

ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

DAVID: The Standard for Faithful Leadership

By Ron Clegg, Assoc. Pastor for Discipleship

It is difficult to narrow down all that could be said about David. After all, his life and reign occupy most of 1 Samuel and all of 2 Samuel. Those of us who attended Sunday School as children are familiar with many stories about David, especially his victory over the giant Philistine, Goliath. In addition to that, we have all of the Psalms that he authored. David was the paradigm of faithfulness in regard to Israel's kings. Every king after David is measured according to the standard David set, and none attain to His record of faithfulness and love for Yahweh. So, what can we say in such a short space about such a great king?

One of the essential descriptions of David that comes from God Himself is that he **"is a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam.13:14)**. This description takes on more meaning when we compare David to his predecessor, King Saul. Outwardly, Saul appeared to be a good king, but he was spiritually empty. In contrast, David was faithful, and that faithfulness showed in how he led Israel and how he trusted Yahweh even when it was excruciatingly difficult. I want to examine one of those difficult occasions.

David was a great king, but he was not the perfect king. The writers of Scripture made sure to show us his shocking failures. The most famous was his illicit affair with Bathsheba, which led to the birth of an illegitimate son, the murder of Bathsheba's husband to conceal the affair, and a whole year of denial and cover-up. It took a dramatic encounter with the prophet Nathan to awaken David to his guilt and shame. In this confrontation, we clearly see David's faith. He did not attack Nathan in self-defense. He responded in open confession and repentance, which is seen most vividly in Psalm 51. As a result of his sin, David suffered years of family upheaval and rebellion.

Now we come to the end of David's life and another serious failing, which we find in **2 Samuel 24**. David decides he wants to know his military strength. He commands Joab, his general, to go through the whole of his realm and number the people. On the surface, this does not sound like a big deal. It actually sounds prudent. Yet, even Joab understood something of the evil nature of this request, and objected to fulfilling this demand for a census. David's command prevailed.

So, what was the problem? David's heart appears to be shifting a bit from his absolute trust in Yahweh to protect the kingdom of Israel, to a greater reliance on his own strength. He was looking for a sense of security in his military power, and maybe even boasting in himself as the king of such a great nation.

It is here in the midst of David's failure that we actually find the best picture of a heart that ultimately finds rest in Yahweh alone. In this sin, David does not need a prophet to come

and confront him. His own heart convicts him to the point that he very quickly goes to Yahweh seeking forgiveness (**vs.10**). This is one of the chief qualities of a faithful leader. All leaders will fail at one point or another, but how they deal with their failure shows the substance of their heart. A faithful leader who is resting in Christ alone will accept responsibility for his failure quickly and fully, not with defensiveness or partial confession. No, he looks at his sin in the face, acknowledges it in all of its ugliness, and then takes it to the one place where it can be sufficiently dealt with—the throne of Grace. This is the quality we need to see in our own leaders. We absolutely want them to avoid sin and failure, but more importantly we need to see how they respond when sin and failure come. Do they hide? Do they blame others? Do they defend themselves by minimizing their sin? Or, do they own it fully? The leader who trusts in Jesus enough to confess his sin and repent is the leader who can show the rest of us how to run to Jesus with our own sin and find forgiveness and grace.

The second way we see David's trust in Yahweh is in his response to Yahweh's judgment on his sin. This is a very peculiar dilemma for David. The prophet Gad comes to David with three options. He can suffer three years of famine, three months of fleeing from his enemies, or three days of pestilence. That does not seem like much of a choice. Notice in all of these, the very strength that David was resting in was going to be reduced in some potentially harsh ways.

Here David's response is enlightening. Where does he throw himself for help in such a hard place? Amazingly he goes to the One who is imposing judgment. Instead of cowering in fear or fleeing, he goes directly and solely to the One who is bringing the hardship. He trusts enough in the faithfulness and mercy of the Judge to know that the arms of the Judge, even in times of punishment and correction, are the safest place for David to be.

How often do we sense God's displeasure and painfully hard discipline, and then run away? Of course we want to run away. Why would we run to someone for comfort if they are obviously angry with us? If we have lost God's favor, won't we just receive His anger? At such times, God does not appear to be so inviting and secure. Yet, this is not the picture we are given of the discipline of God towards His loved ones, something David obviously understood. **Hebrews 12:5-6** speaks of God's discipline, quoting from **Proverbs 3:11-12**:

- 11 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
12 for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.***

Do you see that last phrase? Discipline comes to us, not because God no longer delights in us and wants merely to punish us for failure. Instead, He is showing His delight in us by His discipline. He loves us and delights in us enough to discipline. Too often we think that when things get difficult, God is simply pouring out His anger on us as punishment. Instead, He is lovingly doing whatever He must do to rid us of that which will destroy us. His discipline is not removing life from us. It is bringing life to us. And, if that is the disposition of the One who disciplines, where better can we go to find security and hope in our times of failure than the very arms of our Judge?

David understood this, and his response was one of deep faith and reliance on the mercy and goodness of His Covenant God. Oh, to have leaders with this kind of complete trust in Yahweh, who can then show us how to run to Jesus with such abandon. I am thankful for David and his heart that runs after the knowledge of God.