

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Lessons from the life of David: David's testings

Good morning, and welcome to *Truth for Today*, where we are commencing a series of four talks on Lessons from the Life of David, the king of Israel. During the next four weeks, we shall discuss the testings, triumphs, troubles and testimonies of this great man of God (see 2 Chronicles 8:14, Nehemiah 12:24, 36). Our talk today will be centred on the many times that David's faith and trust in God was tested. Obviously, the most well-known story is when he was called from keeping sheep to fight against Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17:1-58). The struggle between these two has entered our everyday language, for we use the phrase "a 'David and Goliath' contest" when say a non-league football team is drawn against a club from the Championship, or even the Premier League. Nobody expects the non-league club to win, for they are small and weak compared with the might and resources of a wealthy club.

So let us turn to the Scriptures to refresh our minds with the details of the story. The context of David's fight is that the Israelite army, under King Saul, was in a battle with the army of the Philistines, at Shochoh, in territory belonging to the tribe of Judah (1 Samuel 17:1). Obviously, as the Philistines had invaded this part of the land of Israel, a response had been made by Saul to retain the sovereignty of his land. The trouble was there did not seem to be much fighting taking place. Every morning the army of the LORD was challenged by a representative of the Philistines, as we can read in 1 Samuel 17:4-9: *"And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us."*

I have quoted a rather long passage, for I want us to understand just what David was taking on when he, eventually, walked into the valley of Elah to face Goliath. This must have been a terrifying sight to all the Israelites, as nobody seemed brave enough to take up the challenge to go out and fight against Goliath in armed combat.

After looking briefly at the opponent of David, we ought to learn a little about David himself, especially as he will be our subject for the next few weeks. 1 Samuel 16:12 says, *"that he was ruddy, with a beautiful countenance and good looking."* When Goliath first saw David, these were just the features that he ridicules, as we can read in 1 Samuel 17:42. When David descended into the valley to confront this gigantic man of war, he had no sword in his hand nor was he wearing armour (1 Samuel 17:39-40). No wonder Goliath cursed the young shepherd boy for his audacity in accepting the challenge! We must listen again, however, to David telling Saul, when he justified his stance as the champion of Israel, that he had killed a lion and a bear while looking after his father's sheep (1 Samuel 17:36-37). We see him refusing the armour that Saul would have dressed him in, choosing rather to do battle with only his sling and shepherd's staff. There is a further weapon that David carried that day into the battle and we do well to note this 1 Samuel 17:45: *"Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."*

This latter verse, 1 Samuel 17:45 is the main reason why I have used up quite a few minutes of our time together. Whereas the theme of our talk this morning is the testing of David's faith in God, it will be of very little use to us today, in 2013, if we cannot learn something from David's example.

To meet the challenges to our stand as believers in the Lord Jesus, we must reject the weapons of the material world, for our warfare is not with people, but with Satan and his co-workers as we can read in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: *"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"* (Ephesians 6:12-13).

When David went to meet Goliath he went in the name of the living God, trusting in Him to bring the victory (1 Samuel 17:45-46). It was, without doubt, a great moment of testing for the young shepherd lad, yet so deep was his knowledge of the LORD that there does not seem to be a moment's hesitation on the part of David. Let us, when our faith is tested, put on the whole armour of God, that is outlined for us in Ephesians 6:10-20, in order that we, like David, will rejoice in the victory of faith.

It was soon obvious to Saul, and his son Jonathan, that David was destined for the throne of Israel, for which Samuel had anointed him, as we can read in 1 Samuel 16:1-13. This brought danger to David, as Saul frantically sought to prevent it happening, though Jonathan's love for David increased, notwithstanding the fact that David would displace him as the ruler of Israel. While residing in the court, after the victory over Goliath, further tests of his faith enveloped him, when two attempts by Saul were made on his life, both of which he managed to thwart. Despite this, the Scripture says four times in 1 Samuel 18 that David behaved himself wisely (1 Samuel 18:5, 14, 15, 30). 1 Samuel 19:11 says that Saul sent men to wait at David's house to find opportunity to slay him. If we read the inscription that prefaces Psalm 59, a psalm of David, we notice that it marks the time when *"they watched the house to kill him."* FB Meyer, in his book on David (Meyer, FB: *David: Shepherd, Psalmist, King* ISBN: 9780875083421) singles out Psalm 59:9, 16 and 17 that demonstrate the psalmist's faith in God. *"Because of his strength will I wait upon thee: for God is my defence ... But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy."*

Despite his faith being tested by the actions and hatred of King Saul, the most powerful man in Israel, David's trust in God never wavered.

I will pause for a moment to consider the word "wait", that I have just quoted from Psalm 59. The original Hebrew word that was translated "wait" contains the idea of a shepherd watching his flock, or of a watchman keeping guard on a tower, or of a sentry diligently pacing up and down. We ought to ask ourselves whether we wait for God's response when we pray, or do we depart before the windows of heaven are opened? David had to wait many years before Saul was removed, in order to occupy the throne himself, but occupy the throne he did.

If we follow the story, as recorded in the 1 Samuel 20:1-2 we find that things at court got too hot for the young courtier, meaning he had to escape. *"And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? What is mine iniquity? And what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it to me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so."*

The deep friendship between Jonathan and David is a lovely constant in the troubled times of King Saul's court, and reminds us of the verse from Proverbs that tells us that *"if we have friends we must show ourselves friendly and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"* (Proverbs 18:24)

We cannot avoid, however, noticing the deep distress that seized the heart of David that is so evident in verse three of the passage we have just read: *"And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death"* (1 Samuel 20:3)

We are only human so that, occasionally, our faith can falter when the waves and winds of life's storms overwhelm the promises of God (see Matthew 14:22-33). To enlarge upon this, I quote a passage from the already mentioned book on David by FB Meyer: "[David] looked at God through the mist of circumstances, which certainly to the eye of sense were sufficiently threatening, instead of looking at circumstances through the golden haze of God's very present help."

So many of David's psalms that have been traced by scholars to this period denote the feelings of being far from God, such as Psalm 10:1: *"Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?"*

There are similar expressions in other psalms, all of which suggest that David is feeling depressed and sad. He tells God of his innocence and pleads with God for deliverance. This is why I often turn to the Psalms because they describe the feelings and experience of believers in every age. Whatever his complaint, David rarely loses the sense that God is overall, and that His sovereign will is supreme.

When David asked the question of Jonathan, that we read in 1 Samuel 20:1-2, quoted a few minutes ago, he was consulting a messenger that God had prepared to help and encourage him in his time of need. The very last time these two friends met is chronicled for us in 1 Samuel 23:16: *"And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David in the wood, and strengthened his hand in God."*

I like this verse, for it emphasises a very practical truth for us today, namely the importance of Christian fellowship. Christianity is not a lonely, or solitary, existence. We encourage one another to walk the pathway that is pleasing to God. David could have been so discouraged that he could have renounced his trust in God to take vengeance upon Saul, whom he knew was trying to kill him, yet he never did.

One of the greatest temptations, that of hurrying things along, must have gripped David's heart when he had Saul at his mercy, as we can read in 1 Samuel 26. Here David is in the wilderness of Ziph, where the king, accompanied by three thousand men, came to seek him so that he could be executed. During the night, David and Abishai crept down into the king's camp, while they were all asleep. We read now 1 Samuel 26:8-10: *"Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD'S anointed, and be guiltless? And David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD'S anointed."*

I say again, how great the temptation must have been to move quickly against Saul, and hasten David's own coronation day. Certainly David's trust in God, and desire to wait upon Him, was tested that night. Graham Scroggie, a Bible teacher of a past generation, suggests that Psalm 56 belongs to this period of David's life: *"Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me"*, (Psalm 56:2). (Scroggie, WG: *A Guide to the Psalms* ISBN:9780825437731)

And so Psalm 56 goes on to mark the trust of the writer in God's wisdom and care, in the face of the trials and testings that challenged David, as a fugitive on the run from Saul.

As we have passed the midpoint of our time together, can I welcome any who have just joined us, and say that you are listening to a talk, from the *Truth for Today* team, on the testings and trials of David. Welcome to the rest of our time together.

Perhaps the lowest point in David's sojourn in the wilderness was the episode that is recorded in 1 Samuel 27, where he confesses to himself that he is likely to perish by the hand of Saul (1 Samuel 27:1). His answer is to cross into the land of the Philistines, his erstwhile enemies (1 Samuel 27:1). No longer does he summon the priest with the sacred ephod, or enquire of God and seek the Lord's mind. Now he acts out of blind terror and fright. When he arrives in enemy territory, he and his followers compound their error by living amongst the Philistines, becoming almost dependent upon them. David seems to have forgotten that he had been anointed by Samuel to be king, and that that anointing had been confirmed by Jonathan, Abigail, and even Saul himself.

Thankfully for David, God had not forgotten and, though we have no time to read the story together, you will find him leaving the false situation that his scheming had led him to adopt. If only David could have seen the concluding verses of 1 Chronicles, where it states that David died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour (1 Chronicles 29:28). For most of the time, David had a deep faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Only occasionally did he lapse from the high position to which God had called him. Even then, as we have seen, God protected him and brought him back to the right path.

We have just sufficient time to look at one more incident in the life of David to witness his response to difficult and unfavourable circumstances. Before we do, however, I want to impress upon speaker and hearer alike that we must learn from David's example. Similar testings and trials of our faith come to us, as they came to David. Do we continue before the Lord in prayer? Do we seek the Lord's mind by reading His word? Do we look for Christian fellowship in the place where God's people meet? Only if we seek to be obedient to the leading of the Spirit of God, as He speaks and guides us through God's word, will we know the blessing and presence of God.

Our last episode is found in 2 Samuel 17, and concerns David when he was king. Unfortunately, Absalom had usurped the throne and David had to flee (2 Samuel 17:1-22). As the usurper entered Jerusalem, the king had to leave to escape into the wilderness of Mahanaim (2 Samuel 17:24). Now he has the problem that had not concerned him for years. Where was his next meal coming from? 2 Samuel 17:29 tells us this, for it states that *"the people were hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness."*

Thankfully, what David could not do under those circumstances, God could and did. Three men, one of them eighty years old, brought food and sustenance to the king, so that he, and the people with him, could eat and drink. God's faithfulness never failed. David should never have worried, when he was a fugitive, whether he would be crowned king. Nor, when he was at Mahanaim, should he have been concerned that he would not be provided for. Though we have no time to see the end of this incident, we have already learned, in 1 Chronicles 29:28, that David was restored to the throne and died in a good old age.

Some commentators place Psalm 23 in this context, showing that David was acutely aware that God had provided, yet again, for his needs. So I shall read that psalm as we close our time together this morning: *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."*

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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