

The Cloud of Witnesses

David

Lesson 1: David – Chosen By God

Reading

1 Samuel 16:1-13.

Chosen By God

We are told that Saul was extremely handsome and tall; his head and shoulders were taller than his peers and siblings. As Saul was the first King of Israel it was only natural to assume that God would choose someone similar in stature to succeed him. Consequently, when God told Samuel to go and anoint one of Jesse's young men to replace Saul as king, Samuel saw Jesse's attractive first-born, Eliab, and concluded that he must be the one chosen to be king.

When God told Samuel that Eliab was not the one, Samuel evidently went through each of Jesse's sons, from the eldest to the youngest, expecting to anoint one of them as king. However, he still didn't find the one God had chosen.

Mystified, Samuel asked Jesse if he had any more children. He was surprised and, no doubt, relieved to learn that there was still one to be presented, albeit away tending the sheep – the job given to the youngest and most insignificant member of the household.

I guess there is some similarity between Saul and David – when Saul was to be made king he was missing and eventually found hidden away amongst the baggage! However, David was not hiding – he was working in the fields.

Samuel's assumption was wrong on two counts. Firstly, Saul had not been chosen primarily for his looks – although undoubtedly he would have looked the part in the eyes of the people of Israel who were insisting on installing their first king. Saul was chosen primarily for his humility.

Yes, he had military experience and success but his heart was still supple – and he had a certain level of trust in God and His ways. Saul was obedient when he began his reign as king but subsequently forgot who had actually won the battles for him and who had made him king in the first place. After Saul had tasted success and victory, he became arrogant and was no longer of use to Israel or God.

Secondly, Samuel appears to have made the mistake of thinking that God would repeat what He had done in the past – choose someone who was strikingly handsome and obviously valiant.

But God has a much higher set of standards. God had no doubt watched all of Jesse's sons, just

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Lesson 1 continued: David – Chosen By God

as much as He had watched David. From a social and spiritual context it would have been perfectly natural to choose the first-born son who had all the rights and privileges as part of his inheritance.

However, as we see in Scripture, not every first-born lived up to their privileged position. Consider Cain, Esau and Reuben.

No, God had looked on each of Jesse's sons and decided that David was the one who would best represent Him. God had seen him working conscientiously in the fields. Caring for the stock as if they were his own children. Making sure they had all the feed and water they required. Enduring sleepless nights during the lambing season. Rescuing them from the predators – lions and bears – and yet seeking no recognition.

God must have heard David's heart overflow in joyful psalms of praise to his Maker and Shepherd. God wouldn't have missed any of the moments when, in the solitude, David expressed his deepest joys, dreams and gratitude to Him – for life, health and protection. Yes, David knew his God and his God knew him.

We need to be like David and develop our character and integrity in the seemingly obscure and insignificant day-to-day issues of life. We begin by committing our lives to God and being faithful in the little things.

David would say to us today...

God looks at our heart; not our achievements or physique. What does He see in yours?

Prayer

Father, please help me remember that You are far more interested in me than in my looks, achievements, status or strength. Help me to be satisfied with the role and ministry You have ordained for me. For Jesus' sake, Amen

Additional readings

Haggai 1:3-11; 1 Kings 3:5-14; 1 Peter 2:4-10.

Questions

Why do we have this inbuilt drive to prove ourselves to others?

Why is our self-worth so often dependent on our job or role in life?

How do we learn to be content with who God has called us to be?

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Lesson 2: David – Stands Up For God

Reading

1 Samuel 17:1-55.

Stands Up For God

David was just a shepherd boy. He was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, so his job was to look after the family's flock – the family's livelihood and wealth.

He was away from the hustle and bustle of sibling rivalry and the pressures of Israel's national security. He could concentrate on his sheep and their needs of food, water, shelter and protection.

However, David still had a choice – would he consider the job a burden and chore or would it be a responsibility that could bring out the best in him.

Many of us look at our jobs only as a source of income. It is a necessary evil, if you like, and so we go into each day with a sub-conscious negativity – we have to do it or we will become poor or jobless. We don't see it as an opportunity to excel in the way we have been created and gifted. Neither do we see it as an opportunity to build relationships with our colleagues, superiors or assistants. The idea that we may be able to add value to our job is foreign to us.

On the other hand, there are others who find their whole sense of self-worth wrapped up in their employment. For them the status of the job or their individual performance in the role is paramount – particularly if they have shown or proved that they have accomplished more than anyone else – or done better than anyone else.

Whilst striving for excellence is a noble ethic, if it hides a low self-esteem it can end up as a strive for perfection that is totally unattainable. This can result in self-preservation at the expense of others or feeding a sense of rejection since no-one can live up to such unrealistic expectations.

What we need to develop is a mature sense of reality so that we see our job as a place of fulfilment – an expression and extension of who we really are. As we consider the results of our employment we can be content with our contribution – provided we have done our best.

That is why it is important that we recognise and develop our work ethics and values. Once we have established what they are, we will be able to protect ourselves from getting bored, feeling negative and unfulfilled, or worse – losing our integrity through our own actions or the demands of others.

David was establishing his character out in the hillside, away from peer pressure and the temptations of money, prestige, status and power. He concentrated on the job in hand and allowed God to do the rest. Yes, having a faith and relationship with God, his Creator, made a significant

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Lesson 2 continued: David – Stands Up For God

difference to him. It meant he had Someone to talk to, Someone to seek wisdom and guidance from. David was also able to experience God's presence and power – how else would he have been able to dispose of a hungry lion or ferocious bear?

The incident with Goliath was just an extension of who David was. David didn't suddenly become a hero – he already was a hero. He had single-handedly dealt to the lion and the bear in private. Challenging a giant in public was just the next step. Please notice that David did not see Goliath the same way as his brothers or the other troops did. They saw a giant – a huge and fierce looking man who was intent on killing one of them and winning the battle.

David saw something completely different. David saw in Goliath someone who was mocking his God. Someone who was defying the Creator of the Universe and challenging God to do battle with him. Someone who thought he could take God on and not only win but get away with it.

David kept his eyes on God, not Goliath. That is why he struggled with Saul's armour – it was man-made. David needed to use what he knew best and leave the outcome to God. He used only a sling and a stone, and God directed the stone right into the temple of the enemy and gave him victory.

God can use us in the big things so long as we rely on Him and His power whilst we maintain our integrity in the small issues of life.

David would say to us today...

You need to get to know God in your quiet and solitary place before He will release you to stand before crowds.

Prayer

Father, I long to be more like Jesus; One who longs to fulfil Your will; One who longs to hear and know Your heart's desire, so that I may be used by You to bring it into being. Amen.

Additional readings

Daniel 6:1-28; Matthew 26:69-75; Galatians 1:11-24.

Questions

Why is it dangerous to be promoted in front of other people?

Why does Jesus call us to be the servant of others?

When and how will you stand up for God?

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Lesson 3: David – The Lord Is My Shepherd

Reading

Psalm 23.

The Lord Is My Shepherd

We love David because we see in him a real human being. We read his psalms and sense they come from a person not unlike ourselves with similar struggles and feelings. Yet when we study his life we find that what he endured was far more severe than what most of us will ever be forced to suffer.

Like Joseph before him, he was treated badly by those who should have loved him. He was subject to uncontrolled jealousy and betrayal by his family and friends. For David, the wrongs went on for years. First, his brothers were jealous of him, then after he had killed Goliath, King Saul became jealous as well – to such an extent that he hounded David from town to town, village to village, and even to the craggy outcrops of the barren wilderness.

However, again like Joseph before him, David knew where his future lay – not in the hands of men but in the hands of God. Yes, men may play their part but God would choose the time and place.

The life of the shepherd and farmer in today's world is still largely a life of faith. You can make plans and try and prepare for the seasons but the weather can be totally unpredictable; every plan may fail and every contingency can be exhausted. God alone controls the elements. He causes the wind to blow and rain to fall and He can just as easily withhold rain causing droughts.

Why do so many lambs die each year in New Zealand? Why does the lambing season take place when some of the most extreme weather conditions occur?

David learnt to read the signs in the weather and sky. But more than that he learned to trust in God. David knew that God had a plan for his life and he came to understand that just as he himself cared for his sheep, God would care for him.

Yes, David would lead his sheep to fresh pastures, where they could eat and relax. He would also scout out the best watering holes so his sheep could be refreshed by drinking cool clean water in the hot dusty land. He also knew the safe tracks, which the sheep could follow from one grazing ground to the next.

He would protect them from all forms of enemy attack. He knew how to protect his sheep from rustlers, from wild animals and fatigue. He knew how to throw his rod to scare off the intruders and how to use his shepherd's crook to rescue a sheep fallen into a ravine. He knew how to apply oil to their heads when cut or scratched. He knew how to right a cast animal.

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Lesson 3 continued: David – The Lord Is My Shepherd

He would ensure his sheep were safely gathered in at night and they would be able to have a good rest at the end of each day, seemingly aware that their shepherd was watching over them. David knew each sheep by bleat and by name.

Undoubtedly, whilst contemplating his sheep David would have extended the picture to God as he meditated about his life and his lifestyle. He must have realised, like many have done so after him, that he also had a Shepherd.

Yes, we are all so similar to sheep. We get ourselves into all sorts of trouble. We thoughtlessly follow those in front of us. We rarely think before we leap and need help when we are cast down.

David acknowledged that the source of all his help was God. His health and strength came from God – even the air he breathed was God given. It was God who had supplied all his needs – his daily provision, his food, his water for drinking, his vision and the courage to overcome the bear, the wolves and the lion.

David recognised God's voice and the fact that God spoke to him with wisdom and guidance. He realised that when he came to a junction in the paths he could seek God's choice and follow it – and would find it to be the best way.

He also knew that living honestly was always the right way. He felt that everything that had happened to him was for his best – for his growth, maturity and character-building so he could tell others the joy of having God as his Shepherd.

David decided that just as his sheep felt secure at night so at the end of his life he would feel equally secure in God's House – in His Presence.

For David God was the be all and end all of his life – his reason for living and being. He needed no-one and nothing else so long as he had God as his eternal Shepherd.

David would say to us today...

The Lord needs to be all you need – then He will prove to be more than you could ever need or want.

Prayer

Father, I want to say again – Thank You for being my Shepherd. Thank You for being there for me through every circumstance of life and for promising me the greatest future anyone could ever desire or dream of. Thank You that one day I will indeed be with You forever. Amen.

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Lesson 3 continued: David – The Lord Is My Shepherd

Additional readings

Psalm 1; Deuteronomy 28: 1-14; Philippians 4: 4-20.

Questions

How do we learn to allow Jesus to be our Shepherd?

What do you expect from your Shepherd?

Is there another title you would want to use for your relationship with Jesus?

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Lesson 4: David – Procrastinated

Reading

2 Samuel 13:1-39.

Procrastinated

David knew triumph and tragedy, success and failure, joy and deep depression. He was a valiant fighter, a doting father and a passionate lover. Yet he let his sexual lust overpower his purity and integrity, and ended being convicted as both an adulterer and a murderer. Yes, he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed so he could marry her in an attempt to cover up his sin and sense of guilt.

It is common, as happened in David's family, for young people to follow the lifestyle of their parents and fall into a similar sin. Amnon would not delay his sexual gratification. He was smitten by the gorgeous Tamar, and decided he would have sex with her. The only problem was Tamar was Absalom's sister and his own half-sister – so they all shared the same father.

Instead of dismissing the temptation, Amnon dwelt on his fantasy and allowed it to consume him to the extent of making himself sick. At which point, he received poor counsel from his so-called friends who pandered to his ego and lust.

Together they contrived to have Tamar cook Amnon a meal at his place. When they were on their own, Amnon over-powered and raped Tamar despite her pleas and panic-driven struggle with him. As is often the case in such incidents, having had his way, Amnon subsequently felt total revulsion towards Tamar and had her thrown out of his presence.

When we place this incident within the context of his family situation we find it is even more sinister. It happened after David's adultery with Bathsheba. Whilst David did not rape Bathsheba, he took what was not his and similarly gave in to instant self-gratification. He had set a poor example for his family to follow.

David was far from being a model father. Although obviously loving his children, he thought loving meant allowing them to do whatever they wanted without correction or having to face the consequences of their actions. He allowed Amnon to rape Tamar without stricture although the record says *David was furious*. As David did nothing Absalom took that as a licence for him to right the wrong his brother had committed. Absalom secretly harboured revenge which finally revealed itself when he murdered Amnon two years later.

David never confronted Absalom on that issue or on Absalom's blatant conspiracy and treachery. Rather than deal with the issues he either ignored them hoping they would go away or procrastinated so long that other people had to fill the gap.

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Lesson 4 continued: David – Procrastinated

Joab, recognising David's longing to see Absalom again and yet seeming to be incapable of burying the past hurt, devised a plan to have Absalom returned to Jerusalem and reconciled to David. Unfortunately, Absalom did not repent of his action but merely allowed his revenge to smoulder. Evidently he conspired to overthrow David's kingdom. Four years after returning to Jerusalem, Absalom made his move to proclaim himself king in Hebron.

Rather than confront his son, David escaped from Jerusalem. Had he summoned his troops he would probably have won a decisive victory. Instead, he escaped and allowed Absalom to invade Jerusalem and rape his concubines.

Eventually, David mustered his troops and the battle to secure his kingdom began. However, even knowing it was Absalom who had incited the treachery, he wanted the battle won without having Absalom killed. When Absalom was finally killed by Joab, David mourned for Absalom more than he thanked his troops for regaining his rule.

Lastly, when Adonijah set himself up as king, Nathan the prophet had to persuade Bathsheba to get David to fulfil his promise or Solomon would never have ascended the throne as David's successor, a position that was rightfully his.

David would say to us today...

Sometimes you have to deal with the hard issues or they may turn on you and bite you.

Prayer

Father, none of us likes discipline at the time and most of us find it hard to administer discipline. However, help us to realise that You are there in every situation and if we commit our thoughts and actions to You, You will guide us so that when we discipline others it will be done in love and for everyone's benefit. Amen.

Additional readings

Numbers 13:26-33; 2 Samuel 6:1-23; Acts 5:1-11.

Questions

Why do we try and avoid conflict?

Why do we need to realise that conflict may be beneficial rather than negative?

How do you handle conflict? What do you need to learn in order to handle it better?

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Lesson 5: David – Had A Dream To Build A Temple For God

Reading

1 Chronicles 28:1-21.

Had A Dream To Build A Temple For God

God called David a man after His own heart. After studying David's public failures and indiscretions we may be forgiven for wondering why. David's life story is definitely one of highs and lows, and yet we are forced to agree that on balance David's heart was always towards God. We may feel that David's life was far more godly prior to the time he was made the king of Israel, and yet even through some of the most dramatic situations he nevertheless sought God's will.

When David ran from Jerusalem as Absalom proclaimed himself king in Hebron and was accosted by Shimei who shouted abuse and curses on him, David's response was – let him curse me, it may be God who had told him to – rather than eliminating Shimei, which would have been very simple and the most natural thing to do.

David entrusted his whole life to the Lord. He would not take Saul's life even though Saul had set out to destroy him. Why? Because he recognised the fact that God had anointed Saul king, and if God appoints then it is up to Him to *diss-appoint*. It was not for David to take matters into his own hands.

God had given David victory over the lion, the bear and Goliath – God was therefore fully able to fix the rest of his life and destiny.

When we study David's psalms we see someone who was totally absorbed by God. Whether he was commanding the whole of creation to praise the Lord, or asking God to destroy His enemies, or whether he was just expressing his love for God, David's sole purpose in life was to worship his Shepherd.

How often we run out of words in trying to express our worship. How often we turn to David's psalms to help us express our own devotion because he seems to be able to do it so much better.

As we read his words of praise and worship we discover how a man can truly love God as a friend. His love for God is pure and simple – open and honest – free and expressive. Whilst women seem to be able to express their love to God easily, men often struggle – but not David. There was nothing effeminate about him – he was a real man – a valiant warrior – a killer of men and yet he was able to express his love for God in ways that are intimate and sensitive.

How was David able to do that? Maybe it was because he knew what it meant to be forgiven. He had sunk to the lowest place when he committed murder after having committed adultery. And yet God specifically sent Nathan to confront and convict him. David, instead of blaming someone else

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Lesson 5 continued: David – Had A Dream To Build A Temple For God

or claiming some mitigating circumstances, owned up – he took responsibility, and in the words of that contrite Psalm 51 – asked God to forgive him. And God did.

I wonder when David first had the idea of building God a temple. Was it when he was still a shepherd boy? Was it after experiencing Saul's palace? Was it when he was saved from Goliath? Or after he had become king?

It doesn't matter. What does matter is that David longed for God to be permanently present with him. Psalm 23 reveals that he longed to dwell in God's House forever. Yes, David always wanted to be with his God in His Temple.

God was worthy of the best building mankind could build. Not that God could be contained within a building but it would permanently represent His Presence, just as the Tabernacle represented God's Presence among the Israelites in all their travels. God would forever be in the midst of them. David longed for God to be the permanent focus of Israel for the rest of history – David's throne and God's Kingdom established through all the generations.

However, God did not allow David to complete the vision for he had killed too many people. The privilege was given to David's son, Solomon.

Yet that only pointed forward to a new King, a new Throne and a new Kingdom. That King is Jesus, His Throne is in Heaven and His Kingdom exists today in the hearts and lives of His redeemed disciples.

David would say to us today...

Don't be surprised if God uses someone else to complete the vision held passionately in your heart.

Prayer

Father, I long for my family and friends to know You as their Saviour and Lord. Yet I know that I may not be the best one to lead them to faith. Help me release them to You for You to bring the right person alongside them. Help me realise that there will be others whom You want me to reach. Help me also release the ministry You have called me to be a part of back to You, so the vision is completed whether through me or someone else – because it is all for Your glory and the extension of Your Kingdom on earth. Amen.

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Lesson 5 continued: David – Had A Dream To Build A Temple For God

Additional readings

Numbers 20:1-12; Isaiah 45:1-13; Habakkuk 1:5-11.

Questions

What is your heart's desire?

Do you think you will achieve it?

How would you feel if God drew others alongside to help and then take over?