



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers  
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 18  
DAVID**

**APRIL 30 - MAY 5, 2007**

<b>DAY</b>	<b><i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i></b>	<b>ABBREVIATED STUDY</b>
<b>Monday</b>	2 Samuel 15-20, Psalm 86	1 Samuel 17:31-47, Psalm 86
<b>Tuesday</b>	2 Samuel 21-24, Psalm 87	1 Samuel 26:6-25, Psalm 87
<b>Wednesday</b>	1 Kings 1-6, Psalm 88	2 Samuel 7:1-29, Psalm 88
<b>Thursday</b>	1 Kings 7-12, Psalm 89	2 Samuel 12:1-15, Psalm 89
<b>Friday</b>	Ecclesiastes 1-6, Psalm 90	2 Samuel 23:1-7, Psalm 90

**READ**

1 Samuel 17:31-47

Psalms 86

**REFLECT**

This week we look at the figure of David. His story is a long one, and is presented to us roughly in five sections: (1) the ways the boy comes to the attention of Samuel and Saul; (2) the development of the young man as a military leader in friction with Saul; (3) his installation as king and the establishment of firm rule; (4) his sin with Bathsheba and the resulting strife in his own family, especially with his son Absalom; and (5) his old age and death. We will take these five segments in turn, over these five days.

There are three stories that describe the way David emerged onto the stage of history. First, the old priest Samuel is directed by the Lord to anoint the youngest son of Jesse as future king of Israel, when there was no outward reason to choose him. The Spirit comes on David “from that day forward” (1 Sam 16:1-13). But the Spirit also departs from Saul, who thereafter has bouts of mental torment from an evil spirit (16:13-14). The second story is how David, as the accomplished musician, is invited to court to ease Saul’s agony (16:14-23). The third story, well-known to every 5-year-old kid who has spent any time in Sunday School, is David’s solo retrieval of the military glory of Israel by his face-off with Goliath, as Saul and the rest of the army stands watching (today’s passage). These three stories not only introduce David to us, but they also introduce the three dominant themes of his life that will recur over the next chapters: David as military genius, establishing national security; David as king of the nation and leader of men, cultivating a healthy society; and David as psalmist, promoting fresh worship of the Lord.

The defeat of Goliath is told richly, with careful characterization, telling details, and powerful interactions. David arrives at a battlefield where for 40 days a single Philistine has held the Israelite army at bay. David is the first one who sees the full implications: not only Israel’s glory, but the Lord’s, is at stake. His theological insight and readiness for action put him in sharp contrast to the soldiers, and his dependence on the Lord in refusing Saul’s armor likewise places him in contrast with Saul. Goliath “has taunted the armies of the living God” (17:36), and David will do what he can “that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (17:46). It is clear from the story that not only the enemy needs to “know” this, but Israel itself, as well, needs reminding. And right here is David’s value as a leader in Israel: he is unashamed to stand for the Lord.

Did David win the fight, or did the Lord? The best answer to such a question is that David found his own full potential, as he moved in response to the Lord who was with him. As he followed in obedience to the Spirit, he developed as a person and a leader. But his own deepest perspective on this relationship is clear: “There is no one like Thee among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like Yours” (Psalm 86:8).

**RESPOND**

David’s life speaks for the most part of an amazing capacity for active service of the Lord. It is easy to lose this balance, and become personally manipulative on the one hand or a spiritual couch potato on the other. In calling us to His service, the Lord calls us to discover our best selves.

**PRAY**

Lord, thank You for the gift of salvation by faith apart from works; but thank You also for the works You call us to engage in, which You “prepared beforehand, that we might walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

- D.D.

**READ**

1 Samuel 26:6-25

Psalms 87

**REFLECT**

As David grows in maturity and ability, he comes to clash more and more with Saul. David's military successes, celebrated by the people, are perceived by Saul as a threat to himself (1 Sam 18:6-8). Similarly, as David becomes friends with Saul's son Jonathan, instead of welcoming this relationship, Saul accuses Jonathan of throwing away the succession to the throne (20:30-31). As Saul then plots to kill David, David must escape from the court entirely (20:42). He takes up the life of a nomadic leader of a band of "mighty men," a sort of Robin Hood, finding local conflicts in which to hire himself out as a mercenary. But in contrast to Robin Hood, he never fights against his own king, even when Saul leads an army to hunt him down.

This is clearly a period of frustrating conflict in David's life. The essential problem is that of succession, that is, how the leader of the nation will pass responsibility wisely to another. Problems of succession arise in many areas of life today: in national politics, in the business world, in shifts of responsibility within families, and so on. In that sense this story touches on issues of day-to-day relevance. We can be glad (so long as we don't get smug) that our government provides for smooth transfers of authority, and one reason I am happy to be a Presbyterian is the careful thought and prayer that goes into pastoral transitions such as we are now experiencing at Glenkirk. But while human beings are a part of the process, problems of succession will remain alive and deeply challenging. Whether on the highest levels of business leadership so searchingly addressed by gurus such as Peter Drucker, or lower in the ranks of the work place, or in the home itself, real wisdom is what is needed, and it is often in short supply.

Our passage today represents the climax of this period of conflict between David and Saul. Saul has come out with an army to kill David, but David is able with his superior abilities to turn the tables and bring about Saul's death. This too is a lavish tale, carefully and dramatically recounted. David is brash and impetuous, Saul is by turns imperious and maudlin, the audience is vast, and the stakes are huge. But again what David brings specifically is the perspective of the Lord's will, and what the Lord is doing. As his companion Abishai remonstrates with him, David tells him that the Lord will bring about Saul's death in His own way: "but who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed without guilt?"

David's refusal to take the way of manipulation and murder helps commend him to the ages as a man of integrity and godliness. But it also allows Saul, surprised and shocked by the evidence of David's good faith, to have a moment of lucidness. It allows Saul too to step for a moment into the clear light of God's perspective: "I have sinned . . . I have played the fool, and committed a serious error . . . Blessed are you, my son David. You will both accomplish much and surely prevail" (26:21, 25). By witnessing to the love of God, David not only finds a way of action that he can live with in peace; he also helps open the door of God's peace to others.

**RESPOND**

What is the problem facing you today that frustrates you most? What would you do to resolve it if you could count entirely on your own manipulative ability? Are you willing to take David's alternative path, and instead be a believing witness to God's love and grace?

**PRAY**

Lord, we thank You for the newness of life You bring to us, and for the freshness of Your daily challenge and care for us. Above all, You Yourself are the great wonder of our new life. "Glorious things of Thee are spoken." "All my springs of joy are in Thee." (Psalm 87:1, 7)

- D.D.

**READ**

2 Samuel 7:1-29

Psalms 88

**REFLECT**

The death of Saul, and of Jonathan and Saul's other sons, at the battle of Mount Gilboa (1 Sam 31:1-6) leaves Israel without a king. The natural candidate is David, but because Saul never publicly acknowledged the succession, David's kingship is not automatic. The first 10 chapters of 2 Samuel describe the consolidation of the kingdom under David. Several themes emerge: David does not manipulate his rise, but others come to him as the natural leader as society begins to fall apart – first Judea, and then all of Israel. Second, David's continued respect of Saul is seen in his handling of the family and staff of Saul: there is no jealous wiping of the slate. His care of Jonathan's descendants is particularly poignant. Third, he establishes the nation on a new footing, with Jerusalem as the new capital and the new center of worship. He defeats enemy incursions, and creates a new network of international treaties and friendships.

The passage today tells of a pivotal moment in this period of establishing the nation in this way. His new ally Hiram of Tyre has sent him, apparently on his own initiative, a mass of cedar wood, with the suggestion that David build himself a new palace. This David does, but then begins to feel that the Lord should surely have a "house" of His own as well, to accommodate the Ark of the Covenant and the worship of the people. He shares his plan with the prophet Nathan, who initially agrees. But Nathan that night receives a powerful word from the Lord that puts the plan on hold. The prophecy he then relates to David, and David's prayer of response to the Lord, remains one of the high points of the Old Testament literature. The Lord details His annoyance with David's arrogance in assuming he should move ahead on such an important

project without the Lord's guidance. But in midstream the rebuke turns into an astonishing series of promises for David and for Israel. God promises to establish Israel Himself, and to establish the "house" of David after his death for generations. In fact, "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:13).

If God's word to David contained both a "no" and a "yes," David's reply expresses both profound humility and vibrant assertiveness. "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou has brought me thus far?" David acknowledges the sheer grace that the Lord has shown in calling him and blessing him. But then he goes on to pray powerfully for the fulfillment of the promise: "The word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant and his house, confirm it forever, and do as Thou hast spoken." He reiterates both the humility and the boldness throughout the long prayer. He is a mere recipient of grace, but his arms are open to receive the fullness of the grace promised.

The theologian Karl Barth wrote that God's word to us on any given occasion will always include both a "Yes!" and a "No!" The "No!" is needed because we come before Him as imperfect beings always in need of His correction and healing. But the "Yes!" of His acceptance and grace is always there too, purchased by Christ for us on the cross. And the "Yes!" is always greater, more powerful, more final than His "No!" – because He is the Lord God, the Savior.

**RESPOND**

Conscientious Christians usually have no problem hearing God's "No!" We more often need to be reminded to bask in His affirmation of us in Jesus Christ, in His very personal, knowing, loving, saving "Yes!"

**PRAY**

Lord, thank You for Your word to us, that so often delivers us from misunderstandings both dismal and optimistic. Thank You for Your truth, and the freedom which truth brings.

- D.D.

**READ**

2 Samuel 12:1-15

Psalms 89

**REFLECT**

With the kingdom established and the borders now quiet, peace has finally come to Israel under David's leadership. Unfortunately, now civil war will break out, and the challenge to David will come from his own family. David will be forced to flee from Jerusalem for a time and live a hunted existence as of old, hounded by his son Absalom, who now claims the throne.

Absalom's story begins with his murder of his step-brother, who raped his sister Tamar. Fleeing from court, Absalom finds a welcome in other cities. A powerful and attractive leader, he draws the loyalty of other men, but he himself is drawn (unlike David in the old days) into setting himself up as king of Israel. David has to flee Jerusalem and return to tents, until Absalom is finally slain. David, always the loving father, is shaken as much by the death as by the rebellion of his son.

How could this tragedy happen to the blessed king David? The Old Testament traces it to a judgment pronounced by the Lord through Nathan upon David. Peace on the borders brought peace to Israel, but it brought idleness to David, and he had time to steal the wife of another man. Seeing Bathsheba from his own rooftop, he called men to "take" her to him for the night. When it was revealed she was pregnant, he decided to cover himself by calling her husband home from the army, so that she could claim him as the father. Uzziah came home, but never slept in his own bed, out of deference to and solidarity with his companions in the field. Frustrated, David made plans for Uzziah's death: the general Joab was to see that Uzziah died in battle. And so it happened. And Bathsheba became one of David's wives.

Our passage today tells of the role of Nathan the prophet in getting David to admit the depth of his wrong. Using the parable of a lamb stolen by a neighbor, Nathan succeeds in stoking David's wrath, so that David calls for the condemnation of this man. Nathan's ringing reply: "You are the man!" But the news gets worse. The Lord's word is that David's acts have put him in the same peril that Saul faced: he has "despised the word of the Lord" – which is to say, "you have despised Me" (2 Sam 12:9-10). (See 1Sam 15:26). Saul's fate of lonely madness looms as David's future.

What makes the difference is David's immediate and full repentance: "I have sinned against the Lord." Forgiveness means David's escape from death, and the assurance of the presence of the Lord in the following days and years. But there are consequences to be faced: the poor judgment of his sons regarding women and power, and the death of Bathsheba's child.

David's psalms throb with the power of forgiveness. Psalm 51 is often read in conjunction with our passage. Surely forgiveness remains the basic lesson in Christian spirituality. I loved this moment in the older Presbyterian liturgy: after the confession of sins, the leader said, "Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel." And we replied, "In Jesus Christ we are forgiven." Week after week! After a while you began to believe it! And after a little more time, you began to pass it around!

**RESPOND**

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Friend, believe the good news of the Gospel.

**PRAY**

Lord, thank You for the promise and the reality of forgiveness. Thank You for the death and resurrection of Jesus that secured the promise and the reality. Thank You that we have joyful news to share with others this day.

- D.D.

**READ**

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Psalms 90

**REFLECT**

The story of David winds down, after the accounts of Bathsheba and Absalom, with a loose collection of shorter narratives and psalms. A three-year famine falls upon Israel in judgment for a bloody incident from Saul's day. A battle with Philistine raiders raises concerns that David is getting too old to fight. David errs again in desiring a census – perhaps it is an indication that he wants to quantify his own greatness – and again models a repentant heart; the vision of the judging angel over the threshing floor of Araunah marks the location of the future temple (2 Sam 24). David's "mighty men" are listed and some of their exploits are told. Psalm 18 is included here as 2 Sam 22, with some variations. Another shorter psalm, presented as David's last words, is included as well (today's passage). The transition to Solomon's reign is narrated as David is on his death bed, and Bathsheba has to take a strong hand in making sure the king's will is followed in the succession (1 Kings 1-2).

We will focus today on the brief "last words" of David. The song begins by defining itself as an "oracle" (in the second line; the word is not found in all translations), that is, a word of prophecy. David goes on to affirm that he truly has experienced the Lord's anointing to speak the very words of God to the people. As the affirmation of an old man, this can be no kind of boast, but rather a deep and humble testimony, a death-bed confession, so to speak, of profound blessedness. David's last words are not about himself, but about God's ability to actually achieve His purposes in human beings.

The actual "word" that David brings is brief: six lines, beginning with the third line of v.3 and continuing through v.4. It is a description of what

Israel's monarchy ought to be. When justice toward the people is combined with true fear of the Lord, then everything functions well. In fact, the nation prospers in ways as natural as the processes of Nature itself: there is a rightness to the order of things that creates a reality that is both transcendent and perfectly normal. (How transcendently wonderful it would be if we could all just live a normal life!) Here is the ideal of the Israelite monarchy as David passed it on to his descendants, and as it continued to challenge them.

At verse 5, David seems to break in with his own comment: "Truly is not my house so with God?" Is David in his dotage idealizing his life and forgetting his errors and those of his sons? Rather he affirms the ideal that he strove for, and that he often fell short of; and he affirms that the only possibility of success comes through the undergirding arms of the "everlasting covenant." His final comments (verses 6-7) sound a warning, and draw a line in the sand. He has lived long enough to believe that the fundamental issue in life, and the biggest difference among humans, is how we respond to the good things of the Lord as they are offered to us.

**RESPOND**

I remember the preacher who told us once that there are two kinds of old folks: the ones that have been pickled sweet, and the ones that have been pickled sour. Surely the key to the best that life has to offer is a constant readiness to be open to the goodness and grace of the Lord. Here is the miracle of all the ages: God with us, Emmanuel.

**PRAY**

Dear Lord, thank You for the testimony of Your saints, which has meant so much in our lives. We remember and pray for those who have shared their faith meaningfully with us. Allow us too to live as those who testify of You in all we do, in thought and in word and in deed.

- Dave Dorman