

David: preaching righteousness in the great congregation

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David preached to the congregation, typical of the ecclesia today. When speaking to the men and women in Adullam, he drew on his previous experience, a living example of what he preached. When the ark was brought into Zion he preached to the people in a psalm how they should praise God.

THE WORD translated “congregation” in Psalm 40:9 is the Hebrew word *qahal* (*Strong’s* 6951). It first occurs in Isaac’s blessing of Jacob in Genesis 28:3: “And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude (*qahal*) of people”. The word occurs in Psalm 22:22: “I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of *the congregation* will I praise thee”. This verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:12, where the Spirit translates *qahal* by using the word *ekklēsia*. The *qahal* “congregation” of the Old Testament is therefore equivalent to the *ecclesia* in the New. This concept is further confirmed by Stephen in Acts 7:38, speaking of “the church [*ecclesia*] in the wilderness”. David was therefore a leader and a preacher in the ecclesia in Israel in his days. How did he fulfil the function of preaching?

Gath and Adullam

1 Samuel 21:10-15 records the terrible experiences of David in the court of Achish king of Gath. Once David had escaped from the Philistines, he went to the cave of Adullam and was joined by “every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented” (22:2)—what a basis on which to start an ecclesia! Psalm 34 is a commentary on these events and tells us how David responded to this situation and what he said to the congregation who had assembled themselves to him. David says to them in verse 3, “O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together”; he is encouraging them to praise God as he did. He explained to them in verse 4 how God had heard him and delivered him, and teaches them in verse 7 that “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about

them that fear Him, and delivereth them”.

Having shown the congregation these principles, David teaches them:

- to taste and see that the LORD is good (v. 8)
- that God blesses those who trust Him (v. 8)
- that those who fear God will not want (v. 9)
- that those who seek the LORD will not want any good thing (v. 10)
- that they must keep their tongue from evil (v. 13)
- that their lips must not speak guile (v. 13)
- that they must depart from evil (v. 14)
- that they must do good (v. 14)
- that they must actively seek peace (v. 14)
- that if they do right God’s eyes will be upon them (v. 15)
- that God will be against them and cut them off if they do evil (v. 16)
- that God will be near to the contrite and brokenhearted (v. 18)
- that the LORD will deliver the righteous out of all afflictions (v. 19)
- that God will redeem the soul of His servants (v. 22)
- that none who trust in Him will be desolate (v. 22).

What amazing lessons these are for a group of men and women who were in distress, in debt and discontented! David had learned all of these things, and of the dealings of God with man, through hard and bitter experiences. He was a living example of the principles which he preached.

The result of this preaching “in the congregation” was that he welded together a band of men who would follow him implicitly—anywhere that he would lead them. Even the foreigners amongst them manifested this loyalty. Ittai the Gittite would later say, “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 Sam. 15:21). Those men later formed the

backbone of the godly kingdom over which David ruled.

The bringing up of the ark

When David became king over all Israel, he immediately did three things: he took the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital (2 Sam. 5:6ff.), he defeated the Philistine threat to his kingdom (2 Sam. 5:17ff.), and he brought the ark into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). David then set the family of Asaph to sing before the ark, and delivered to them the Psalm that is recorded for our learning in 1 Chronicles 16. The purpose of this psalm was to “shew forth” (v. 23), “preached” in Psalm 40:9, the salvation of God to all nations. So faithful were the men of the house of Asaph that they continued to sing this psalm for over 600 years!

What did the Spirit through David “preach” in this psalm? Notice first the huge emphasis on God and His works and how little space there is for the doings of man. “Yahweh” occurs fifteen times in the twenty-eight verses of the psalm. The emphasis throughout the psalm is on “His name”, “His deeds”, “His wondrous works”, “His

strength”, “His judgments”, “His covenant”, etc. David encouraged Israel to seek their God, to sing His praises (v. 9), to talk about Him amongst themselves (which the Law commanded; Deut. 6:4-9), to speak about Him to the surrounding nations (1 Chron. 16:8,24) and to encourage the people of those nations to glorify Yahweh (vv. 29,30).

What was the result of this “preaching” through the psalm sung before the ark by the family of Asaph? “And all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD” (v. 36). David had set the example by putting the symbol of God’s Word and His presence at the very centre of the nation, and he then caused one of the most faithful families in Israel to sing before it (initially for *forty years* until the temple was built!) of the glory and might and purpose of their God. Thus, by his personal example and teaching, as their king, he showed them how they ought to think and to walk before their God—just as he had showed his people in the time of his fugitive years in the wilderness. On both occasions the people responded to his preaching and they became more godly as a result. Could we be a similar influence by our example and preaching in the ecclesia?