

“A Life of Learning Obedience”

In the past few weeks we have taken a look at the lives of the priest Eli, his successor Samuel, and the man who Samuel anointed as the first king of Israel, Saul. From Saul’s mistakes we learned how we should examine our own lives. In the Bible we find many people who are “good examples” for us to follow, but there are also many “bad examples”. And we see that a person who is a good example may also in some aspects be a bad example.

Today I would like us to take a look at the life of one of these Biblical figures, the successor of Saul and the second king of Israel, king David. Last week we saw how God withdrew from Saul because of his disobedience. Instead God directed His favor toward David, the son of Jesse. David’s father Jesse was the son of Obed, who was the son of Ruth. This makes David Ruth’s great-grandson. David experienced many things during the course of his life and today I would like our focus to be on the kind of person he was shaped into through these experiences.

David was the eighth and last son of Jesse. Regarding his birth, David said “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5, NKJV), so we can assume that his birth wasn’t particularly celebrated. In those days, being born not as the second or even third but the eighth son meant that no one took him seriously or gave him much attention. Even when Samuel was sent by God to the house of Jesse to find Saul’s successor, he saw Jesse’s eldest son and thought “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here”, all the while David was not even considered a candidate and was left in the fields to tend the sheep. The way in which we as humans see and judge others is at best unreliable and there are many problems in the world that are caused by this.

But the way God sees and chooses us is different, as we see from these words in First Corinthians: ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are

not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

Perhaps some of you feel a sense of inferiority because of your upbringing or the circumstances you are in right now. Whether we see ourselves as inferior or not is our own decision. But remember that God blesses us regardless of our upbringing or circumstances. I pray that our own perception of ourselves would not hinder us from reaching for the door of possibilities that God has set before us. Just as God chose to anoint and exalt David, the eighth son of Jesse who was brought forth in iniquity, in the very same way He will lift us up no matter our circumstances.

Up until that time, David was just a shepherd boy in Bethlehem. When we look at other passages, it seems like he was often treated like a servant by his older brothers, and if it were not for God’s providence, he most likely would have spent his entire life there in that little town. But it turned out that those years he spent shepherding the sheep out in the fields were crucial in preparing him to become the king of Israel. God chose David to be anointed as the king of Israel. In other words he was going to become the “shepherd” of Israel, and without knowing it, he was being trained through those years he spent with the sheep in the fields. It is no question that David's most famous psalm, Psalm 23, was based on David’s experience as a shepherd. This is how David was chosen by God, “and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD was upon [him]” (1 Samuel 16:13).

You might think that the days you are spending right now are unproductive and have no purpose. But it is a little too early to conclude that your life is being wasted. As long as these days are in the hands of God, He will turn them into something that will be essential in preparing us for our future. A time will come when the purpose of these days we are now going through will be revealed.

Now the time came for David to show what he is made of. The first big turning point of his life came when he faced Goliath, a warrior of the Philistines who were the arch enemies of Israel. Goliath was a giant whose sheer size was enough to terrify those who saw him. Day by day this giant came to defy and mock Israel. But the Israelites were too terrified to do anything about this. Goliath’s insults escalated to the point where he began mocking the God of Israel, and when David

heard this, he burned with righteous indignation and stepped up to challenge Goliath.

Goliath was an experienced warrior who was covered in armor from head to toe. David on the other hand was a young man with no experience in combat and clearly smaller in stature. But without even a sword and with only a sling and five stones, David stood before Goliath and declared “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied... All those gathered here will know that 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” (1 Samuel 17:45,47). And with his first stone he struck Goliath on the forehead, knocking him facedown to the ground. David fought the Lord’s battle and his trust in God led him to victory.

An important thing to remember here is that David clearly knew that this battle was the Lord’s and that the Lord was with him in the battle. This is why he wasn’t concerned about his enemy being a giant or that he was covered with armor. Another thing to note is that his skill with the sling, the method he slew Goliath with, was a skill he learned as a shepherd in order to protect his sheep from wild beasts out in the fields. As mentioned earlier, the plain and simple days he spent as a shepherd taught him this skill and with this skill he was able to defeat Goliath. The force that propelled David’s stone was both the hand of God and the experience and discipline he acquired through his day to day life. We see that he didn’t even need to use the other four stones. With the Lord on his side, he came out of that battle more than a conqueror.

In our lives, there are times when we too must come face to face with a giant. When we face the giant of worry or the giant of trials, it seems like Goliath himself is standing before us. But with the Lord on our side, we can be victorious over this giant.

After this battle, David became a national hero, and compared to Saul, who by this time was no longer favored by God and has fallen into insanity, David’s popularity among his people rose and eclipsed Saul’s, and as a result Saul grew

more and more resentful of David to the point where he became obsessed with pursuing and killing David. David fled from Saul and spent his days as a fugitive, and one time he had the chance to attack Saul who was caught off guard in a cave, but to show Saul that he had no desire to harm him, David only cuts off the corner of Saul's robe.

But it says that “⁵Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord”” (1 Samuel 24:5-6).

If you remember from last week's message, the cause of Saul's downfall was that he feared man instead of God. But David feared God and not Saul. As it says in Proverbs, “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe” (Proverbs 29:25). When we fear other people we come up with all kinds of weird schemes. And this causes things to become even more complicated and disorderly. But David learned through these difficult situations that when he put his trust in the Lord instead of fearing man, God opened up a way for him and his heart was filled with peace. In this way David learned to fear God in all circumstances. God blesses us when we learn to fear and honor Him in all things.

David was anointed by Samuel while Saul was still on the throne (1 Samuel 16:13), but before he officially became the king of Israel, he spent another ten years in which he received further training by God. If Saul was dead, David could have instantly become king and expanded his reign over Israel, but the Lord didn't make him take this shortcut. David waited patiently for the time which God had planned for him. And after many years, the time finally came for him to become the king of Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-3).

Through the experiences he went through before he became king, David learned about God and about people. Knowing about both God and man was absolutely necessary when it came to being the king of Israel. David learned to keep his eyes on God while at the same time having to deal with people face to face. So often we are taught by God through other people. David faced many life threatening situations and the cause was almost always people. We have no control over how

other people behave. Through these situations in which he had no control over, David learned that everything was happening within God's hands. Peter confirmed this truth when he wrote in his epistle, “⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

After these years of training, David became king and ruled in Jerusalem for thirty-three years. It wasn’t always peaceful in the kingdom and during his reign, David’s own son Absalom conspired to overthrow him. When this happened, David had to flee the capital and was betrayed and humiliated (2 Samuel 15, 16). In the past weeks we saw how both the priests Eli and Samuel’s sons did evil in the temple, and here we find that David faced the same problem with his son. His own son was trying to take his life, so we can just imagine the pain and grief he was going through. Another thing we should note is that although Saul was one of Scripture’s bad examples, his son Jonathan was David’s best friend and most trusted ally. His father Saul had a deep-rooted problem, but Jonathan earned David’s confidence and even risked own his life to support David. So let us remember that we can’t make conclusions about what kind of person a child will grow up to be.

But even David made two grave mistakes in his life. The first was his incident with Bathsheba. At that time, the Israelites were at war with the Ammonites. The war was an easy victory so David didn’t even see a need to go to the battlefield and instead let his men take charge while he remained at his palace. He woke up one evening after he had a nap and walked out on the roof. From that place he could see the whole kingdom below him. It seemed liked the safest place David could be in. But it turned out to be the exact opposite. From there he saw Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers, as she was bathing, and he summoned her to the palace and committed adultery with her, after which she became pregnant and to cover up this up, he deliberately sent her husband Uriah to the frontline to kill him. To cover up one sin, he glossed it over with another, and he tumbled down into a pit of his own iniquity (2 Samuel 11, 12). He was the king of Israel, so he had the power and authority to force his subjects to say and believe whatever he

commanded them. But David confessed and sincerely repented of his sins before God and before his people.

David made another great mistake and this was when he took a census of his kingdom (Samuel 24). You might wonder what is wrong with taking a census. Let me explain the background. During the time of the Book of Judges, Israel didn't have a standing army. Soldiers were gathered from each tribe every time a war broke out. But during Saul's reign, they began recruiting foreign mercenaries in order to keep up with threats from neighboring states. David continued to employ mercenaries in his army, but as he saw the advanced weaponry used by his enemies on the battlefield, he felt that he needed an even stronger military and decided to issue a decree that is an equivalent to what we know today as the draft. And in order to do this he needed to take a census. He may have also had a desire to display his own military's power to the surrounding nations. In this way he led Israel to depend on her own military force instead of trusting in the Lord. Because of this the Lord plagued the land for three days and it is recorded that seventy thousand people died as a result.

When he was confronted about his sin with Bathsheba, he repented (Psalm 32, 51). After he took the census and counted his fighting men, he was conscious-stricken and repented before the Lord saying he had done a foolish thing (2 Samuel 24:10). An important thing to note about these two incidents is that they both happened when his nation was secure and he had a good reputation among his people. In contrast, his faith grew stronger during times of trial like when he was being hunted by Saul. But during times of peace and prosperity, David fell into sin. Paul gives us the following warning regarding this:

“12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

In a Japanese TV drama called “Jin”, a very similar phrase often appeared during the story which said “God never allows a trial you cannot bear”. David

experienced trials that were brought about by other people and those he brought on himself. But all of these trials shaped him into becoming a king who is obedient to God. Like us, he too was only human and made mistakes in his life, but through these mistakes he learned to keep obeying and trusting in God.

So far we have taken a look at the lives of the priest Eli, his successor Samuel, the first king of Israel Saul, and today the life of David, the second king of Israel. As mentioned in the beginning of today's message, David is a good example for us to imitate, but at the same time made some serious mistakes from which we could also learn. Throughout his hectic life, he continued to learn how to be obedient to God. And it is God's desire for us to be like David in our own lives. We've been through, are going through, and will go through many things in life. We may continue to be faithful towards God during these trials or at times fail to do so. But through all of these things we face in our lives, the Lord is leading us to one goal. That goal is that we, like David, may continue to live a life of trusting and obeying the Lord. Let us pray.

Translated by Keita Machida