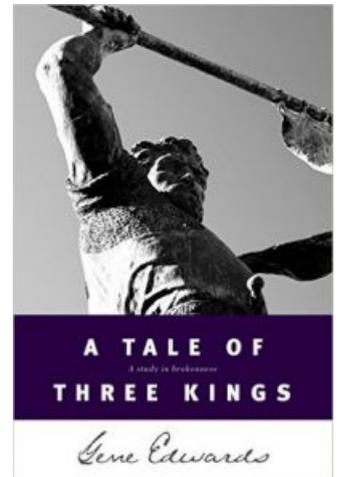


Review: A Tale of Three Kings – A Study in Brokenness

What is our posture and place before God?



Gill has often asked me, “How do you see God right now? Who is he to you?” It’s not a doctrinal question, it’s a *posture* question. Am I rejoicing before him, in freedom? Am I figuratively curled up on his lap in weariness? Am I ignoring him, hardened and rebellious, presuming and attempting to usurp, blocking my ears? Am I being contrite, bringing my brokenness to him? Do I see God as someone to be scared of, to avoid? Or can I boldly approach the eternal throne, trusting in his mercy and grace?

It is often useful to ground such exploration in the pages of Scripture; to look to those who have gone before us and see how God reveals and deals with them. What posture do they take? What can we learn? Exegetical care is required, of course, but it is a blessing to observe the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. And dare to seek to his face.

In this fascinating book, *A Tale of Three Kings*, Gene Edwards takes us to the example of King David, to glean what we may.

David, of course, is one of the three kings. The other two are Saul, who saw the young David as a rival and pursued him, and Absalom, David’s son, who sought to usurp the throne of

his father. Edwards finds in David's response to both Saul and Absalom, an example of someone who is enrolled "not into the lineage of royalty but into the school of brokenness" (page 8).

If we were to be critical, we could say that Edwards overplays his hand. His framework has David as a "broken vessel" who is able to pursue God through pain (page 12), and Saul is "the unbroken ruler (whom God sovereignly picks) who metes out the pain" (page 15). Of course, in reality, David is not always the David that Edwards speaks of. He is unbroken with regards to Uriah. He is also a belligerent warrior, an inept father, and a wielder of authority who isn't always humble. I'm sure that there were many in Israel for whom David was their Saul!

Nevertheless, this doesn't diminish the force of Edwards' exercise. He takes us into David's experience and unpacks what is virtuous in a way that matches the thrust of all levels of the biblical narrative. As a type of messiah, David reveals Christ, and so Edwards is helping us to imitate him as he imitates Christ, so to speak. Conversely, he wants us to be aware of the "King Saul in you" (page 23) and to be aware of where we may ally with Absalom (page 62).

The Sauls of this world can never see a David; they see only Absalom. The Absaloms of this world can never see a David; they see only Saul. (Page 80)

The result is an excellent tool for self-reflection, particularly for those in leadership. We are taken, for instance, to places where people desire power, "ambition, a craving for fame, the desire to be considered a spiritual giant" (page 41). We are caused to think of why sometimes the wrong people seem to have the power, and how we might respond to that. The example of David who would not bring down the Lord's anointed in his own strength governs much of this reflection.

It takes us to David as a “study in brokenness”. This is where we find Edwards’ overstatement: That David “forced no rebellion because he did not mind if he was dethroned” (page 47) is not entirely true, and surely it could not be said of Jesus that “he had authority... but that fact never occurred to him” (page 48); humility is not psychological obfuscation! Nevertheless, the way of leadership as a deliberate path of trust through loneliness and suffering is well made.

*Legalism is nothing but a leader’s way of avoiding suffering.
(Page 47)*

The most important lessons, however, are not just for the leaders, but for Christians in general, for churches and congregations. For me, the biggest lesson Edwards expounds is to **exercise faith such that we are willing to do... nothing**. He looks to David with both Saul and Absalom, and also to Moses with Korah, who didn’t meet rebellion with rebellion, but simply “fell on his face before God. That is all he did” (page 87).

Consider this posture: **“I will leave the destiny of the kingdom in God’s hands alone**. Perhaps he is finished with me. Perhaps I have sinned too greatly and am no longer worthy to lead” (page 93).

My instant reaction was to write this off as unworthy passivism, a reneging of responsibility, a failure to embrace the favour we have in Christ. Surely that is far from the pursuit of God’s mission and a faithful response to his call? But Edwards’ observation is not invalid, and the reflection has merit.

We Christians, individually and as churches, are so very very quick to sacralise our drivenness and idolise our achievements. We intone, “Unless the Lord builds the house...”, and then pick up our own hammer and nails and do whatever we want; any success, on our own terms, becomes proof of divine

favour. We pray "Lord, bless my church, and all that we do" and this looks like (and can often actually be) a humble petition, but it can also be the essence of self-reliance.

The fact is, it is actually the Lord's church, and we might not be doing what he wants at all!

Rather, David *receives* the Kingdom just as Christ would later *receive* resurrection and "*all authority in heaven and on earth*", not from themselves, but in the laying down of themselves. The posture that Edwards finds for us in Scripture would have us seek to do the same.

My own reflection is this: We are so often like self-centred children. Our Lord offers us *every spiritual blessing* as a gift of grace. Our response should be to *receive* this gift, and the calling and activism that goes with it. Yet our attitude can subtly shift us away from this; rather than receive, we *seize*, we *take*, we almost *demand*. We consider our *inheritance* and treat it like an entitlement. And this is where Edwards' reflection assists: Because the difference between receiving and taking is in the attitude, the *posture*.

And that difference is that the receiver *waits*, and does not presume, *doing nothing* until the giver puts the gift in place.

It *is* God's church. And *he* will build it. That honour belongs to no other.