

(Gaining God's Approval) 7. the Testing of David

by Zac Poonen

David's life is a testament to God's approval, which is gained through faithfulness at home and at work, a concern for God's Name, refusal to take revenge, faith in God's sovereignty, and honest acknowledgement of sin.

Scripture: Genesis 41:46, 1 Samuel 16:11, 1 Samuel 17:26, 2 Samuel 12:13, Psalm 66:10-12, Psalm 75:6-7, Isaiah 49:23, Matthew 6:9, Acts 13:22, Romans 12:19-21

Topics: "Faithfulness", "Trust in God's Sovereignty"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the testing of David as a man after God's own heart, highlighting his faithfulness in mundane tasks, concern for God's glory, and refusal to take revenge against Saul. David's journey to kingship was marked by trials that tested his patience and faith in God's sovereignty, demonstrating that true service to God begins with faithfulness in everyday life. Poonen illustrates how David's concern for God's name fueled his faith, enabling him to overcome fear and challenges, while also stressing the importance of humility and repentance in the face of sin. Ultimately, David's life serves as a model for believers to trust in God's timing and to seek His approval through integrity and faithfulness.

Transcript

God testified concerning David saying, "I have found David, a man after My own heart, who will do all my will" (Acts 13:22).

Saul had been God's first choice as king of Israel. But Saul failed in both the tests that God gave him - through impatience (1 Sam. 13) and disobedience (1 Sam. 15). And so God took away the kingdom from him and gave it to David.

But it was a long and arduous road that David trod from the time that he was anointed as king, to the time that he actually sat on the throne of Israel. During all those years he was tested by God in numerous ways - and he qualified.

Faithfulness at Home and at Work

The first thing we notice about David is that God called him when he was faithfully doing his earthly duties at home and in his place of work - as a shepherd-boy.

"And Samuel said to Jesse (when he came to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king of Israel, at God's command), 'Are these all the children?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest (David), and behold, he is tending the sheep.'" (1 Sam. 16:11).

Faithfulness at home and in our place of work is fundamental if God is to approve of our lives.

We considered this matter when we looked at how Jesus obtained God's approval. But it is worth repeating, for it is so important.

Jesus never called an unemployed person to the ministry of the Word. Every apostle whose calling for the ministry is described in the gospels, was called from his place of work.

The tragedy of Christian work in India today is that the vast majority of those in full-time Christian work are people who have never had a secular job at any time. This one fact alone makes it questionable whether God ever called them to His service. God places great importance on faithfulness in the ordinary tasks of our earthly life. That is what qualifies us for His service.

A Concern for God's Name

The second thing we see about David is his concern for the glory of God's Name. When Goliath was defying the armies of Israel, it was not some cheap desire for adventure that drove David to challenge the giant - but a concern for the honour of God's Name.

We read that "David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, 'What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?'"(1 Sam. 17:26).

The primary mark of every true servant of God is that uppermost in his thinking is a concern for the glory of God's Name. "Hallowed be Thy Name" is his first and spontaneous request in prayer. (Mt. 6:9).

Everything else - personal comfort and security - is secondary. This is the point at which God tests all of us, in various circumstances. Few pass the test. David was one who did.

The concern for the honour of God's Name was so intense in David, that a strong faith came into his heart that God would certainly help him to overcome Goliath. This faith drove away all his fear. Armed with that faith he went forth and slew the giant and drove away the enemies of Israel.

If we were as concerned about the glory of God's Name as David was, we would also find that faith in God drives away all fear from our hearts and that Goliaths are slain. It is often because our concern for the glory of God is so little, that we remain in timidity instead of going forth boldly in faith.

Refusal to Take Revenge

David's testings were not over with the slaying of Goliath. They had only begun. Saul's jealousy at David's popularity, made him hound David all over Israel in order to kill him. David ran from one town to another and from one cave to another.

On two occasions when Saul was alone, he was at David's mercy and David could easily have killed him. In fact David's friends told him to do so. But David refused. He would not touch God's anointed king - even if the king were a backslider. David did not want to grab the throne from Saul. He believed that God was

well able to put him on the throne in His own good time.

David's faith in the sovereignty of God is a far more wonderful thing to behold than his faith in God's ability to help him slay Goliath.

David was being tested by God when Saul lay at his mercy - not just once, but twice. The first occasion is recorded in 1 Samuel 24:3-7:

"Saul came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and he went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. And 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. And it came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. 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.' And 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."

The second occasion is recorded in 1 Samuel 26:6-12:

"David and Abishai came to the people by night, and behold, Saul lay sleeping inside the circle of the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the people were lying around him. Then Abishai said to David, 'Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time.' But David said to Abishai, 'Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt?' David also said, 'As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water; and let us go.' So David took the spear and the jug of water from beside Saul's head, and they went away, but no one saw or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a sound sleep from the Lord had fallen on them."

Each time David passed the test. He would not take revenge - for he knew that vengeance belonged to the Lord alone. He was determined to overcome evil with good.

The Bible says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."(Rom. 12:19-21).

Faith in God's Sovereignty

God had promised David the throne. And David was willing to wait for God to give it to him.

It is quite a test of our faith and our patience when we have to wait for that which God has already promised to give us.

David never lost anything by waiting and trusting in God. God had planned for David to become king as soon as he completed his thirtieth birthday; and circumstances worked out exactly as God had planned.

"David was thirty years old when he became king." (2 Sam. 5:4).

David had learnt no doubt from the biography of Joseph that God was well able to put a man on the throne at His appointed time.

The word of the Lord had tested Joseph also many years earlier in very trying circumstances.

"They afflicted Joseph's feet with fetters; he was laid in irons. Until the time that God's word came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him." (Psa. 105:18,19).

But as soon as Joseph had completed his thirtieth birthday, God's time came and Joseph became the second ruler in Egypt.

"Now Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt." (Gen. 41:46).

Neither the jealousy of his brothers nor the false accusation of Potiphar's wife could prevent God's plan for Joseph's life from being fulfilled. In fact they could not delay the accomplishment of God's will by even a single day.

David had read that story and now he was determined to prove God's faithfulness and sovereignty in his own life. And he found that what God did for Joseph, he would do for him too.

The question now is whether we have faith that what God did for Joseph and David and a host of others, He will do for us too. Here is where our faith is tested.

Do you believe, for example, that the marriage-partner whom God has planned for you will come to you, without your having to grab or to act carnally? And likewise, that the job and the house that God has planned for you - and all the other things that you need for life on earth - will come to you at God's appointed time? It is when we are faced with such needs that our faith is tested.

"Those who wait for the Lord (to work on their behalf) will never be ashamed." (Isa. 49:23).

"For since the world began no-one has seen or heard of such a God as ours Who works for those who wait for Him." (Isa. 64:4 - Living).

Men of faith always get the best - without grabbing.

How different it was with Jacob who deceived his father in order to get the birthright! If only Jacob had committed the matter to God and trusted Him, he could have got the birthright without having to tell lies (Gen. 27). But because Jacob got it the wrong way, he had to run away from his home and suffer much for the next twenty years.

All these incidents are recorded in Scripture for our instruction and our warning, so that we may not act in unbelief and impatience at any time.

When tempted to tell a lie in the office in order to escape out a tight spot, we can refuse the temptation and honour God and trust Him to take care of us. You can never lose out by telling the truth and honouring God. After all, God is certainly more powerful than any lie. And if a lie can deliver you, how much more God can!! "Promotion does not come from the east or the west (that is, by

chance), (nor from any man), but God is the Judge Who puts down one and exalts another." (Psa. 75:6,7).

It is God alone who can exalt an unknown Joseph and an unknown David to an important ministry, after having tested them and found them faithful.

Through Trials to Abundance

Recounting his experience later, David says, "You have tested me O God; You have refined me as silver is refined. You brought me into a net; You laid an oppressive burden on my back. You allowed men to be placed over me and to ride over my head. I had to pass through fire and water. But through it all you finally brought me to a place of liberty and overflowing abundance". (Psa. 66:10-12 - various translations).

That is how David's cup began to overflow and run over. (In Psalm 23:5, David uses the same Hebrew word for 'running over' that he uses in Psalm 66:12 for 'place of abundance').

God's ultimate purpose is to bring us to a place of glorious freedom where the rivers of living water flow out from us continuously. But He cannot lead us there without testing us first.

He will take us through fire and water. He will allow men to abuse us and to take advantage of us. He will put us into the net - confining our movement and our ministry. In all these situations, He will watch our reactions. If we bow in humble and joyful acceptance of all that He has ordered for our lives, He will certainly bring us finally to the place of overflowing abundance.

Honest Acknowledgement of Sin

One final aspect of David's character that we could consider, is his willingness to judge himself, even after becoming king. When he fell into sin with Bathsheba, he did not immediately realise the seriousness of his sin. Later, when Nathan the prophet came and charged him with his sin, we find David humbly acknowledging his fault.

"I have sinned against the Lord.", he acknowledged to Nathan (2 Sam. 12:13).

We are not to compare ourselves with David, who fell into adultery, for he lived under the old covenant. He was not under grace. The standard that God expects of us today is far higher.

The standard that Jesus has laid down for us in this area now is described in Matthew 5:28,29: "I say to you, that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

But we can learn a profitable lesson from David's reaction to conviction of sin.

Why was it that God took away the kingdom from Saul for what, humanly speaking, was a negligible offense? And how did God allow David to continue as king, when his crime - adultery followed by murder - was far greater? The answer lies in the reaction of these two men when confronted with their sin. Saul acknowledged his sin privately to Samuel, but sought honour before the people.

"Then Saul said (to Samuel), "I have sinned; but please honour me now before the elders of my people and before Israel.'" (1 Sam. 15:30).

He had sinned but he still wanted the honour of men. David, on the other hand, did not try to cover up his sin, but publicly acknowledged it by writing Psalm 51.

What we learn from these two men is that those who seek the honour of men find it far more difficult to turn to God in genuine brokenness and repentance than those who have committed murder or adultery. Jesus forgave both the murderer on the cross as well as the woman caught in adultery, because they repented. But the Pharisees who continued to seek the honour of men found it difficult to repent. And so they could not be forgiven.

Seeking man's honour is a form of idolatry. And it is in this area that the Lord tests each of us the most.

Blessed are those who pass the test, like David.

Our past failures need not hinder us from fulfilling God's purposes, if we are willing to acknowledge them in humility - for God gives His grace to the humble.

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