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The National Presbyterian Church

Life of King David: “The Path to Success”

1 Samuel 17

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In the month of August we’re looking together at the life of David, Israel’s greatest King. He’s the ancestor of Jesus in terms of flesh and blood, and he’s also his ‘ancestor’ as a prototype of the Messiah – In his passion for God, and in his passion to build God’s community: *so Jesus is sometimes called the “Son of David.”*

David lives and reigns *about* 1000 years BC, at a time of great crisis and fear for God’s people: a time when new technology (which they do not have – the discovery use of iron for weapons) is destabilizing the ancient near eastern world. This is a period we read about in the Biblical Books of 1st and 2nd Samuel

Last Sunday we began our series by thinking together about David’s “Rise from Obscurity” – the fact that before David became a king,

- he was *not only* a mere shepherd
- *but* he was from a tiny town (Bethlehem), not a big city
- the youngest of 8 brothers – of no account, an after-thought
- as for his stature – great eyes!! but not the biggest and strongest!

YET he was the one

- God sent for when **Samuel the prophet** went looking for a king
- God used to save twelve tribes of Israel from the more powerful Philistines
- and God anointed to become Israel’s greatest king

And one of the Lessons from the story, and from others in Scripture last week was simply that the God of the Bible does this repeatedly: God notices and chooses the unexpected:

- the younger brother
- the One with a bad record in his early years;
- the woman who is orphaned and bereaved
- and Jesus himself , who was from country not the city; a carpenter not a scholar

The same is true for us too: this noticing and choosing of God is huge: God loves to do this, just like Uncle Sam saying “Your Country Needs YOU!” It means that there’s no place to hide, there’s no excuse that holds water with God. When God comes looking for recruits for His Kingdom there’s no one too high, no one too low. If David was in view, then we’re all in view; all called to be used by God for his purposes in some way.

So David rises to the challenge of God’s call, and in time (chronology is hard to pin down) – probably about ten years – becomes king.

But what happens in those ten years? That’s the question I’d like us to think about today

- What about the years of waiting before David takes the throne?

- What difference does it make in David's life that God notices him and anoints him?
- In what ways does he grow into the job to become a leader who eventually has enormous success?
- What happens on the path?

Well, the first thing to say (though it may seem obvious) is this:

This was a time to grow in PATIENCE. In these years, David learned patience, and embraced INTEGRITY. He was willing to wait, and not force the issue of power and authority.

As the prophet Isaiah taught years later (40:31) David learned the truth that

*(it's) those who wait upon the Lord (who)
Will renew their strength
They shall mount up with wings like eagles
They shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint*

In David's case the problem (the reason for waiting) was simple:

There was another king on the throne: King Saul

- who had great public and military support
- who had no intention of giving up the throne

and especially not to David, the young upstart whose growing success in battle against the Philistines was making Saul more and more jealous.

In fact on more than one occasion, God's word in I Samuel tells us that Saul's jealousy became so violent toward David that David had to flee for his life.

But David's patience was not just a matter of David being too weak or helpless to resist, or fight back, or grab the throne for himself. In fact, David gathered a remarkable group of warriors around him who gave him total allegiance. But rather, it was that he simply didn't believe that that was the way to do things; he chose not to be an opportunist, building on the weaknesses and failures of those in his way. And we know this because on two occasions (see I Sam 24, 26) he found himself in a position, he had the opportunity, to kill Saul, his nemesis, and he chose not to do it. In 1 Samuel 24, for example,

David and a small group of his men were being hunted down by Saul, and were hiding in a cave, when Saul himself came into the cave to relieve himself!! (1 Sam 23). David and his men could hardly believe their eyes! It was the perfect opportunity -- seemingly God-given, to capture him, or kill him, But David didn't do it!

In fact, he became upset that he and his men even entertained the idea for a moment. He believed that Saul, like he himself, was also God's chosen instrument. SO, instead of hurting or killing Saul, he stealthily cut off a piece of Saul's garment to show Saul later, that he had been within David's power – and that he, David, had **refused to take the low road when the opportunity came.**

So, on his path to success, David had patience. If God was going to get him to the top, then there'd be no shortcuts; the path to power would be filled with faith and honor, and would glorify God

As Jesus, the Son of David, would say years later . . . (Mark 8:36)

What does it profit us, if we gain the whole world but lose our soul

So David was **patient not pushy** (waiting for God's time); **unwilling to sell his integrity** or to put others down, to be an opportunist, in order to climb to the top.

BUT NOT ONLY THAT, from the very outset of his public life he was also **savvy and skilled**, especially when others tried to press him into their mold.

Sometimes, just to be nice, to avoid conflict, we go along with the crowd, we allow ourselves to become someone we're not. And whenever that happens, it's rare that we're ever really happy. In fact, it's often a recipe for resentment and failure.

The Late UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden, used to tell his teams that following their own game plan made all the difference.

- If we broke away from our style **and played their style**, we would be in trouble.
 - And if we let our emotions, rather than our reason, command the game we would not function effectively."
 - If we believed in our plan, however, we would wear the opposition down
- "I constantly caution our teams: *'Play your game, just play your game. Eventually, if you play your game, stick to your style, it will tell in the end.'* This does not mean that we will always outscore our opponent, but it does insure that we will not beat ourselves." [You Call Me Coach]

David was savvy. He knew his strengths – and that his particular skill was **with a sling** which was no toy in those days.

In fact the sling was sometimes used in the ancient world as a weapon of war, with some slingers being so accurate that they could hit a wild hare on the run. And David knew that while this ancient weapon would be useless against a trained army, gathered in formation, with shields and the new swords made of iron (armies like the Philistines), YET, one-on-one, from a distance and with the skill he'd developed over years he could take down any beast – or man!

SO when David turned up at the battle field one day, fresh from watching his sheep, and when he volunteered to single-handedly take on the champion warrior of the enemy Philistines after nobody else in Israel would accept the challenge, his weapon of choice was *not the sword* but the sling, even though the pressure was on (from no less than the king himself) *to use a different game plan entirely*: to act and become like Saul with his armor and sword.

And for a moment David was tempted to buckle under pressure (*like Jesus in the Wilderness, or in the Garden of Gethsemane*), until the weight of the armor, the burden of pretending to be someone he was not, made him realize that this was no way to win the day! So in 1 Samuel 17:38 we read

³⁸Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail.

³⁹David strapped Saul's sword over the armor, and then he tried *in vain* to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul,
"I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them."

So David removed them. **(The guts! A mere shepherd in the presence of the king).**

⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; and his sling was in his hand.

And, much to everyone's amazement, David moved out towards Goliath -- in fact he began to run towards him. He loaded his sling and slung it! And Goliath falls down dead, and the battle is won. The whole of the enemy-army is stricken with panic and flees.

AND So David rises to success,

- (1) Not only by demonstrating patience
 - (2) Not only by knowing what's right and wrong: refusing to compromise his integrity
 - (3) But by savvy and skill: knowing what he's good and refusing to become someone he's not.
- And throughout it all, undergirding it all, David is strengthened and energized by a FAITH THAT IS STRONGER THAN FEAR.

So **when Goliath the Philistine said to David,**

"Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field."

David – the pip-squeak – responded by speaking back and saying,

*"You come to me/ with sword and spear and javelin;
but I come to you/ in the name of the Lord of hosts,
the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.
⁴⁶This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand,
and I will strike you down and cut off your head;
and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day
to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth,
so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,
⁴⁷and that all this assembly may know
that the Lord does not save by sword and spear;
for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."*

For David, God the LORD wasn't a mere theological abstraction, nor a crutch to rely on only when things got bad. **But for David**

1. **God the LORD was** the God who made the Universe – and who was still active in it!!
2. **God the LORD was** the God who saved his ancestors from slavery and bondage, and destroyed any enemies who stood in their way
3. **God the LORD was** the God who'd kept him alive numerous times in the middle of the night while he was keeping his sheep, in the face of danger.

IF GOD had done it before, well, God could and would do it again

So –

- Instead of sucking in the fear that was running rampant in Israel at the time;
- Instead of multiplying the fear and spreading the fear that was destroying the power and witness of God's people,
- David countered it with courage and hope, taking on a challenge and responsibility that no one else would take, and changing the course of history – not only the political history of Israel, but the spiritual history – bringing **a vibrant faith in the living God** back into national life of God's people; not by Laws, but by personal witness and courage.

It's as if David knew Jesus' teaching a millennium ahead of time:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 5:25-26)

Fear not, little flock, (DO NOT be afraid), for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32)

THE PATH TO SUCCESS!

The path David followed for many years (probably at least a decade) between the time when he was anointed to be king, but waiting for power to come was one that God used to train him to become effective in the service of the King of Kings!

On this path he was able to

- (1) Grow in Patience *with the twists and turns, the steps forward and then back that so often characterize God's way*
- (2) Hold on to his moral integrity, unwilling to trade it in, *in order to grab for power*
- (3) Use the knowledge of his gifts and talents, his savviness and skill, *built up over many years, and not abandon "himself" under pressure.*
- (4) Demonstrate the power of his faith in the living God to conquer the power of fear. David's god was a god who was very much alive and active

This is a picture of the David given to us in Scripture. But not only of David (of course), but in some ways, this describes the **Son of David**, too: Jesus – whose life and path you and I have been called to make our own.

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