

“The Lord Delivered Him”

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I want to quickly jump - I did this in a class and it took me 40 minutes so, I'm going to do this in a whole lot less time - I want to walk really quick with you through the Cliff Notes version of David's life, so we can understand what it meant for him to be a hero, and what it meant for him to be righteous in the eyes of God, even when we are dealing with a very flawed and imperfect person.

So, the first time we hear about David was when he happened to be of the right line and lineage: he was of the root of Jesse. So here he is - he has brothers. Eli comes to talk to him, because they want to find out from Jesse who the next King might be. He goes through all of the brothers. You know the story. None of the others match up. We know that Samuel isn't going to find the right one, and then, all of a sudden, the littlest, the last of all of Jesse's sons comes up: the little shepherd boy and it is David.

I don't know how the prophet knew that it was going to be David, but it was, and the first thing we find out in Scripture is that David comes, and hears about this great war that was about to take place with the Philistines. So, you have the Philistines all lining up. You have the Israelites all lining up; and, you are going to have one terrific battle.

Now, they were not dumb going into battle. It wasn't just the Philistines and the Israelites, you had the Moabites and the other “bites” and whoever knows how many other groups there were. And, it wasn't smart to have too many wars. Because if you had the Philistines fighting the Israelites and they tore each other apart, and there were not many left, the other armies would come in. The other nations would take both countries over. So, it wasn't unusual for an army to say, “I tell you what, guys, let's negotiate this. We will put our best warrior out here and you take your best warrior, and whoever wins that battle between the two men will win the war.” That way both armies do not lose too many people. That protects both nations from other invading armies.

That's why Goliath and David ended up doing battle in the first place: to protect nations and their armies. So, out comes, Goliath - and Goliath is humongous, I'm talking maybe 7' tall and he weighed about 375 pounds, and he is fully armored. You did not want to mess with Goliath.

Well, the poor people of Israel kind of looked at each other and went, “You do it.” [Laughter] Nobody wanted to do this. But out walks this little guy named David - still not more than a kid - and he said, “OK, let's put on the armor.” Well, the armor was too big for poor little David and it was only going to slow him down. So, he goes out there and, you know the story, with nothing more than a sling shot. He goes up and pulls it back and hits Goliath right between the eyes. He's gone. David wins the war. But here is the part we forget to read in our little stories that we do in Sunday School: They had an agreement that whoever won, won the battle, and they would go home. But the Israelites didn't do that. The minute Goliath went down, the Israelite army went out and wiped out a great many of the Philistines.

Now, who was righteous? Who was guilt free? It wasn't God's chosen people in that moment. They broke the covenant that they had with the Philistines and nearly wiped them out.

So, I scratch my head. What in the world happened?

Well, David went on - and we hear more about David. Now David is growing up and he is growing into himself. He is muscular, and he is handsome, and it said in the Bible that both women loved him and men. And, what made his life miserable was how handsome he was; because King Saul had a number of children, but his daughter, Michal, and his son, Jonathan, both fell in love with David. Apparently, you couldn't even look at the guy without falling in love with him. And Saul became jealous, because remember - if you watch "Game of Thrones," you know there is a whole lot more going on with the King and Queen and everything. You are also constantly jockeying for how you are going to protect your Kingdom. How you are going to align your children? And, you can't even trust your own children, so you have to be very careful who you align yourself with.

Saul, rightfully or wrongfully, knew from day one that David was a problem. So, David fled knowing that Saul was going to get him. David flees this way and then Saul chases him down, and he goes to another place, and here and there. He lands, after a time, in Absalom. There he realizes he has to put together an Army, so he gathers a group of the lowliest criminals, most-marginalized group of people you could ever find. Let's face it, those are usually the group of people who can fight reasonably well. So, he gathers them together and he forms his own little army. They were formidable. He would go and attack the Palestinians in a town, and plunder all of their stuff. That kept his group of formidable army guys happy, because they could take. But David was wily. He knew that one day he wanted Saul's job, so he would only fight those that the people of Judah in the southern Kingdom would appreciate him going after.

David was smart as can be, so he would go out on these raids and would steal everybody's stuff, but he only stole, ordinarily, from the people who were against him. But that only inflamed King Saul more because the people were happy with David. They turned him into some [kind of] Robin Hood figure. That just angered and riled Saul's jealousy even more.

So, one day, Saul was hunting David. David, this time, had to flee all the way down to the Red Sea. (If you have ever been to the Red Sea, first of all, you have to take a swim, because it is so full of salt you are just so buoyant, but that is another story for another time. I will bring slides someday.) [Laughter.] Around, there are all of these caves. Hundreds of caves. You have heard of the Qumran cave where the Dead Sea scrolls were found - in those caves by the Dead Sea? Saul came up and wanted to get away from his troops for a minute. He went into one of the caves. Wouldn't you know it, it would be the very same cave David is hiding in. Saul has his back to everything and there is David, who pulls his sword, thinks about it, but for whatever reason decides - whether it's his fear of God or respect for the office of the King does not kill King Saul. He let Saul know he could leave and, in that moment, Saul repents of his wanting to kill David; but the minute David leaves with his men, Saul wishes he had killed David and goes after him again.

This goes on back and forth, to and fro, and all of the other problems he continues to have with David and everything that is going on. But then there is a second situation. Now, all of

a sudden, David is caught seeing Saul and, another moment to kill him. This time David goes after him and catches him sleeping in a tent. David knows, "Now, this is my time;" and whether it is God stopping him, his conscience, I don't know, he doesn't kill him again. But this time and for good, Saul repents and said, "I will not hunt you down ever again." And, sure enough, he didn't; Saul even tried to be friendly with David. That didn't help much, because David, rightfully, was a little bit worried and stayed as far away from Saul as he could get, but there was never another attack.

David took that opportunity. He rallied his forces. He gathered people together, built more alliances because he was so cunning, and then, the most difficult and strange moment happened: there was another war with the Philistines, only this time the Israelites did not do very well.

Jonathan, Saul's son who David loved, was killed in the battle. The battle was overwhelming the Israelites to such a degree that Saul knew he would never survive. He fell on his sword, committed suicide and died.

Now, all of a sudden, David is going to be King. Jonathan is not there to take the throne. Whoever the other sons of Saul were, apparently they did not want it or were not capable of fighting David. We don't know. But, all of a sudden here is David. David, who had been fleeing Saul all of that time, and had all of these problems, finally had his chance.

Ish-bosheth, one of the other rulers, stepped in instead, because King Saul's general, Abner, did not want David. He still held a grudge, the same way Saul did. So now, all of a sudden, Ish-bosheth steps in and takes over the northern kingdom and David gets the southern Kingdom of Judah; Israel was split into two. They had been fighting for years - kind of like Nebraska and Iowa.

But after two years of fighting and carrying on and wondering and worrying, Ish-bosheth left, died, whatever. [He] was gone - out of the picture - and there is David. God finally blessed David with both the northern Kingdom and the southern Kingdom, and now we have one people of Israel, and David has the world by the tail, can have everything and anything he wants. [He's] truly blessed. But, the minute he has everything he needs he can't control his own happiness. Some people are better strivers, but once they have everything they ever wanted, they don't know how to respond and they often respond poorly; and David, if he was anything, was incredibly human.

So, he was out on his balcony one day, and he looks down onto the roof of Uriah, who was one of his military leaders, and sees Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, (and you know that story), out there bathing. He is aroused. He goes and gets her, and finds out she is pregnant. Now, isn't it terrible that we don't know anything about the story of Bathsheba? Was she forced? Was her life destroyed? The Bible doesn't care because it was all about men.

But King David, righteous David, who, at the end of his life, has nothing to feel guilty about. Not only [did he] impregnate another man's wife, but now figures out he is in trouble. He is going to fix it, and he is clever. I told you that. So, what does he do now? He comes up with this brilliant idea that he will bring Uriah back so that he can then be with

his wife, and then it will be Uriah's baby. But, Uriah has more integrity than the King, and Uriah says, "I can't leave. We are fighting, and I will stay with my men."

You can just see David saying, "What am I going to do?" So, he figures out a way for one of his own men to kill Uriah in battle and make it look like the enemy did it. David is smart and David is clever, and whatever David defines and does, works out. And sure enough that worked too, and Uriah died.

It wasn't one of the most glowing, heroic moments in the Bible, so God is not happy. Thank goodness God isn't happy. So he brings the prophet Nathan to go to David and say, "You really messed up here. You need to repent." Go back and read it; but it is almost as if the prophet has to trick David into repenting for the sin that he did - this heroic figure King David.

So now we move on in the story - everything is going on reasonably well, after that horrible episode, except that David has sons that are not very nice. He wasn't a very good father, according to everything that was described. He has two sons, Amnon and Absalom, and Amnon has raped his half-sister Tamar,

(Absalom goes in and is upset when he hears about the relationship with Tamar and raped her,) so he goes and kills the first brother, Amnon. What does David do? Nothing. Absalom is so upset that he goes and hides. David doesn't even go looking for him.

Finally, David repents, somehow. We wonder how. What we don't know is that story. Then Absalom comes back and David won't see him for 2 years. In that 2 years, finally, David wants to make amends; but Absalom, the son, is so angry that he tries to go to war with his father, David. He goes to war, steals his concubines and then Absalom, David's son, is killed in battle at the hand of David's troops. Can you imagine? It isn't very good parenting.

At the end of his life David is now an old man. He is fighting with the children he has left because he decides to not give the bounty - his whole heritage - to his older son which is what was recommended, which was almost law; but he gives it to the next son, Solomon.

So even on his dying, death-bed, his relationship with his children is fractured. All that mess and why is he a hero? The only thing that is beneficial in David's life was his unending trust and love of God.

When David received both the northern and southern Kingdoms, he decides he would go and get the Ark of the Covenant and bring it into Jerusalem - no longer in a tent out hidden and protected, but brought into Jerusalem. He was going to build a house for God, but even then, when he brings it back, and dances and rejoices, he is so embarrassed because his robes went up. (It was kind of like Scottish guys wearing kilts, should not dance and spin.) [Laughter.] [The] same applies to David - even then he gets his wife upset with that action; but he didn't upset God, because God was so thrilled that David was so excited to be in the presence of God, through the Ark of the Covenant, that God rejoiced in David's exuberance and being in the presence of God. David wrote songs, almost like love poems to God that you can find in some of the Psalms. That relationship was strong.

So, as I tell you this story, I scratch my head about what it means to be a hero; what it means to be one of the most faithful individuals in the history of the Old Testament; the one who was so important that he became the line and lineage of Jesus the Christ. Maybe there is hope in knowing, one, that if our lives are not easy that doesn't mean that God doesn't love us. Number two, that we can be flawed, that we can make horrific mistakes, and that does not mean that God gives up on us. That if God can love - truly love - someone that could do something that by today's standards would not only cast them out as socially inappropriate, but literally throw you in jail for the rest of your life, and God can still love you, then there might be room for you and me.

No matter what you have done, there is a responsibility to repent, as David did. However he did it with the prophet, he still repented. And, no matter what you and I have done that have separated us, that has been horrific, God has not given up on us. We can still be heroes in the sight of God. But the one thing God *does* expect from us is to love God, to honor God, to celebrate God, which you are doing today in this house, that King David built and that the Holy Spirit continues to restore.

I won't ask you to follow David's example, but I ask you to rely on God's grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.