

David | The Once and Future King

The King's Speech

First Samuel 24.1-22

9.12.21

Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." ² Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. ³ He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. ⁴ The men of David said to him, "Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly. ⁵ It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. ⁶ So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed." ⁷ David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way.

⁸ Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. ⁹ David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'?" ¹⁰ "Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but my eye had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.'" ¹¹ "Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. ¹² "May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹³ "As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹⁴ "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? ¹⁵ "The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

¹⁶ When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷ He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. ¹⁸ "You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. ¹⁹ "For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. ²⁰ "Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. ²¹ "So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." ²² David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

We're following David, as he runs for his life. He's in this perilous situation of having been chosen to be king when there was already a king on the throne and that sitting king (Saul) had no intention of making way for David! So it's a very confusing, sad, raw chapter in David's life.

But the good news is: David's in God's School of grace and God is using all this pain to liberate David from his character flaws and transform him into the likeness of Jesus Christ. The David story is very dramatic, very engaging and at many different levels it draws us in emotionally, intellectually and even artistically; it's great storytelling.

When we were in Birmingham, Alabama a few years ago, we saw the magnificent fountain at Five Points. There's a great ram sitting in the middle and he's reading a book and seated all around him are the animals of the forest: a great bear and a duck a squirrel, a deer and fox and a skunk. The fountain is called, simply, The Storyteller. It's a tribute to the Southern tradition of storytelling and the idea that when a good story is well told, even the beasts of the forest stop – everyone listens.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then what is a story worth? The truth is: there are certain truths that are best learned NOT by a textbook or a dictionary definition but by a narrative, a story that goes deeper than bare facts and includes an aesthetic component, an energy and appeal that go beyond information and into the realm of formation. A narrative or story (as we see in the teaching method of Jesus Christ) often has the power to move us.

What we're witnessing in David, if you want to capture it in a word, is sanctification. David is growing in holiness; he's being consecrated or set apart for God's use in David's whole person.

And while this word, sanctification, CAN be defined, it's much better caught than taught. It's best learned NOT by the definition as much as by a picture, a moving picture – a STORY.

Today's text is a twist in the plotline, an unexpected encounter with truth and grace in the midst of grief and insanity. Today, we hear the king's speech; it's a concession speech and in it we see more clearly than we'd learn by facts alone what is the meaning of growth in grace or sanctification.

Let's look at: 1) The Strange Wilderness Path

2) The Inevitability of Concession

As soon as David is chosen for the office of king he starts to get hurt and hammered and betrayed and bent and confused and heated and cooled and heated and cooled.

Now in chapter 23 David's on the run - Saul wants to kill him but David hears that the Philistines are coming to attack this little town in the lowlands called Keilah. David feels compelled to do his civil obligation and protect his country but first David wants to know if this is what God wants (it seems like a good thing but David has to know if it's God's will).

So the Lord tells David to go and defend the city of Keilah. Then Saul, without consulting God at all, just assumes that this is a sign from God. "David is inside a walled city, so God must want me to kill him." Saul misreads providence; he doesn't know God and doesn't recognize God's will.

So again, Saul comes after David and David cries out to God for guidance again! It's becoming a recurring, repetitive habit for David - continually calling on God! It's getting to be a practice; he's learning to lean!

David is constantly at the end of his rope, constantly facing his own weakness and his own lack of resources. He's incessantly overwhelmed and in over his head so David's getting accustomed to appealing to God regularly -- learning to lean!

And this is exactly what God means to occur in David's life. David is being sculpted. It's a moving picture of a man who's growing spiritually: seeking God from a place of weakness and utter dependence until it becomes a reflex, a reflexive response, a habit.

Five times in these two chapters it says David was in the wilderness. The author's telling us that God is shaping David by pain and grief and danger and deprivation and weakness. It's a living, moving, graphic picture of spiritual growth taking place right before our eyes!

This is a young man who's learning to rely on God and who would later write these words: "Only in God is my soul at rest; He only is my rock and my defense." (Ps 62)

It happens in the wilderness. God proves Himself to David in the wilderness. God provides an "angel" to minister to David, Jonathan, the soul-friend shows up (23.15) and it says, "Jonathan encouraged David in God."

Then David gets betrayed by a group of Saul-loyalists and barely escapes when Saul gets news that the Philistines are attacking. So he has to leave the David-hunt to fight the Philistines.

And THEN this odd encounter in chapter 24: David's hiding out in a cave with some of his guys and "Saul is coming!" says the lookout. "Shhhhh—everyone be quiet! He's marching with like 3,000 troops!"

"No worries! They'll never find us here in the way-back of the cave! They'll march right by us!"

But they don't march by... It's the craziest thing! Saul has to go to the bathroom; I mean: you gotta be kidding!

And in the pitch black... his eyes failing to adjust to the darkness... Saul wanders in blind. He comes right next to David. You can feel the drama here; if you've ever played Hide-and-Seek and

your heart was just in your throat because the one who was “it” was right... next... to you but he didn’t see you!

And suddenly, in a most ironic, unexpected, surprise the tables turn; a complete reversal. Saul, the all-powerful, tower of strength and David the dove, the prey, the helpless victim. The fox is now the hound. The hunter is now the hunted. David is in the catbird seat. Saul is in his hand; God has arranged it. David is in control and Saul is crouching in the dark, by himself, unguarded vulnerable. (‘Caught with his...)

David's men say "David this is it; God wants you to kill Saul! Read the signs!" But David says, "No! You don't know God like I do." David cuts the edge of the vulnerable, helpless king’s robe. Some of the commentators agree that this was a euphemism for symbolic emasculation... David is saying, “I could have cut more than just the robe!”

And then David's conscience bothers him. See: this is being in the school of grace and it makes David dependent on God and tender in his conscience. His heart trusts in God alone, not manipulating or exploiting in any way. And Saul is God’s messiah... the king anointed by God.

And finally we come to the High Point in this whole drama, the speeches of David and Saul.

David comes out of the cave. He humbles himself and addresses Saul as "my lord", literally prostrates himself to the ground. Again, in verse 12 David strongly expresses his total trust and full dependence on God. David refers to himself as a “dog and a flea”; he says “King, I am no threat do you! That is, unless God is FOR me.” And Saul responds with an unexpected concession speech. Listen again:

“When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you... Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand.” (16-17, 20)

When Saul sees this weak man who is now in the power position and instead of taking advantage of the moment, David humbles himself and depends completely on God’s grace, Saul breaks he weeps and he faces the truth...

The truth I want US to face this morning and to remember is that both David and Saul concede to God ... Concession is inevitable and unavoidable.

David yields to God, sweetly and gradually and he does it because he's convinced of God's tender mercy and His glorious goodness, love and power. And God's choice, David, has learned

and is learning to simply trust God. David knows that God takes the pain and grief and confusion in this life and tenderly converts it into growth and beauty (Divine Alchemy).

David the shepherd is getting to know God the Shepherd (24.3). David, the poet, is becoming God's poetry. (Ephesians 2.10) ... Saul, on the other hand, is also conceding. He's throwing in the towel with David: "I can't beat this guy because... God is FOR him."

Saul weeps to recognize that his whole life has been built on self-sufficiency and manipulation and independence from God now he has to face a man who is weak, under resourced, nowhere to lay his head but David knows God and trusts God. And Saul can't deny it and it breaks him. Psalm 66: "even Your enemies will give forced obedience to You..." (3)

And the question facing us is: how will YOU concede, like David or like Saul?

Some may say "Um... No thanks... I'm not going to concede at all. I'll do it my way. I can appreciate a religious spiritual approach to life but it's not for me I'm here as a guest... happy for you but it's not for me."

Well, respectfully I want to say, "That'll get you only so far because eventually we all concede – it's just a matter of how/when you're going to do it."

It may be when the tables suddenly turn: you may be at the top of your game; you have more new accounts than you know what to do with... you're pretty and witty and wild – you're in demand. You're young and you have the world by the tail and doggone-it people like you! And that's great; I certainly don't wish you ill; I hope your streak continues... But it won't.

Suppose somehow the tables turn and you find yourself suddenly vulnerable and weak and helpless maybe you get sick, face great difficulty in a relationship, in a job situation, financially, emotionally. And you may ask yourself- "well... how did I get here? The tables have turned – I never thought this could happen to me!"

Does that sound far-fetched to you? It's not.

And if not a sudden reversal of fortune...still... before long we all look back on our lives from our deathbeds and say "Wow! Where did the years go?"

And I'm not trying to scare you but what kind of broken, splintered, confused leap into the darkness will you take then, when you're forced to relinquish the illusion of control? OR you could see now what David saw: that this is a God who loves us powerfully who knows all about reversal of fortune because He made Himself totally vulnerable like David.

He became one of us... He took on a disguise and hid like David hid in that cave... God in Jesus Christ looked totally weak and vulnerable and held out His hands to us and pleaded...not for His life but for OURS. He could've "come in hot" (as they say) – He could've called angels, powers down on our rebellious heads...could've forced us to concede ...but instead He lowered Himself...became a Servant.

He had us in His hands WHICH is an interesting word in this whole context because the word "hand" occurs again and again in these chapters. About 20x in CH 23-24 – the hand is synonymous with POWER and control. So, in v 6 (God is saying) "Behold I am about to give the enemy into your hand..." and in v 6 David says, "Far be it for ME to stretch out my HAND against God's anointed..."

Saul, the control-freak, paranoid mad-man always has a spear in his hand...David says, "see the edge of your robe in my HAND..."

David's saying, "I relinquished control of my life...I'm not taking matters into my own hands...though I could have... but I'm learning not to trust these hands ...not to demand my way...I'm learning (in the wilderness) to put my life in His hands: 'Not what my hands have done ^[]_{SEP} can save my guilty soul; ^[]_{SEP} not what my toiling flesh has borne ^[]_{SEP} can make my spirit whole.'"

Because Saul would not trust...he would not open up his clenched fist and relinquish control...would not come out with his hands up...The sufferings/pains he met did not make him pliable in God's "artist hands." The same sun that softens the WAX also hardens the CLAY and Saul was NOT being sanctified by suffering but only becoming hard and bitter.

David, on the other hand, is changing under the Potter's Hands... In the end, David looks so much like Jesus Christ. He relinquished all manipulation and control and trusted the God of Covenant and Grace.

He's so secure that he's able to lay down his life before Saul. David knows that the Artist who's shaping him has Hands that can be trusted... And WE have seen it all the more clearly because we've seen that those Divine Almighty hands bear scars in them... the marks of the nails Jesus Christ accepted in order to forgive me and set me free and make me all that He intends me to be.