

The Story: The Man After God's Own Heart
By Jason Huff
Psalms 59:1-5,9,16-17, Luke 1:26-35, 1 Samuel 16:1-13a

Our final Scripture reading today comes from 1 Samuel 16:1-13a. Listen now to God's Word. "The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." But Samuel said, "How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me." The LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate." Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?" Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these." So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives." So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power."

The Christmas presents are all unwrapped. The ham and eggnog are gone and the cards have been opened. Games have been lost and won and the batteries have worn out. In amidst all the holiday cheer, there's the memory of a child born in Bethlehem, a child who would grow to be a man, a man who would live and die a perfect life and be raised again to life eternal, the Savior who would offer us salvation from sin. As we think on His birth, it rings in the back of our minds – what would it be like if *I* were a man or woman like Him? What might my life look like? None of us strives to *be* Jesus, but a true Christian wants to follow him wholeheartedly. What would someone with a heart dedicated to God be like?

In the last few weeks, we've seen examples of godly people like Ruth and Hannah and Samuel. This week, we are introduced to David. The Bible says he is a man after God's own heart. He becomes Israel's greatest king. Only Moses himself compares to David in the leadership of God's people. Not only was he a great warrior, he was also a musician and poet, responsible for a great number of the psalms. He was talented, he was bold, but most of all, he was sold out to God. We're going to spend two weeks with David, and this week, we'll how his pursuit of God speaks to us today.

When we left off last week, Saul, the first king of Israel, had repeatedly disobeyed God. God told the prophet Samuel to anoint another man king of Israel instead. As we just heard, Samuel goes to Bethlehem at God's command and makes a sacrifice there. God has chosen someone from the house of Jesse, and Samuel assumes it will be Jesse's oldest son Eliab. But God tells him to anoint Jesse's youngest, David. David was so far back in his family line that he was left tending the family sheep while the rest went to the sacrifice. Samuel anoints David essentially in secret, as Saul is to remain king for now, but David will succeed him on the throne. This anointing is a promise, and with this promise comes the Holy Spirit in power upon David.

Soon afterwards comes the story of Goliath. David goes up to the Israel's front lines to bring his brothers food only to hear this raving giant cursing Israel and asking for a duel. The soldiers are terrified, but David is confident that God will bring this blasphemer down. Everyone thinks he's too young for battle. David can't even wear the armor Saul gives him. He's a simple shepherd who has protected his sheep with his bare hands. He goes to fight Goliath with just five stones and a sling. He knows that it won't be by spear or sword but by the hand of Yahweh that he and Israel will triumph. With one shot, Goliath goes down and the Philistines are routed.

David is suddenly famous. He impresses Saul and becomes his son Jonathan's closest friend. Saul sends David on missions and he returns victorious. David not only wins Saul's battles, he is Saul's favored musician. But all is not right with Saul. An evil spirit plagued him and his ego pained him as he realizes the kingship is falling from his grasp just as the prophet Samuel said it would. In anger and jealousy and sheer insanity, Saul tries to kill David on several occasions. At first, the fits of rage subsided quickly, and David stayed by Saul's side.

Eventually, Saul's madness takes over, and David flees with a few hundred loyal soldiers. In the desert of En Gedi, David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he would not do it. Instead, he took a piece of Saul's robe, and even that disturbed his conscience. He calls to Saul, showing him that he could have taken his life, but he has no right to kill God's anointed king. Saul, in a rare moment of clarity, admits his guilt and makes a treaty with David. For a short time, there is peace. But Saul changes his mind, and knowing Saul has lost it, David retreats into Philistine country. He is there when Saul and Jonathan fall in battle with the Philistine army. But David is not pleased; instead, he mourns his fallen friend and his troubled father.

Soon afterwards, David is anointed king of Judah. After a seven year struggle with loyalists to Saul's family, David is finally anointed king of all Israel. He leads Israel to decisive victories over the Philistines and the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem. He makes that city the center of his kingdom, and with great fanfare he brings the Ark of the Covenant back into Israel, dancing before the LORD in the sight of all. In fact, his display upset his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, so greatly that the two of them never had anything to do with each other after that day.

One thing disturbs David, though. He has a palace, yet the Ark sits in a tent. He decides to build a house for God. But through the prophet Nathan, God says no. God makes a promise that, instead, He will build a house for David. God will raise up one of David's offspring to build a house for Him, and God will establish his throne forever. God says, "I will be his father, and he will be my son." David is awestruck by this incredible promise God makes to Him.

By the end of this chapter, David has become an incredible king full of love for the LORD. That's where we'll leave things this week. In David, we see three truths about a person who is truly after God's own heart. The man or woman after God's own heart knows, respects, and trusts in God's sovereignty. He accepts God's disciplining, and he longs for God to be honored even at his own expense. These traits define a person who truly loves God.

First: the person after God's own heart knows, respects, and trusts in God's sovereignty. Now sovereignty is simply a three dollar word for rule or kingship. *God's* sovereignty refers to His kingly authority over the entire universe, over humanity, and over events in space and time. Everything that happens is under God's control. There are some events that God does not *desire*, such as sin and its consequences, but He *allows* them to happen as He works out His plans for us. When we believe and trust in God's sovereignty, we believe that God is working out all things for the greater good of His Kingdom and His people. When we trust in God's sovereignty, even though we don't understand how certain events fit into God's purposes, we know that what He says will come to pass, and we choose to rely on Him rather than in ourselves.

David shows total trust and reliance in God's sovereignty. He thrusts himself into danger time and again, and not because he's a skilled warrior at first. He's obviously not. He can't even wear a suit of armor when he goes out to meet Goliath! But he trusts that God will protect him, and he makes it very clear to friend and foe alike that he goes into battle solely at the pleasure of the LORD. David doesn't rely on his charisma or skill. He relies on the LORD, and God gives him success. Israel is united by a man who trusts in God's authority at every turn.

Even in grave danger, David trusts God's sovereignty and won't lay a hand on Saul. It's not because David holds Saul blameless. But he knows God is the one to bring Saul to account for his sins. But Saul is God's anointed, and David respects God. Now David has also been anointed; God intends for him to become king. When Saul steps into David's cave, it would be easy to assume that God had given Saul into David's hands. Yet David feels guilty for even trimming Saul's robe! He doesn't know why God has let this crazy man come after him, but he flees into enemy territory rather than to kill God's anointed without God's blessing.

There's a reason that we talk about God's sovereignty a lot, and it's this: when you know God is sovereign, that He is in complete control, that, as Jesus said, God has the hairs of your head numbered, that not a single sparrow falls outside the will of the Father – when you fear God, you will no longer fear anything else. The author of Hebrews writes, "God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"" David was fearless because he knew the LORD was the One who gave him victory. When you trust in God's ultimate authority over all things, you live with confidence, knowing that even in the difficult times, God has your back.

Our lives would change if we would make that leap of faith. For most of us, it's not that we don't believe in God, it's that we don't believe in a big enough God! We think we're the ones in the driver's seat, we're the ones making the decisions, we're in charge of our own destiny. But that viewpoint leads to fear. One wrong turn and you're in the ditch. One false move and your life is in jeopardy. One mistake ruins everything.

And think of how many things in our lives we can't control. We can't control when we're born or when we die. We can't control our taxes or our government or, to be honest, even our kids. Have you ever seen the sign, "A clean desk is the sign of a sick mind?" I think it's true! It's our attempt to bring order into chaos, but inevitably, things slip back into anarchy.

But if we follow David's example, we need not worry: God is in charge. The God who put every star in place, who holds the universe together, is there for us. He will win our battles for us. He will heal our hearts and free us from our sins. We must simply trust that He will do it and let Him move in our lives. Even those things we believe are on us to do – to share Jesus with our friends, to act with kindness and humility, to show mercy and forgiveness – God will do those things *through* us. Have no fear; with God all things are possible.

If we believe and trust in the sovereignty of God, we are ready for the next truth: the person after God's own heart accepts God's discipline. Now the scriptural idea of discipline isn't punishment so much as it is the difficult training necessary to be ready for the work ahead. An athlete spends countless grueling hours in training before a single race is run. A doctor takes years of classes before seeing that first patient. God's discipline is the same...sometimes unpleasant, sometimes exhausting, but always towards the purpose of making us into men and women of godly faith and character.

David was anointed by Samuel to become king when he was quite young. Yet there were at least fifteen years, if not twenty, between David's anointing and David's taking the throne...a good chunk of that time spent fleeing from Saul, with the Israelite forces ordered to kill him on one side and his arch-enemies the Philistines on the other. Many people would have lost faith at that point. But David poured his heart out before the LORD. He wrote psalm after psalm calling on God to rescue him from his enemies, to deliver him from his foes, to protect him and save him. Was he in distress? Absolutely. But rather than to deny God, he withstood the discipline, and when it was finished, he was ready to lead God's people, and that he did for forty years.

Friends, we face hardship. Some of us face physical challenges we never expected. Some have lost loved ones; others have lost jobs. We wonder, "Why can't I have the easy life?" As Christians, the one thing I pray we don't have is the easy life, and that's because the LORD disciplines those he loves. Hebrews 12:10 says, "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." Not every burden we have is God's discipline. But know this: God will use your burdens, your grief, your pain, and mold you through them. Let God's discipline transform you into his prized child.

Finally, the person after God's own heart longs for God to be honored even at his own expense. David leapt before the LORD when the Ark of the Covenant finally entered Jerusalem. He didn't care what anybody thought – he was going to praise God. It was such a display that his wife Michal despised him for it. This was no small loss; Scripture says Michal loved David and helped him escape her father Saul. But David would have nothing to do with her if she could not accept his love for the LORD was always going to come first. Later, David wants to build a temple for God, a permanent home for the Ark rather than a simple tent. Nathan the prophet didn't suggest it. God Himself didn't request it. But David was so on fire for the honor and glory of God that he desired to make a place for God.

God says no – David isn't the one to build it. But God makes a promise to David that David's house, someone of his lineage, *will* one day build a home for God. This comes true in a certain sense when David's son Solomon builds the first temple. But the language is unmistakable to the Christian ear. God promises that this one who will build his house will be His Son, and He will be his Father, and His kingdom will have no end. God is making the promise that the messiah will be from David's line, and in Jesus, that promise was fulfilled. God lavished His goodness on David because David was zealous for God's honor.

How passionate are we for God's honor and glory? Think about it this way – we sing songs that say we “bow down” or “lift our hands” before God, but we don't. Maybe we take them as some sort of spiritual metaphor, that we honor God in our hearts. But why *not* with our bodies? Why not kneel or put a hand in the air? In fact, we're going to try something here. I want you to raise one hand with me. Just put a hand up to praise God. OK, we got that far. Now put the other one up. Both hands in the air with me. Now look around. We have a bunch of Presbyterians, hands raised, praising God. Take a good look because *you'll never see it again*. (You can put your hands down now.)

I'm making a joke, but I'm also trying to make a point. It feels weird, doesn't it? It feels embarrassing. Here we are, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, and it feels strange to us that somebody might see us praising God with our hands in the air. But there should be nothing more natural to us in the world than praising God. We have joy! We have freedom from sin! We have freedom from death! We have the Spirit working in our lives! We should be passionate about the God who has given us all of that and so much more! David danced half-naked in the streets, leaping in the air to praise the God of heaven. Now you don't want to see me doing that! But let's be zealous for God's glory!

It's not just in worship that we should want to see God honored. We should want to see Him honored in our lives. David wanted to build God a temple so God would have a place to dwell when He so chose. God has chosen His dwelling place; He takes up permanent residence in every believer. We are His temple. How are we honoring Him through it? Do we watch what we say and how we act to honor God? The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesians, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Do we guard ourselves against such things? It's not an issue of being good. It's an issue of being passionate about honoring God's presence in us, for the Spirit literally lives within us who believe. Let's honor Him with our lips and with our lives so that we each might be a pure place for God to dwell.

David was a man after God's own heart. In his trust and zeal for God and his willingness to be disciplined as God's own child, David was blessed, and through His family all the earth has been blessed through Jesus Christ. I invite you this week to enter into God's story more fully. Believe in Jesus and let Him enter your heart. Trust in Him, let Him discipline you, honor Him...and He will transform you into a son or daughter after His own heart.