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## Sermon

### ***The Obedience of Faith***

**1 Samuel 23:13-17; Romans 1:1-6; Mark 12:35-37**

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Thirst – do you know what it is to be thirsty – really thirsty?

Listen to this account of the liberation of Palestine in the First World War by Major Gilbert:<sup>1</sup>

Driving up from Beersheba, a combined force of British, Australians and New Zealanders were pressing on the rear of the Turkish retreat over arid desert. The attack outdistanced its water carrying camel train. Water bottles were empty. The sun blazed pitilessly out of a sky where the vultures wheeled expectantly. "Our heads ached," writes Gilbert, "and our eyes became bloodshot and dim in the blinding glare... Our tongues began to swell... Our lips turned a purplish black and burst." Those who dropped out of the column were never seen again, but the desperate force battled on to Sheria. There were wells at Sheria, and had they been unable to take the place by nightfall, thousands were doomed to die of thirst.

"We fought that day," writes Gilbert, "as men fight for their lives... We entered Sheria station on the heels of the retreating Turks. The first objects which met our view were the great stone cisterns full of cold, clear, drinking water. In the still night air the sound of water running into the tanks could be distinctly heard, maddening in its nearness; yet not a man murmured when orders were given for the battalions to fall in, two deep, facing the cisterns" He then describes the stern priorities: the wounded, those on guard duty, then company by company. It took four hours before the last man had his drink of water, and in all that time they had been standing twenty feet from a low stone wall on the other side of which were thousands of gallons of water.

That is thirst; that is obedience. The Old Testament account today speaks of thirst and obedience as well. It comes from that period we have reached when David is on the run and is based at the Cave of Adullam. This is about 12 miles from Bethlehem. It is the summer harvest season. The Philistines have pressed far into Israel; they occupy Bethlehem to the south of Jerusalem and the valley to the south west of the city. The Philistines have come raiding intending to steal the harvest.

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<sup>1</sup> From an account of the British liberation of Palestine by Major V. Gilbert in [The Last Crusade](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/thirst.htm), quoted in <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/t/thirst.htm>

It is hot. David is thirsty. Not as bad as those men during the Great War but hot and thirsty. Maybe his remark was more of a longing for normality, peace and home. I doubt that he meant anyone should get water for him especially from Bethlehem.

Have you ever expressed a wish for some item perhaps not meaning it seriously and then to your dismay later found someone had got it for you at some personal cost. They had shown great regard and love for you but actually it was not a serious request on your part.

Remember the murder of Thomas a Beckett? The king and archbishop were at odds and it is said that the King said, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" Some knights took him seriously and went and killed the archbishop. Did Henry actually want or intend that?

Or I think of a toy in the window of Woolworths which I wanted so much and then realised it was not really worth having. To my shame, I received it for Christmas – my grandfather had bought it for me.

Before long David finds three of his bold men have risked their lives by passing through the Philistine troops into the enemy occupied village and drawn water for him and brought it back. These three are from the chief men who came to David when he was based at the Cave of Adullam. They are his senior men, the heroes of his band – the account has already listed some of their deeds of derring-do.

David probably was not the only one who thirsted. But they went for him. Why? We might understand it as an expression of love and loyalty. Or maybe it was obedience writ large – "Just a murmur from the king is my command."

David understands the men risked their lives, offered their lives out of love and loyalty for him. Thus the water represents the offering of their lives and he chooses to honour them by pouring it out – giving it God. Since it was obtained at the risk of their lives it represents their lives even as blood carries the life and must not be consumed under the Law rather it was to be poured out to God.

From the tone of the story, we can hear that David's response served only to increase their admiration. Can you imagine them saying, "And then, do you know what David did? He said he was not worthy to receive a gift like that and offered it to Yahweh. He poured the water out as an offering before the Lord!"

You can imagine it can't you. Their leader was humble and they loved him for it all the more.

Turning to the New Testament, we find David's descendent. Jesus of Nazareth was of the line of David. Both Mary (crucially) and Joseph were descended from David. God had promised David that from his descendents would come this special ruler. The Son of David was expected and much was expected of him by Jesus' time. However, in an hierarchical society the younger is always subservient to the older. The older is always greater and of more status than his offspring. So here is Jesus a descendent of David and therefore in the culture's thinking less than David. Yet Jesus observes that David in Psalm 110 called his descendent the Messiah "my Lord." Jesus points this out and says in effect, "How can this be?" He knows the answer of course. The Messiah is not just a descendent of David, he is the son of a virgin in whose womb by a miracle God caused life to form. Let scripture speak for itself:

... the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is the promised son of David, yet he is David's Lord. In setting this conundrum, Jesus draws people towards the conclusion that he is divine.

Paul states the same at the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans:

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:30-35

“...the gospel [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

What should our response be to Jesus in that case? If David’s men were prepared to obey a whim at the risk of their lives, how should we respond to Jesus? Paul gives us the answer.

Firstly, he calls himself a servant of Christ Jesus. That could also be rendered a slave of Christ Jesus. Slaves obey! Paul continues:

“Through Jesus and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

Are we walking in the obedience that comes from faith? What does that mean? When you trust Jesus as saviour, you are called to obey him. When you believe in him, you find you want to obey him. The old saying is true, *if he is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all*. Are you called to belong to Jesus Christ? You are certainly being called – have you, will you respond?

Are you obeying the commands of Jesus you know? The Bible claims to be inspired by God. Are you prepared to submit to the Bible? Did you notice that Jesus himself said David was speaking by the Holy Spirit? If you are inclined to say that scripture is just an old book, here Jesus affirms the divine inspiration of the Psalms. If that is not a reason to pay attention nothing is. Church, it is time we took Jesus and His Word seriously.

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 1:2-4

<sup>4</sup> Romans 1:5-6