

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“On Being Anointed”

II Samuel 2

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The Old Testament is a messy, messy story. It's not a moral script really. It's more a “how not to do things” than it is a “how to do things manual.”

Most of it is NSFG... you know what that is, right? NSFG? It's “Not Suitable for Flannel Graph.” We're pretty hard pressed to find stories we can use in children's Sunday School and have to do some editing on most of them.

Even all those Old Testament heroes have some pretty awful and embarrassing moments. Noah... do you know how the story of Noah ends? He's lying drunk and naked in a tent.

Abraham... gets afraid of a king and basically gives his wife, Sarah, to him... **“Who, her?.. Oh, she's just my sister.”**

There are clay feet on every page and real live sinners on every page; and as we read these pages, we really have to read between the lines. In these words, we have to listen for “The Word.” We have to see what's sacred in the mess being made. Everyone seems to make a mess.

David... for a while... is the exception to the rule.

David, at least in the beginning... bats 1000.

He seems to always get it right.

And that's the case in today's Old Testament reading from the first chapter in *II Samuel*. And we'll look at that in a moment but not before we recall what leads up to it in *I Samuel*.

David is anointed remember? Little David... small town, shepherd boy... last-born to Jesse. And then the story every VBS vet knows... introduces us to David as an older adolescent... a young adult, perhaps.

He's confident of himself and God.

Probably a bit courageous and naive...

Ready to change the world... for sure...

And little David takes out large Goliath with a slingshot to the forehead... and overnight he's a teen idol. Everyone in Israel is singing his praises. **“Saul has killed his thousands and David his ten thousands.”**

Oops. ... Don't believe I'd have sung that... I'm sure David is wincing as everyone sings the chorus over and over, **“Saul has killed his thousands and David his ten thousands.”** And his instinct is right... Saul, almost overnight, becomes mad with jealousy and paranoia and obsession about David.

And what you have in the rest of *I Samuel* is this combination soap opera... cloak and dagger, espionage and intrigue, military and political maneuvering.

And it's just a mess. First Saul just loses it one night in the palace. David's just over there playing his harp for him and Saul flips out and throws a spear at him. David ducks.

Then Saul tries to get him to become his son-in-law, so that he'll wind up in the front lines and as an heir, be an easy target. David denies the offer... But then Saul offers him his daughter Michal. He seems to know David has an eye for her. So, he says you can have her for 100 Philistine foreskins. (I told you this wasn't suitable for flannel graph)... wants him in harm's way.

Apparently David had it bad for Michal because he takes him up on the offer and brings back 200 Philistine foreskins. And I thought a couple dozen roses were impressive. Two hundred—not just a hundred—200. They count them out for Saul... 1, 2, 3... all the way to 200. I'd hate to have that job.

Saul gets more and more obsessed. ... Tells his general and all his attendants to kill David... has them do surveillance on his house... They're gonna make the hit when he steps outside but Michal helps him escape out a back way and he flees into the countryside and that begins several chapters of Saul chasing him about.

And of course, all the folks in all the villages are in on it and know what's going on. David acts crazy once... acts insane... dribbles on himself... so they won't bother to turn him in. Another village gives him a place to hide and when Saul finds out, he kills everyone in the village... men, women, and children. Sadaam has nothing on Saul. He even killed 85 uncooperative priests. He's just crazy.

David eventually has a small army of dissenters following him... and he has the countryside pulling for him for the most part. But he exercises great restraint. Twice he could have killed Saul. They were right there together and Saul was vulnerable and David chose not to...

Saul is finally killed. And it's a bit hard to tell in the stories just how it happens but it seems he's wounded in battle... and a sympathetic Amalekite comes along and Saul is dying and he asked the man to end it... So he does.

The soldier takes the crown and the news to David... and David's responses are not what you might expect.

He weeps... he mourns and fasts rather than celebrates.

And he interrogates the Amalekite and when he realizes that this man killed Saul, even though Saul asked him to, he has him executed.

Then... David puts pen to papyrus and writes a lament and orders all the people to learn it and sing it.

**A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel.
How the mighty have fallen!
Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
Lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.
Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain,
May no showers fall on your terraced fields.
For there the shield of the mighty was despised,
The shield of Saul – no longer rubbed with oil.
For the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty,
Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet and finery,
Who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.**

(II Sam. 1: 17-24)

Isn't that odd. Here Saul has tried to kill David over and over... made his life a living hell... David running for his life like a hunted animal. Saul's done horrible things. Then Saul dies... and here's the crown...

And his response is to weep...

And he kills the messenger.

And he writes a lament...

And everyone sings it.

It's not what we might expect and probably not what we would do.

So... what's going on? I mean, aside from some shrewd political moves... When we take off the cynical sunglasses... what's up here? Can we read between these lines?

I think... there are two things that are really important to see. One is, David knows that Saul was anointed of God. And that's very clear in the story... that's why he doesn't kill him when he can. That's why he runs rather than fights.

“I'm not raising my hand against the Lord's anointed.”

That's why he executes the Amalekite soldier... even though the soldier was just following orders. **“Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand and destroy the Lord's anointed.”**

That's why he grieves and invites the whole nation to grieve. David believes something about God and about the fact that God and God's will are in play. Saul had been anointed.

Now... to be sure... (we talked about this at Lectionary Breakfast) this kind of theological notion has more often than not been abused by those who like to remind everyone that they are **“God's anointed.”** Mostly pastors who thought being called by the church... equaled being anointed... equaled telling everyone what to do and not being held accountable themselves.

And of course, it's not just pastors but any leader who starts believing they're the chosen one and whatever they do is justified because of it.

So... we have to be careful with the way we think and talk about it... we have to read between the lines. But when we do that with David's story, we see someone who has a trust that God is finally in charge.

And that doesn't make things simple.

And it doesn't mean everything that happens is God's will.

Or that you and I have no part to play.

Or that everything is “just fate” and “woe is me and you.”

But... there is a kind of deep and authentic freedom that comes into us when we trust that we're not in charge. That we don't have to control everything and that we can't control everything.

We stop playing God... and start looking for God. We stop believing we're in the center and we start seeing ourselves as a part of a great unfolding... a sacred world, where everything is holy and we aren't propping anything up, including ourselves.

It's something we come to maybe in time. And there's such freedom. I love this quote by Gregory Meyers.

The longer you live, the more you learn that you cannot control your life very much. The more you realize this fact, the more likely you will enjoy life, the natural ecstasy inherent in life itself... It means you cease judging life... The religious traditions call this, “living the will of God.” Then something happens, something indescribable. We are living in the Mystery, or perhaps to say it better, the Mystery is living us. (*Listen to the Dessert*)

Well, David lived in a different day and so, acted on it in a different way... but he knew this about the world. He “lived the will of God.” Saul was anointed and he could not change that.

Can you read between those lines this morning? What are you manipulating? Where is your anxiety? How much energy are you wasting trying to change what is in your life or being mad at the way things are? Do you live... do you wake up at all with the sense that you are not in control of all that much... that you're living in a mystery and it is living you? Do you see how that changes everything?

I know what some of you are thinking, you're thinking... but how do we know? Some things are bad and some things need to be confronted and changed, resisted... how do we know?

Well... that's a good question and I'm pretty sure David's story doesn't have the whole answer, even reading between the lines. But there is one other thing about David that can help with that and is important to remember.

David... not only knew that Saul was anointed... he knew he was. He was blessed. Samuel had poured the oil all over him... it had covered him and he'd never forget it. He was certain of it and lived from it.

And my question is, "Can you read between the lines?" David's not the only one anointed... blessed... The gospel is, "You're blessed."

Jesus teaches you to call God, "Abba... Father."

Knowing that you're blessed of God... that's what leads you to living in this life with genuine, authentic strength and power. If you can ever just once know that... feel yourself covered by it... drenched by the grace of God. It changes everything.

Do you see? David has both a way of looking at the world and himself that gives him the ability to live the way he lives. The world is sacred and so is he. God is in the middle of things and God is in his life. He is anointed... blessed of God... He doesn't have to chase after anything or cling to anything.

That's when we live real and powerful lives... when we know that. And it can't be just a doctrine... It can't just be a song we sing, "Yes Jesus loves me." It's got to be experienced... Truth known deep and lived.

There's no better picture of that than in John 13... In the upper room... the last supper... the night before he dies. Everything's tense and everyone's self-conscious. They'd just had a debate that day about who would sit on the right and the left... who'd be number one and number two when Jesus took over.

There's judgment and comparison and hostility... everything the world knows everyday and so no one is going to wash anyone's feet... which of course, would have been the custom.

John's language is perfect. **"And Jesus, knowing that he had come from God and that he would return to God, wrapped himself in a towel and washed their feet."**

It's the only way to be free. It's the only way to become loving. It's the only way to not resort to the ways of the world... that are so with us. Power plays, manipulations, and Saul-like anxiety, anger, resentment and revenge, bomb after bomb after bomb after bomb. Only those who know... who know their source and their destiny... can live truly powerful, loving lives.

I really do believe that this is the ministry we must be about here at DaySpring... helping folks to know source and destiny. The world is groaning, as Paul says and the news reminds us everyday, for children of God to live like children of God... to grow into the fullness of Christ.

And it isn't at all about just your life and what happens in your living room... Although it is vital there.

The world is in a crisis of soul.

The problems are political and social and moral and environmental and cultural...

But they can't be remedied at that level... but only by those who are living life at another level... and through whom the life of God is being lived.

I pray that we might be counted among them. Amen.