

David | The Once and Future King

The Mad King

First Samuel 16.13ff

8.8.21

¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. ¹⁵ Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. ¹⁶ "Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well." ¹⁷ So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me now a man who can play well and bring him to me." ¹⁸ Then one of the young men said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him." ¹⁹ So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David who is with the flock." ²⁰ Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread and a jug of wine and a young goat, and sent them to Saul by David his son. ²¹ Then David came to Saul and attended him; and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer. ²² Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight." ²³ So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

We're looking at perhaps the most developed and complete, complex biography from antiquity, the life of David, the once and future king.

When he first trots on to the stage (as we saw last week) he was the youngest son of eight (or seven - 1 Chr 2.15 ?) brothers and dismissed as the kid... He had the lowest task as shepherd. THEN he was summoned from the pasture at the command of the prophet Samuel and God commanded the prophet to anoint (lit: "messiah") this handsome little nonentity and thus designate that he, little David, was the Lord's choice for king.

Then, after being designated king (by God's anointing) David... went back to the pasture ('cause those sheep won't take care of themselves!) – all pretty anticlimactic... underwhelming at best. And it all took place in Bethlehem... in the Tribe of Judah... maybe ten miles from where the reigning king, Saul lived in Gibeah.

Today, by a series of God orchestrated events, nobody David and KING Saul (the failed king) meet and *begin a working relationship* spanning over a decade and a friendship that lasts about ten minutes ... because Saul is CRAZY!

Today's topic is: how to work alongside people who are INSANE. I won't ask for a show of hands but I would raise mine – how many work with deranged coworkers? I know I'd raise MY hand!

Truth is: we go from the difficult *Book of Revelation* to easy, *1st Samuel* – only to discover: it's not so easy. There are hard things in this passage – a man who had the Holy Spirit taken from him, an evil spirit from the Lord, the onset of mental illness, music therapy, but our focus is the jerks at your works!

What really separates David and Saul? How do you account for the disparities between them? And how to work with really difficult people (esp. a *supervisor*)?

1. The Differences

2. The Underlying Cause

3. How/Where the differences play out in our work

Saul started well. He seemed humble. He was not only tall and handsome but he was merciful and wise (10.27) and well organized in battle and he commanded respect. People followed him into war (11.7; 14.47).

But as Eugene Peterson noted, “We begin to pick up indications that Saul, for all his charisma and charm, wasn't all that much interested in God.” (*Leap Over a Wall*, p 26)

Where Saul went wrong *was in the arena of worship*. The two glaring failures that got him fired (by God!) seem pretty small compared to David's infamous sins against God and against Uriah/Bathsheba. Saul's sins, were not immorality or violence or political corruption – you know: the big ones! Saul's were worship failings.

He was going into battle and the custom was to first worship God by a sacrifice – to celebrate that “*the battle belongs to the Lord*”. But this time (CH 13) the priest was late, the enemy was advancing and the people were in a panic. Some of the soldiers were running.

So, Saul said, “I know I'm not supposed to DO this *since I'm not a priest* but surely God will understand.” And he offers the sacrifice himself (“better than just rushing into battle without worshipping...right?!”).

And then Samuel, the priest and prophet, shows up and says, “What have you done?” (13.8 – Like God in the Garden – “where are you?”). And Saul said, “Well, you didn't show up on time... so I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.” (13.12)

And Samuel the Prophet/Priest says, “...now your kingdom will not last. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart...”(13.14)

David (not named) but Samuel first raised the idea of David in THIS context – the point being, “This breach in worship shows that Saul doesn’t really KNOW the LORD... Saul sees worship as a means to an end and is NOT a man after God’s own heart”

He thinks he has to perform this ceremony to guarantee that God would give them success in battle. And even though this test was a hard one to pass because the enemy was coming, the people were panicking and the soldiers were deserting AND THE PRIEST WAS LATE – still it showed Saul’s heart!

And still, none of that changed the nature of God – it’s like touching a high-tension electric wire because ...you had, what you thought was good reason – your good reasons don't change the nature of electrical current. God is still holy, He’s still unique and for the king to publically misuse worship as a guarantee of victory shows that Saul’s heart wasn't with God.

The second and decisive failure (CH 15) was also a worship failure for Saul. When Saul gave in to the voice of the people and chose pragmatism and popularity over holiness and trust. He kept the best livestock and lied about offering it to the Lord in worship.

So, if Saul, “wasn't all that much interested in God” David on the other hand was obsessed with God. For all the wonderful descriptors of David in v. 18 of today’s passage – seven in total – where he’s portrayed as the Bethlehemite, skillful musician, mighty man of valor etc – the seventh attribute is everything: “the LORD is with him”.

This was said of Saul but not in the same way as it’s said here. (see 10.7 – “elohim” not “Yhwh”) THIS is the one great underlying factor that separates Saul from David. “The LORD (YHWH) was with him” and knowing that, believing that and living in that sense of grace – it made David a worshiper. He was NOT, in this sense, like Saul. He was NOT mechanical in his relationship to God. He – this word sounds trendy but I don't know what else to use – David’s heart resonated with God’s.

It was like the harp/lyre/guitar that he played with strings vibrating in a way that the human ear found pleasant and harmonious – so David’s heartstrings vibrated with the nature of God. David will do some crazy things (like acting the part of a madman in CH 21; or dancing with all his might before God in worship publically – what did THAT look like?!)

There was a freedom in David that was not there in Saul... and David will credit this freedom in his poetry over and over to the “chesed” of God. He saw that the relationship he had with God was not a matter of David’s doing but that God’s covenant-loyalty was responsible. God’s “lovingkindness” (that’s a word invented to translate the Hebrew word, chesed – it’s doing His part of the deal AND doing our part of the deal) - for David, the heart he had for God was itself a gift from God and that gift (what in Hebrew is chesed and in Greek is charis – grace!) the gift-love of God was responsible for making David the man who had a heart after God’s own heart.

In this episode, the people around Saul could see that something was very wrong. God withdrew the anointing from Saul – God negated the people’s choice and transferred, as it were, transferred the empowerment necessary to be king from Saul to David and the weight of the kingdom crushed Saul.

God sent a spirit (because ALL the spirits belong to God and He dispatches them as He wills) and that tormenting spirit *pushed Saul in the direction Saul wanted to go*. God said to Saul, “Thy will be done” and Saul lost his sanity.

And when, God orchestrating every detail, when the servants suggest a harpist and David’s dad sends him with bread and wine (literally a “donkey-load” of bread – remember, Bethlehem means House of Bread – maybe they had a famous bakery there so they had to represent Bethlehem well – just like you, if you visit friends up North you might bring a bag of Florida oranges [or an iguana!]) -

But doesn't the scene of the Bethlehemite with beautiful eyes entering a city with a donkey-load of bread and wine and a goat – doesn't that remind you of another scene when THE King from Bethlehem entered Jerusalem on a donkey and He Himself was the Bread of Life and His blood the Wine of joy and refreshment and relief to a world parched from mechanistic/graceless religion... And He Himself came as the Scapegoat to carry our sins outside the city and put those sins to death in His own crucifixion. Do you see it? Do you see Jesus Christ, the true King from Judah, from Beth-lehem, the House of Bread – see how He haunts this passage!

He is the incarnation of God and the incarnation of grace and He is the One who gave David a heart for God and HE can do the same for you.

Which brings me to the final point today – YOU and the arena where grace works itself (Himself) OUT in our lives – i.e. at work. We all have callings/vocations. We’re called to a daily routine and it’s THERE that God works His grace (chesed) into our lives and through our lives to bless others.

David was anointed for a work, a calling, *an office or position in what God is doing in the world*.

Saul, who’s now begun his slide into madness and he needs a grace-man to help him. It’s very much like Pharaoh with Joseph or Nebuchadnezzar with Daniel – when they’re deeply troubled and they need a grace-man to soothe their tormented souls.

Saul is a kind of symbol for the world, the flesh and the devil – we work in that environment and we should know that God has planted us around people who both benefit from our “guitar playing” or whatever service you may provide (we even have some mental health professionals among us!) but also, like Pharaoh and Saul and others – and like people controlled by the world, flesh and devil – *the world has limited patience for the people of grace*.

So, if you work with crazy people – here are a few things to keep in mind. # 1 – the only reason you're not clinically insane is the grace and mercy of God to you. This will become clear to David as he continues to serve Saul and as Saul descends into madness and violence.

#2– David continued to serve Saul and even refuses to take vengeance on Saul when David had opportunity to do so. BUT David also drew the line at points and didn't allow Saul to kill him with a spear. So, if your crazy coworker tries to actually abuse or harm you, *you are well within your calling under God* to either leave or represent the truth ... truth and grace go together (in the Hebrew Bible and Greek).

#3 – When David is anointed with the Spirit and he receives this calling/work – it's BRUTAL. The Spirit anointed David's greater descendent Jesus Christ and immediately thrust Him into difficulty. Christians are anointed to serve and *it's very often* very difficult – we're given the Spirit in order to fight the world, the flesh and the devil EVEN as we serve people who are strangers to God and grace.

#4 As we DO serve unbelieving people, they may sense the gifts of God we bring *and "love" us for a time* – just like Saul loved David...until he didn't. The world benefits from the Church and they like us for what we can do for them... but the world eventually sees what we're about and sees the freedom that's ours in grace... and they love us til they don't.

#5 – The wrestling we do in our jobs and with people in the world and IN THE CHURCH (Saul was a professing believer and may have been a real believer because real believers do sometimes suffer with mental illness and similar struggles) but relationships are where God meets us and changes us – liberates us from our old self. That's very clear as we read the Psalms. They're the record of David's sanctification MOST of which took place through difficult relationships...SO run if you MUST (#MeToo) but relationships are stressful ...They're the arena where God meets us and refines us. And be honest and open with God in these difficult places (David was).

#6 – There may be some here who do NOT know the Man from Bethlehem who rode the donkey and who was the Bread and Wine of the spiritual life. If you don't know Him, Jesus Christ can be known today – you don't qualify...you don't achieve it – YOU RECEIVE it and if you want to know what the next steps may be in your life with God come talk to me. I'd love to help.