

Sinners & Saints
David
2 Samuel 23:1-7 (NIV)
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How many of you have watched an entire TV series from start to finish? Or even engaged with Star Wars or Marvel or Harry Potter from start to finish? I ask you because I have asked myself, “What makes you like that particular series so much?” I am sure there are quite a few reasons, but I want us to consider this morning that one reason may be character development. Even over the course of a season of a show, you are getting involved in the lives of those characters, and that is what brings you back week after week after week.

You will never find a storyline more involved than the story of a shepherd king by the name of David. From Genesis to Revelation, there is no one except God Himself and His Son Jesus Christ that more is told about, more information given, and more said from his pen than David himself.

If you like character development, then you’ve come to the right place. Unfortunately, we won’t get to everything this morning, so I encourage you: if anything piques your curiosity, go and read 1 and 2 Samuel on your own. We are about 1,000 years before the feet of Christ hit the dirt of this earth. We are at the beginning of the monarchy of the nation of the chosen people of Israel.

We have the opportunity to begin at the end with the life of David, so that is what we are going to do this morning—2 Samuel 23:1–7. The headline at the top of this chapter in your Bible might read “David’s Last Words.”

Toward the end of their lives, many Old Testament sinners and saints gave a final speech that included warnings, blessings, or prophecies. These speeches, in turn, are often regarded as the last words of these saints, even if they said additional things afterward. This would be true of David, and 2 Samuel 23 records David’s last spoken words of public significance. Let’s read them:

¹ These are the last words of David:

“The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse,
the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High,
the man anointed by the God of Jacob,
the hero of Israel’s songs:
² “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me;
his word was on my tongue.
³ The God of Israel spoke,
the Rock of Israel said to me:
‘When one rules over people in righteousness,
when he rules in the fear of God,
⁴ he is like the light of morning at sunrise
on a cloudless morning,
like the brightness after rain
that brings grass from the earth.’
⁵ “If my house were not right with God,
surely he would not have made with me an everlasting covenant,
arranged and secured in every part;
surely he would not bring to fruition my salvation
and grant me my every desire.
⁶ But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns,
which are not gathered with the hand.
⁷ Whoever touches thorns
uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear;
they are burned up where they lie.”

We see in verses 2–3, like the words of the prophets, that these words were spoken by the Spirit of the Lord, who put His word on the tongue of David. So, David’s last words were actually words from God, given for the benefit of all people.

These final words look forward to the coming messianic kingdom. Certainly, future descendants of David could look to verses 3–7 for a description of what the ideal ruler of God’s people should look like. The ideal leader rules in justice, and his reign brings new life and growth, just as the sun and the rain call forth life from the earth.

However, we know that no human king or ruler—now or then—has yet reigned in perfect justice or has ruled in such a way as to give lasting life to his kingdom. Thus, these words point us ultimately to Christ, whose everlasting kingdom brings life itself to the world. All will not be set right until Christ’s return, but He strengthens us to press on in the meantime.

So, who is this man, David? I love the New King James version of 2 Samuel 23:1, and that is where we are going to park for the remainder of our time this morning as we see how the life of David unfolded. 2 Samuel 23:1 from the New King James version reads,

“Thus says David the son of Jesse;
Thus says the man raised up on high,
The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel:”

This is the description of David; these are the words that are written on his heart. No matter what people had said about him after all his failures (which we will get to), after all of his weakness, this is what God had written on his heart.

For David, especially as he glanced back over the course of his life, he knew that when it comes down to it, God was all he really had going for him. When it is all said and done, what David did in God’s name, because God Himself blessed it and did it, is what will last.

That is exactly what this legacy is here in the last words of David. Here in verse 1 is the caption that hangs over his heart. Every single description says nothing about what he accomplished—what he was able to amass in horses, in chariots, and in great armies. Rather, they speak to what God had done.

All David had going for him was God himself in every way. The Spirit of God was upon David, and God promised that it would never depart. No matter what he did or where he went, it would not leave. David may have quenched the Spirit, but the Spirit never departed him.

We—all of us—are going to go through all four of these descriptions, these titles of David, and see how they are interwoven with God and His Kingdom.

First is the son of Jesse. The son of Jesse. That's where it all begins. He simply was a son of a regular human flesh and blood person and his wife. It gets more insignificant than that in the fact that David was the eighth of eight sons. By the time David was born and they said, "It's a boy," I doubt Jesse went "Wahoo!" I mean, he was like, "Of course, of course, because if there is anything we do around this house of Jesse is make boys somehow."

David was not even distinguishable enough to be called in when Samuel visited the house and asked for every single one of the sons. In 1 Samuel 16:1, we see that God rejected Saul as king of Israel, and he instructed the prophet Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint the new king that He had chosen. This king was to be selected from among Jesse's sons, and out of all Jesse's strapping sons, God selected the youngest of the group, a mere shepherd boy, to lead the nation.

Why David? Why the eighth son of Jesse? Everyone else was looking at the outward appearance. God was looking at David's heart. That was the real test: to have a heart for God means that you have a heart that is sensitive to the things of God. You're not perfect. You are still a sinner. But you have a sensitive, caring, responsive heart. If you have a heart for God, he can use you greatly.

And boy did God use David greatly, even as a teenager.

Kids, guess what I have in this bag. It's five smooth stones. These stones make me think of something that happened in the Bible in the very next chapter, actually—1 Samuel 17—with two men named David and Goliath. What we are about to hear is true and right!

You may already know about the boy named David who fought and killed a giant named Goliath. Goliath was a mighty warrior who was more than nine feet tall! Can anyone show me how tall that is? I guess it's hard for any of us to show that height, but we can use a measuring tape. Goliath wasn't only tall, but he also wore strong armor on his whole body, and he had a sword and spear. The armor weighed 100 pounds. His armor weighed more than each of you!

David, on the other hand, was a young shepherd boy. He had no armor; it was too heavy for him. And he had no sword or spear. David's weapon was a slingshot, and his ammunition

was five smooth stones, which he picked up from a nearby stream. But David defeated that giant, who all the Israelite soldiers were afraid to face!

We might not face a nine-foot giant, but we face giants of other kinds like anxiety, loneliness, and fears. And we can remember David's five stones to help us defeat the giants we face.

- The first stone represents COURAGE. David was not afraid to face the enemy. "Don't worry about a thing," David told Saul. "I'll go fight this Philistine!" (1 Samuel 17:32). You will use courage to face giants in your life.
- The second stone represents CONFIDENCE. As a shepherd, David protected the sheep from wild animals, so he had confidence to face Goliath. "The LORD who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!" (1 Samuel 17:37). Like David, you can have confidence that God will help you overcome the problems you face.
- The third stone represents PREPARATION. David didn't face the giant unprepared. He went to the stream and collected five smooth stones in his bag. Armed with his shepherd's staff and slingshot, he went to fight Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40). It's important for you to prepare to face the challenges in your life, too.
- The fourth stone represents TRUST. David didn't trust in his own ability. When Goliath shouted at David, cursed him, and was ready to kill him, David said, "You come to me with a sword and spear, but I come to you in the name of the LORD God Almighty" (1 Samuel 17:45). When you face problems, put your trust in God, not in your own ability.
- The fifth stone represents VICTORY. "It's God's battle, not ours," David said (1 Samuel 17:47). That's why David had victory over the giant with only a stone and sling. When you turn your battles over to God, you'll have the victory over the giants in your life.

So, the next time you're facing a giant in your life, remember David and Goliath and the five smooth stones. Let's pray:

Dear God, just as you gave David the victory in his battle with Goliath, we know that when we put our trust in you, you will give us the victory over the giants we face in our daily life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So, it all begins right here: nothing special about David, born to regular parents on a regular day. And he was also a teen, a man after God's own heart: David, the son of Jesse.

Number 2: the man raised up on high. He was the keeper of the sheep, and now he found himself on the throne of Israel. Dr. Robert Alter, in his commentary "The David Story," says this: "The two Hebrew words (raised up and on high) reflected in this translation have a gorgeous strangeness as compacted idiom." It is something of a gorgeous strangeness. I love that. It is like David was lifted up by the lofty. He was lifted by the one who is already lifted, to be brought up high by the most high.

It is a gorgeous strangeness when God lifts up human flesh and blood and dares to give them a dignity no human being could possibly earn, which leads us to description #3: the anointed of the God of Jacob. You can go in your mind's eye to that day. We mentioned it earlier: David is brought in from caring for the sheep after his seven brothers were passed over, and God says, "That's the one. That's the son of Jesse." And Samuel anoints David king. This insignificant shepherd boy is king.

"The anointed of the God of Jacob." The God of Jacob? Why would David use the name Jacob here? Pastor Layne last month shared with us what a scoundrel Jacob was. His name literally means supplanter, deceiver, cheater. Out of all troubled people in the Old Testament, you could land on this one—Jacob—and have a lesson on human flaws that, maybe in many ways, is unmatched until you run straight into David in the middle of his reign.

David's flaws involve adultery, murder, deception—and the list goes on and on. The story of David and Bathsheba is a sad story, especially for Bathsheba. This story happens at the pinnacle of David's career. He's a hero, he's powerful and rich—and then an act of adultery. Since there are young kids present, I won't go into a lot of detail, but if you don't know the story, I encourage you to read it. If this were a TV series, this would be the climax. You would be on the edge of your seat.

We have all done things that have come back to haunt us, so we have some sense of how David must have felt: that sickening, panicky feeling in the pit of your stomach. And things spiral down from there. He fell so fast, so far, and God was not pleased.

And yet God is not going to leave David there, just like He didn't leave Jacob. God sent his dear friend Nathan to speak truth to him in love. David beautifully confesses his sin in Psalm 51, and there is nothing but joy and forgiveness and restoration on the other side of confession.

Scholar Joyce Baldwin says this about the God of Jacob out of her commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel: "This title refers to God as the one who transforms twisted human material." Jacob had been untwisted by the hand of God, given a new name, and given a new destiny. Even after everything he had done, Jacob became the father of the nation. This was the word to Jacob from God in Genesis 35: "A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body." That was the promise that was made to Jacob.

David, too, was untwisted by the hand of God. After adultery, murder, fill-in-the-blank, God kept His promise to David. David is saying here, "I was anointed in the name of the father of the nation. I was anointed in the name of Jacob himself." In other words, David's significance is not on account of any kind of human achievement. David sinned greatly. He was a flawed man, and yet God used him to usher in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This anointing was nothing less than the anointing of the divine royal lineage that would lead to the true Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is God's promise to David.

God's promise is stronger than David's failure. God's promises to us are stronger than our failures. Every single time. David could not out-sin God's ability to keep His promise.

David's significance is on account of a divine appointment. David is saying, "My legacy is entirely related to God's plan and to God's purpose, not what I ever did or said. God arranged and secured it in every part."

The untwisting that God did for Jacob—that He did for David—He is doing for me and will do for you, too. It's a gorgeous strangeness.

And that leads to our last and final description: the sweet psalmist of Israel. I absolutely love this description, the sweet psalmist of Israel. Out of the 150 that are in the book of Psalms, David wrote 73, if not more.

I want to read Psalm 18:1-16 for you, because this is the psalmist David. This is why he was the sweet psalmist of Israel:

¹ I love you, Lord, my strength.

² The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

³ I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,
and I have been saved from my enemies.

⁴ The cords of death entangled me;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

⁵ The cords of the grave coiled around me;
the snares of death confronted me.

⁶ In my distress I called to the Lord;
I cried to my God for help.

From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears.

⁷ The earth trembled and quaked,
and the foundations of the mountains shook;
they trembled because he was angry.

⁸ Smoke rose from his nostrils;
consuming fire came from his mouth,
burning coals blazed out of it.

⁹ He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.

¹⁰ He mounted the cherubim and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.

¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—
the dark rain clouds of the sky.

¹² Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.

¹³ The Lord thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded. [d]

¹⁴ He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,
with great bolts of lightning he routed them.

¹⁵ The valleys of the sea were exposed
and the foundations of the earth laid bare
at your rebuke, Lord,
at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

¹⁶ He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.

Do you now see why God called him the sweet psalmist of Israel? Somebody else might go, “You know, He really helped me.” “Thus far the Lord has helped me.” And that’s a beautiful thing. But what God had given David was a vivid imagination that was overtaken by the inspiration from God Himself. Beth Moore says this: “When you put inspiration with some imagination, you have something explosive.” When people ask, “Can we use any imagination whatsoever with the word of God?” I want you to remember David: an imagination that was overtaken with the inspiration.

This week, we will face troubles. Things will overwhelm us. What if we tried a little bit of this? What if we brought a little bit of imagination to the inspiration? *God, mount your cherubim and come down and work with me. God, interrupt my everyday existence. Interrupt the troubled marriage. Heal. Restore.*

How big is your God? Because David’s was huge! And no wonder. David experienced firsthand how big God is with the victory over Goliath when he was a teen. He experienced firsthand the untwisting by the hand of God—restoration and transformation. David did not doubt God’s character, didn’t doubt God’s promises. For David, God was huge!

In all of his weakness, he was a man after God's own heart. Can you see yourself like a woman or like a man after God's own heart? Like a child or teen after God's own heart? Can you think big things of God? Can you be challenged by the thought that you cannot make Him bigger in your imagination than He is? A gorgeous strangeness.

Our stories, our character development, like David's, are complicated. They are filled with things we did and didn't do, things other people did and didn't do, and the consequences that followed. We have days when we look like heroes and days when our hearts look as murderous and unfaithful as David's did. The story told in 1 and 2 Samuel offers us only one faithful Hero: GOD.

God's faithfulness is the context of David's story and ours. His sovereignty reigns over every plot point; He is doing the arranging and the securing. God is doing the untwisting. His mercy is mightier than our regrets. By faith in God's Son, Jesus, we can stand at the end of our days and say with David like in verse 5, "My house is with God. He has established a permanent covenant with me, ordered and secured in every detail. He will bring about my whole salvation."