto death to show that henceforth I belong to him." Now, whether you have been baptized or not I leave to yourselves, but in any case this must be true—that henceforth you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. As soon as ever Christ is yours you ought to be Christ's. "I am my Beloved's" should be linked with "My Beloved is mine," in the dawn of the day in which you yield to the Lord.

Again, Ittai surrendered himself to David *in the most voluntary manner*. No one persuaded Ittai to do this; in fact, David seems to have persuaded him the other way. David tested and tried him, but he

voluntarily out of the fulness of his heart said, "Where, my lord, the king, is, there also shall his servant be." Now, dear young people, if you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is yours, give yourselves up to him by a distinct act and deed. Feel that one grand impulse without needing pressure or argument,—“The love of Christ constraineth me”; but do not wait to have your duty urged upon you, for the more free the dedication the more acceptable it will be. I am told that there is no wine so delicious as that which flows from the grape at the first gentle pressure. The longer you squeeze the harsher is the juice. We do not like that service which is pressed out of a man: and certainly the Lord of love will not accept forced labour. No; let your willingness show itself. Say—

“Take myself, and I will be
Ever, *only*, ALL for thee.”

My heart pants after the service of her Lord. With the same spontaneity which Ittai displayed make a solemn consecration of yourselves to David's Lord.

I used a word then which suggests another point, namely, that *Ittai did this very solemnly*. He took an oath which we Christians may not do, and may not wish to do, but still we should make the surrender with quite as much solemnity. In Dr. Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul" there is a very solemn form of consecration, which he recommends young men to sign when they give themselves to Christ. I cannot say that I can recommend it, though I practised it, for I fear that there is something of legality about it, and that it may bring the soul into bondage. I have known some write out a deed of dedication to Christ and sign it with their blood. I will neither commend nor censure, but I will say that a complete dedication must be made in some manner, and that it should be done deliberately and with grave thought. You have been bought with a price, and you should, therefore, in a distinct manner own your Lord's property in you, and transfer to him the title-deeds of your body, spirit, and soul.

And this, I think, *Ittai did publicly*. At any rate, he so acted that everybody saw him when David said, "Go over," and he marched in front—the first man to pass the brook. Oh yes, dear friend, you must publicly own yourself a Christian. If you are a Christian you must not try to sneak to heaven round the back alleys, but march up the narrow way like a man and like your Master. He was never ashamed of you, though he might have been: how can you be ashamed of him when there is nothing in him to be ashamed of? Some Christians seem to think that they shall lead an easier life if they never make a profession. Like a rat behind the wainscot they come out after candlelight and get a crumb, and then slip back again. I would not lead such a life. Surely, there is nothing to be ashamed of. A Christian—let us glory in the name! A believer in the Lord Jesus Christ—let them write it on our door plates, if they will. Why should we blush at that? "But," says one, "I would rather be a very quiet one." I will now place a torpedo under this cowardly quietness. What saith the Lord Jesus? "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven; but he that shall confess me before men, him

will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Take up your cross and follow him, for "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." When our Master ascended up on high he told us to preach the gospel to every creature; and how did he put it? "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." There must be, therefore, the believing and the acknowledgment of believing. "But cannot I be saved as a believer if I do not openly confess Christ?" Dear friend, you have no business to tamper with your Master's command, and then say, "Will he not graciously forgive this omission?" Do not neglect one of the two commands, but obey all his will. If you have the spirit of Ittai you will say, "Whosoever my lord the king is, there also shall thy servant be."

I leave the matter with the consciences of those who may be like Nicodemus, coming to Jesus by night, or who may be like Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. May they come out and own their Master, believing that then he will own them.

II. Secondly, WHAT DID THIS DECLARATION INVOLVE? As to Ittai, what did it involve?

First, that *he was henceforth to be David's servant*. Of course, as his soldier, he was to fight for him, and to do his bidding. What sayest thou, man? Canst thou lift thy hand to Christ and say, "Henceforth I will live as thy servant, not doing my own will, but thy will. Thy command is henceforth my rule"? Canst thou say that? If not, do not mock him, but stand back. May the Holy Ghost give thee grace thus to begin, thus to persevere, and thus to end.

It involved, next, for Ittai that *he was to do his utmost for David's cause*, not to be his servant in name, but his soldier, ready for scars and wounds and death, if need be, on the king's behalf. That is what Ittai meant as, in rough soldier-tones, he took the solemn oath that it should be so. Now, if thou wouldst be Christ's disciple, determine henceforth by his grace that thou wilt defend his cause; that if there be rough fighting thou wilt be in it; and if there be a forlorn hope needed thou wilt lead it, and go through floods and flames if thy Master's cause shall call thee. Blessed is the man who will follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, giving himself wholly up to his Lord to serve him with all his heart.

But Ittai in *his promise declared that he would give a personal attendance upon the person of his master*. That was, indeed, the pith of it. "In what place my lord, the king, shall be, even there also will thy servant be." Brethren, let us make the same resolve in our hearts, that wherever Christ is, there we will be. Where is Christ? In heaven. We will be there by-and-by. Where is he here, spiritually? Answer: in his church. The church is a body of faithful men; and where these are met together, there is Jesus in the midst of them. Very well, then, we will join the church, for wherever our Lord, the King, is, there also shall his servants be. When the list of the redeemed is read we will be found in the register, for our Lord's name is there.

Where else did Jesus go? In the commencement of his ministry he descended into the waters of baptism. Let us follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. At the close of his ministry he brake bread, and said,

"This do ye in remembrance of me." Be often at his table, for if there is a place on the earth where he manifests himself to his children it is where bread is broken in his name. Let me now tell a secret. Some of you may have heard it before, but you have forgotten it. Here it is—my Lord is generally here at prayer-meetings on Monday nights, and, indeed, whenever his people come together for prayer, there he is. So I will read you my text, and see whether you will come up to it—"Surely in what place my Lord the King shall be, whether it be in a prayer-meeting or at a sermon, even there also will thy servant be." If you love your Lord, you know where his haunts are; take care that you follow hard after him there.

Where is the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, brethren, he is wherever the truth is, and I pray God that he may raise up a race of men and women in England who are determined to be wherever the truth of God is. We have a host of molluscous creatures about who will always be where the congregation is the most respectable: respectability being measured by clothes and cash. Time was in the church of God when they most esteemed the most pious men; has it come to this that gold takes precedence of grace? Our fathers considered whether a ministry was sound, but now the question is—Is the man clever? Words are preferred to truth, and oratory takes the lead of the gospel. Shame on such an age. O you who have not altogether sold your birthrights, I charge you keep out of this wretched declension.

The man who loves Christ thoroughly will say, "Whosoever the Lord the King is, there also shall his servant be, if it be with half a dozen poor Baptists or Methodists, or among the most despised people in the town." I charge you, beloved, in whatever town or country your lot is cast, be true to your colours, and never forsake your principles. Wherever the truth is, there go, and where there is anything contrary to truth, do not go, for there your Master is not to be found.

What next? Well, our Master is to be found wherever there is anything to be done for the good of our fellow-men. The Lord Jesus Christ is to be found wherever there is work to be done in seeking after his lost sheep. Some people say that they have very little communion with Christ, and when I look at them, I do not wonder. Two persons cannot walk together if they will not walk at the same pace. Now, my Lord walks an earnest pace whenever he goes through the world, for the King's business requires haste; and if his disciples crawl after a snail's fashion they will lose his company. If some of our groaning brethren would go to the Sunday-school, and there begin to look after the little children, they would meet with their Lord who used to say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." If others were to get together a little meeting, and teach the ignorant, they would there find him who had compassion on the ignorant and on those that are out of the way. Our Master is where there are fetters to be broken, burdens to be removed, and hearts to be comforted, and if you wish to keep with him you must aid in such service.

Where is our Master? Well, he is always on the side of truth and right. And, O, you Christian people, mind that in everything—politics, business, and everything—you keep to that which is right, not to that which is popular. Do not bow the knee to that which for a

little day may be cried up, but stand fast in that which is consistent with rectitude, with humanity, with the cause and honour of God, and with the freedom and progress of men. It can never be wise to do wrong. It can never be foolish to be right. It can never be according to the mind of Christ to tyrannize and to oppress. Keep you ever to whatsoever things are pure and lovely and of good report, and you will so far keep with Christ. Temperance, purity, justice—these are favourites with him; do your best to advance them for his sake.

Above all, remember how Jesus loved secret prayer, and if you resolve to keep with him you must be much at the throne of grace.

I will not detain you over each of these points, but simply say that Ittai's declaration meant also this—that *he intended to share David's condition*. If David was great, Ittai would rejoice. If David was exiled, Ittai would attend his wanderings. Our point must be to resolve in God's strength to keep to Christ in all weathers and in all companies, and that whether in life or death. Ah that word "death" makes it sweet, because then we reap the blessed result of having lived with Christ. We shall go upstairs for the last time and bid good-bye to all, and then we shall feel that in death he is still with us as in life we have been with him. Though our good works can never be a ground of confidence when we are dying, yet if the Lord enables us to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and so to lead a decided, positive, downright, upright Christian life, our death pillow will not be stuffed with thorns of regret, but we shall have to bless God that we bore a faithful witness as far as we were able to do so. In such a case we shall not when we are dying wish to go back again to rectify the mistakes and insincerities of our lives. No, beloved, it will be very, very sweet to be alone with Jesus in death. He will make all our bed in our sickness; he will make our dying pillow soft, and our soul shall vanish, kissed away by his dear lips, and we shall be with him for ever and for ever. Of those that are nearest to him it is said, "These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. They shall walk with him in white, for they are worthy."

I conclude with this observation. Will our Lord Jesus Christ accept at our hands to-night such a consecrating word? If we are trusting in him for salvation will he permit us to say that we will keep with him as long as we live?

We reply, he will not permit us to say it in our own strength. There was a young man who said, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," but Christ gave him a cool reception: and there was an older man who said, "Though all men shall forsake thee yet will not I," and in reply his Master prayed for him that his faith should not fail. Now, you must not promise as Peter did, or you will make a greater failure. But, beloved, this self-devotion is what Christ expects of us if we are his disciples. He will not have us love father or mother more than him; we must be ready to give up all for his sake. This is not only what our Master expects from us, but what he deserves from us.

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

This, also, is what the Lord will help us to do, for he will give us

grace if we will but seek it at his hands : and this it is which he will graciously reward, and has already rewarded, in that choice word of his in the twelfth of John, where he says of his disciples in the twenty-sixth verse, " If any man serve me, let him follow me ; and where I am, there shall also my servant be : if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." Oh, to be honoured of God in eternity when he shall say, " Stand back, angels ; make way, seraphim and cherubim ; here comes a man that suffered for the sake of my dear Son. Here comes one that was not ashamed of my Only-begotten when his face was smeared with the spittle. Here comes one that stood in the pillory with Jesus, and was called ill names for his sake. Stand back, ye angels, these have greater honour than you." Surely the angels of heaven as they traverse the streets of gold and meet the martyrs will ask them about their sufferings, and say, " You are more favoured than we, for you have had the privilege of suffering and dying for the Lord." O brothers and sisters, snatch at the privilege of living for Jesus ; consecrate yourselves this day unto him ; live from this hour forward, not to enrich yourselves, nor to gain honour and esteem, but for Jesus, for Jesus alone. Oh, if I could set him before you here ; if I could cause him to stand on this platform just as he came from Gethsemane with his bloody sweat about him, or as he came down from the cross with wounds so bright with glory and so fresh with bleeding out our redemption, I think I should hear you say, each one of you, " Lord Jesus, we are thine, and in what place thou shalt be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servants be." So may the Lord help us by his most gracious Spirit who hath wrought all our works in us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Samuel xv.
13—23 ; Matthew x. 24—33.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—670, 658, 666.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

BELoved FRIENDS,—The Lord has been graciously pleased to release his prisoner. I am weak, but the pain is gone, and in this land of bright sun and warm air I expect soon to recover strength. If my hopes are fulfilled, I shall have escaped this time with a lighter measure of chastening than for several previous years, and for this I feel doubly grateful. To all those by whose prayers I have been comforted and blessed I return hearty thanks.

Special services are commencing at the Tabernacle, and I entreat friends at home to throw their whole souls into them. I also beg my readers to pray that my beloved work at home may not suffer through my absence, but that it may please God through these special services to revive and increase the spiritual life of the church committed to my care. Then will all the agencies be quickened also, and great blessing will come to the people of God.

Unto the Lord our God belong the issues from death, and he restoreth our soul. To him be glory for ever.

With love to all the saints, yours,

Mentone, Dec. 26, 1879.

C. H. SPURGEON.