

David - Faith and Failure

Psalm 138

Thanksgiving and Praise Of David.

I give You thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing Your praise;
I bow down towards Your holy temple
and give thanks to Your name for Your steadfast love and Your
faithfulness;
for You have exalted Your name and Your word
above everything.
On the day I called, You answered me,
You increased my strength of soul.
All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord,
for they have heard the words of Your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
for great is the glory of the Lord.
For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.
Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
You preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;
You stretch out Your hand,
and Your right hand delivers me.
The Lord will fulfil His purpose for me;
Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever.
Do not forsake the work of Your hands.

Introduction

King David is one of the central figures in the Scriptures. He lived about three thousand years ago. Two thousand years ago, the people of Roman-occupied Israel identified our Lord Jesus as “the son of David” (*Mt. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9,15; cf also Mk 10:47-48; Lk 18:38-39*). The Son of David was the one anointed by God to free God’s people from bondage and bring them into the kingdom of God. And Jesus did just that!

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When Paul announced this good news to a group of first century Jews in southern Turkey, he said,

Then they [the Israelites] asked for a king; and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, "I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes." Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised ... (Acts 13:21-23)

Paul is quoting the prophet Samuel, when he rebuked King Saul, saying that, because of Saul's consistent failure and disobedience, God was taking the kingdom away from him. Samuel said, "the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart" to rule after Saul. When Saul discerned that this might be fulfilled in David, he attempted to murder him numerous times.

God's provision of deliverance for David, and the circuitous route to the throne that David experienced take up much of 1 and 2 Samuel. When David comes to power in Jerusalem he expands the kingdom of Israel, gains control over a number of surrounding territories, and experiences God's blessing in wealth and success.

The summary of David's life reads like an unqualified success.

Thus David son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. The period that he reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. He died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour; and his son Solomon succeeded him. Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the records of the seer Samuel, and in the records of the prophet Nathan, and in the records of the seer Gad, with accounts of all his rule and his might and of the events that befell him and Israel and all the kingdoms of the earth.

Timeline of David's Life

David's Failure

However, David succumbed to the temptation of people in power - he saw something someone else had and used his position to take it from him. David became enamoured with the wife of one of his key military officers and had a one night stand with her. When he discovered she was pregnant, he had the officer recalled to the city so the timing of the birth wouldn't be obvious. However, the officer refused to enjoy the comforts of home when his troops were still in the battlefield (a clear rebuke to David's ease while his army toiled for him). So David sent him back to the battle with secret orders for the general of his troops. The husband was placed in a critical situation and support was withdrawn from around him. He died in battle.

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Now it seemed the problem had been solved. David waited till an appropriate mourning period had been completed by the widow, and then took her to be his wife. Well within a king's prerogative in those days. However, in God's books status is no excuse for sin — David was an adulterer and a murderer. By the law of Moses, he should have been killed.

... the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. ...

One day, as I was in my throne room, celebrating the birth of another son, the prophet Nathan came and asked to speak with me. This day there was no small talk or chatting about the issues in the city. Nathan started right off with a situation he was concerned about.

“There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest.”

I was furious with this lout, I spoke a word of judgement!

“As surely as the Lord lives,” I vowed, “any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity.”

Then Nathan spoke his word of judgement.

“You are that man! The Lord, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. I gave you your master's house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. Why, then, have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife. From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own.

“This is what the Lord says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view. You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel.”

My guilt hit me like a wagon load of bricks; I fell on my face and cried out,

‘I have sinned against the Lord.’

Nathan said,

“Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin. Nevertheless, because you have shown utter contempt for the word of the Lord by doing this, your child will die.”

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Then Nathan went home.

And me? I went to my chapel and prayed, lying on my face before God, refusing to eat or drink. I sang a song before the Lord,

Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.

Because of your great compassion,
blot out the stain of my sins.

Wash me clean from my guilt.
Purify me from my sin.

For I recognize my rebellion;
it haunts me day and night.

Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight.

You will be proved right in what you say,
and your judgment against me is just.

For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

But you desire honesty from the womb,
teaching me wisdom even there.

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Oh, give me back my joy again;
you have broken me—
now let me rejoice.

Don't keep looking at my sins.
Remove the stain of my guilt.

Create in me a clean heart, O God.
Renew a loyal spirit within me.

Do not banish me from your presence,
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.

Then I will teach your ways to rebels,
and they will return to you.

Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.

Unseal my lips, O Lord,
that my mouth may praise you.

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.
You do not want a burnt offering.

The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Look with favor on Zion and help her;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit—

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with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.
Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.

The consequences for my sin were dire.

- The baby born to Bathsheba died.
- My eldest son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar, then rejected her. I, in my blindness, refused to do anything about it.
- My third oldest, Absalom killed Amnon in revenge for raping Tamar.
- Absalom and I were estranged for years.
- Absalom instigated a revolt against me and almost succeeded, but died in the attempt.

David's Story

When I was a young lad, I spent most of any time doing chores and eventually looking after the sheep. I had seven older brothers, so I was relegated to the menial jobs, though I grew into the manager of our sheep production. We sold the ewe-lambs for milking and fleece, the male lambs for the meat market - keeping the occasional ram for trading to enrich our breed stock. I got to meet a lot of other shepherds, but very few young ladies.

When I started as Saul's musician, I met a number of ladies and their daughters in Saul's household. But after killing the Philistine giant Goliath, and my first tour of duty in Saul's army, I met quite a few of young women. That's all in the past.

But I became focused on one of Saul's daughters, Michal, who returned my overtures with interest. Eventually Saul gave me the opportunity to marry her, the dowry being a hundred dead Philistines. I accomplished that, thinking nothing of the danger, and we were married. Shortly afterwards Saul's hatred of me grew to the point where I could no longer be in the capital. One night when Michal found out my life was threatened, she helped me escape from my father-in-law's henchmen.

After we were separated, Saul gave her to one of his lackeys. I was furious, but helpless. We spent years in the wilderness, running from Saul, gathering a troop of bandits and misfits. All those warriors or guns for hire who were dissatisfied with Saul or ran afoul of his government joined me in the Negev. In that time I married Ahinoam and Abigail, mothers of my first and second sons. Eventually we moved to Ziklag in the territory of Gath, among the Philistines, just to get out of Saul's reach.

When Saul died I moved to Hebron and was crowned king of my tribe, Judah. There was civil war between Judah and the rest of the tribes for seven years. During that time I married Macaah, the daughter of a neighbouring king who made an alliance with us, Haggith, Alban, and Eglah. Each of these provided me with a son during that stay in Hebron. I also took a number of live-in mistresses, called concubines.

When Saul's son was murdered, we moved the capital city to Jerusalem and there I added more wives and concubines to my harem. By the time I fell into adultery and murder I was over fifty with more than a dozen wives and twice that number of concubines. I had let my lust become an idol that displaced my loyalty to God.

So how did God weave all this into His plan?

There are four women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Three are closely related to David.

When Israel crossed the Jordan to invade Palestine, they sent spies into Jordan the first city in their attack plan. These spies ended up at a brothel for night and the lady who ran the house was named Rahab, When the king started hunting for the spies she hid them, then pled with them to save her family when they took the city. She had become a God-fearer after hearing about all that God had done for his people. They made her promise she'd have a scarlet rope hang from her window so they could identify her house in the attack. They saved her and her family (probably including the girls who worked for her), and she became part of the Israelites, likely marrying one of the spies. They had a son called Boaz (David's great-grandfather).

When famine struck Israel in the days of the Judges, a man and his wife Naomi and their two sons left Bethlehem to immigrate to Moab, a nation to Israel's east. While in the east the boys married two Moabite women. Then Naomi's husband and both her sons died. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law could not make it without family support. When Naomi decided to head back to Bethlehem, she begged her daughters-in-law to return to their families and start their lives again. One went back home, but the other had adopted Naomi as her mother and Naomi's faith as her own faith, so she went with Naomi back to Israel - her name was Ruth.

Ruth married Boaz and became David's great-grandmother. That's an incredible story all on its own and you can read it in the book of Ruth in the Old Testament.

God ended up using Rehab, Ruth and Bathsheba, all foreigners to the promise of Abraham to bring to being his plan of salvation - the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. And just as Gentiles had participated in the birth of Jesus, so Gentiles received the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection. God had woven good from David's sin and from those outside the promise.

Conclusion

Whether we'd call David's behaviour a "mid-life crisis" (In that culture Bathsheba may still have been in her late teens or early twenties, but that could apply to a number of his latest concubines) or just a lack of blood getting to the brain, his sin destroyed much in his family and impacted his service for God. David's downfall was letting his desires take the place of God's desires as the centre of his life. He claimed faith but acted unfaithfully.

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God extended his forgiveness to David, as he does to us, but the pain, tragedy and unfaithfulness in his family was an all-too-present reminder of his sin. God extends his forgiveness to us, but often our foolish or rebellious behaviour haunts us for the rest of our days. This isn't God punishing us, it's just what sin does. Sin destroys, and though we may dress it up and put it in acceptable clothes, its destructive nature doesn't change.

My faith in God keeps me from sin, but when I put my faith on the back burner in my life, sin returns to work its destruction in my life and those around me. That doesn't mean I am no longer God's child when I sin. In 1 John we read,

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

God is pure light, there's no darkness in Him. When our lives flirt with darkness we're lying if we say we're tight with God. When we live in sync with God, we just don't sin. That puts us in sync with other God-lovers, and our confidence in the saving work of Jesus Christ grows.

As you walk into this week, start by confessing your failures to God. Ask for his forgiveness and then rejoice because you've received it! Then ask God's Holy Spirit to guide your steps this week as you seek to walk with God. As our Lord taught us to pray..

Our Father in heaven,
 may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
 as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
 as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
 but rescue us from the evil one.