

dDAVID – A SINNER AFTER GOD’S HEART

Introduction

Today we are returning to “Essential 100” our journey through the key passages of the Bible. I shall talk about King David, from the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. Recall from Wayne’s talks in July that after the anarchy of the Judges period, the Israelites asked God for a king “like the other nations”. Although God through Samuel counselled against this, he nevertheless led Samuel to anoint Saul. But Saul displeased God and God sent Samuel to anoint the shepherd boy David instead. David distinguished himself even as a boy in killing the giant Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, and led successful campaigns in the wake of this. But there followed a period as a fugitive, while Saul sought to kill David, knowing he had been replaced by David as God’s chosen one, as well as in the people’s affections. The death of Saul in battle led to David being successively chosen as king of Judah, his own clan, and then of all Israel. He reigned for 40 years and is celebrated as God’s favoured one throughout the Bible, the king to whom God promised an unbroken line that we as Christians trace to his descendent Jesus.

What is your favourite picture of David in the Bible? [Paintings/sculptures] Is it the brave shepherd who killed the lion protecting his flock? Is it the courageous boy who defeated Goliath? The royal founder of the dynasty that ruled Israel, from whom Christ is descended? A great musician, calming Saul’s nerves? The master poet who wrote many Psalms, as Simon will discuss next week? In sum, the perfect man, as in Michelangelo’s statue?

Think about these images – which one do you find appealing? Are there any you can relate to personally?

David the Sinner

These pictures, that seem to show a “Renaissance Man” are part of the story. I must say I find it hard to relate to them. But we must not see David as like Christ, a man of sinless perfection. And this is clear from 1 and 2 Samuel which give a gritty and realistic portrait of David, “warts and all”. Here’s a great book I recommend you to read on it – “Men Behaving Badly” by John Goldingay, many of whose chapters are about David and his misdemeanours. I believe that in looking at David’s faults alongside his heart for God, we shall get closer to David and find an important application in our own lives that is ultimately of great encouragement.

And what sins David committed! The one that is most blatant is of course the seduction of Bathsheba, his military captain Uriah’s wife. The story is told brutally simply in 2 Samuel 11 “One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite? " Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her.” See how he abuses his power as king by ordering her to come and she has to obey. The act of adultery was worsened by the consequence as David ordered the murder of her husband, writing to his military commander Joab “"Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.” The Bathsheba event resulted in turn from the sin of complacency at letting others go to war rather than David leading the army himself.

But this is only one event in a lifetime of transgression – it would be wrong to see David as someone who was perfect till he saw Bathsheba and then fell. Early on in his career, David was an accomplished liar, albeit often to save his skin – he lied to Saul about where he was going, he lied to the priests in order to get food for his men and he lied to the king of the Philistines about his actions and mental state. As an outlaw, he and his men committed extortion, running a protection racket like gangsters and were on the point of murdering Nabal the rich sheep farmer who refused to “pay protection”. Later, as king he offended God by proudly taking a census of his fighting men, rather than relying on God’s support, which led to a plague on the nation, killing 70,000 people.

And he shed much blood himself. David killed 200 men to become the son-in-law of Saul, and mutilated their corpses, when he was only asked to kill 100. Enthusiasm or bloodlust? He carried out scorched earth policies on tribal cities, his men killing everything that lived, as part of acts of robbery – and to ensure no witnesses. Some of these acts may have had God’s tacit approval (you’ll recall the concept of “Holy War” in the Old Testament from my earlier talk) but not all. David had no compunction in handing out lynch justice to the man who announced the death of Saul. Over his entire career, he was responsible, according to theologians, for the death of 140,000 people. Little wonder that God told him “You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.”

Even beyond this, he is hardly a role model. He was a dreadful father who clearly had no control over his sons, never exerting proper fatherly discipline. For example, he turned a blind eye when his son Amnon raped his daughter by another wife Tamar. This led in turn to the murder of Amnon by Absalom,

Tamar's brother. Absalom in turn starts a rebellion that leads to his death. David can be seen as exploited his many wives for the status and position they offered him; there is no reference to him loving any of them. Like a dying mafia boss, he ensured that his son Solomon took revenge on David's enemies, such as Joab and Shimei, whom David had promised before God not to kill. He instituted a system of forced labour in Israel that Solomon would tighten, leading to division of the nation.

How do you feel about this darker view of David? Does it make him more human than the superman portrayed before?

David the man after God's heart

We must not paint David all black. He shows many noble acts and human qualities – such as not seeking the death of Saul as God's anointed despite Saul's unfair hounding of him, loyalty to his friend Jonathan, his kindness to Jonathan's disabled son and his bravery before man and beast. Nevertheless, I have given a damning catalogue of evil deeds.

But God says in Acts 13:22 "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do." Why then given his sins does God see him as such a favourite?

I believe part of the answer reflects David's actions in seeking God's heart, despite his sins. God loves to be in relationship, and David sought it. (Contrast with Adam and Eve who fled from God's company.) As we see in the battle with Goliath, David depended on God and not his own strength "it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands". He trusted God

with his life “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

He listened to God, seeking God’s direction and acting upon that direction; “David enquired of the Lord” it says repeatedly during his military campaigns and God even gives detailed directions “Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees.”

When David is confronted by the prophet Nathan with his sin in the case of Bathsheba, he repents "I have sinned against the Lord" he says simply to the accusation. He doesn’t try to hide, rationalise his actions or blame someone else.

David celebrates God’s work in joyous worship as when the Ark was brought into Jerusalem, “David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.”. He was so enthusiastic, he inadvertently exposed himself to the disgust of his wife Michal. He is always faithful to God and never sought to worship idols; he brought the Ark to Jerusalem and wanted to build the temple. Throughout the Book of Kings, he is the measure of all later kings “Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God.” is a repeated, damning, condemnation of most of them.

But David’s rise and fame are also the story of God’s grace to David, God’s side of the relationship. The first time we meet him, God anoints David with his Spirit and “from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power”, even as the Spirit departed from Saul. Again and again in David’s rise we are told that “the Lord was with David.” It is clear that God chose David in the same way that he chose the nation of Israel,

not because of his righteousness or integrity (evidently!), but because God is sovereign. We can draw a parallel with God's choice to love Jacob the deceiver and hate Esau his brother. David realises this undeserved favour for him and for Israel "David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel."

The highpoint of God's favour comes when he announces a covenant with David; "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" – a covenant which is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. God's favour is recognised in awe by David "for the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant".

As God and David interact, I think we can see a clear contrast between David's actions that are positive and negative, what the theologian Gunn calls "gift and grasp". In his positive actions David is attuned to the giving and receiving of God's blessing as a "gift", acting in line with God's will, for example in his military victories. When David sins, as in taking Bathsheba, he "grasps" using his own power after what God has not given him freely, even as Eve grasped the apple in Eden. In other words, when David accepts God's gifts gratefully, all is well, but disaster happens when he seeks to grasp at things for himself.

I believe that the way to see God and David is as a father-son relationship. They may conflict but God will not forsake David, his adopted son. God gives David freedom to receive or to grasp, as a father would his adult son. But he also holds him responsible for his actions. Hence, in the Bathsheba story, God punishes David but with the loss of his infant son and not his own death, painfully but less severely than he deserves. He

disciplines him, as a father would a son. But ultimately grace and mercy prevail and God forgives.

Reflect on how God loved David despite his sins. What do you think was the most crucial reason?

Application to our lives

This leads to what I think are encouraging applications for our lives.

One thing we can rule out is people carrying WWDD armbands! What would David do? Lying, murder, adultery?

At least, we need to be selective. But David can be a role model for us in his faith, which is the foundation of his relationship with God, “seeking God’s heart”. He shows us how to be closer to God:

- depend on God in times of trouble, as our “rock and our deliverer” who is faithful;
- trust “in God’s “unfailing love” and not be afraid;
- listen, to God’s direction in prayer and not “lean on our own understanding”;
- repent when we do wrong as David did – and also Peter – and not seek to rationalise our actions - denying our guilt before God - like Adam, Saul and Judas;
- celebrate “praise you forever for what you have done”
- be faithful and put God at the centre of our lives, not an idol such as money or fame;
- give the Lord the credit for our successes even as David did.

The David story teaches us to take God’s gifts gratefully and do our best not to grasp for better things ourselves.

God's grace and mercy are an even more crucial lesson from David's story. Like David, we have all sinned, and many of us bear guilt from those sins that form a barrier with God. The story of David shows us that God mercifully holds the door open for reconciliation and forgiveness if we repent sincerely. For like David, we too are adopted as God's children, as Paul says in Romans 8 "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." And as Hebrews 12 says "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?". God in his grace and mercy has chosen us to be forgiven, even as he forgave David. We can rely on God's promises. We like David are part of his story! God can work through us as he did through David in spite of our weaknesses.

As John Calvin said, "David is like a mirror, in which God sets before us the continued course of his grace". Grace to us as to him.

I want to finish with David's Psalm that best sums up this theme of grace and forgiveness – Psalm 51 where David acknowledges his guilt after Bathsheba before God and relies on God to forgive him, to cleanse him, to create a pure heart in him. We can do the same before God with our own sins, where we are cleansed by Christ's blood as it says in Ephesians 1:7 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace". This is the blood of the cross that we remember in communion. As we move now to communion, reflect on your personal need for God's grace and mercy:

PS 51:1-12 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Yes, God will do all these things for us, who are his children, through our faith in Jesus. He will forgive us as he forgave David.

During and after communion, there will be people available for prayer for anything that you found important from today's message. In particular, there may be some among us who are caught up in guilt about sin, and unsure of God's mercy and grace, his loving fatherhood, his desire for a restored relationship.