

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 19 January 2003

No. T0249

Speaker: Mr. Peter Ollerhead

The man of God - David

I don't know about you, but I always think it rather strange when I read in the press or a trade magazine that a biography is being published about a person who is hardly out of their teens. The subject, usually a pop star, sportsman or fashion personality, obviously commands sufficient public interest to make such a project financially and commercially worthwhile but a query still remains in my mind. In the normal course of things there are still many years left of the person's life, so yet more chapters could be written. Usually, of course, the person fades from public view so nothing else is written. How different was the task for Churchill's biographer. Here was a long life that touched many momentous matters, both nationally and internationally. What to include and what to leave out is the difficult task facing the scholar. The eight separate volumes, plus many companion books, was Martin Gilbert's attempt to compress ninety years of this statesman's life into print.

I feel that my exercise today has more than a hint of the dilemma that faced Martin Gilbert, for I have to try to speak of David, the second King of Israel, whose life and poetry occupy many chapters of Biblical narrative. He is part of the current series at *Truth for Today*, where we are looking at the lives of men who are known in Scripture as 'men of God'. In the time allotted for this broadcast it is impossible to fully cover the life of this remarkable man. At various times he was a shepherd, soldier, hero, poet, musician, warrior king, husband, father and fugitive. Consequently, I have decided to use the summary that David made of his life as the basis for this talk. We can read this in the 2 Samuel 23:1 and I am quoting from the Authorised Version. "Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel, said." The Scripture goes on to state the words that David spoke, but at the moment we are not concerned with them.

I have chosen this verse because I think that in it David sums up quite succinctly the main features that I wish to concentrate on. The first of these is **the fact that he was the son of Jesse**. This might not seem very important in the context of David's life, but it is something that he never forgot. He was first brought to the notice of King Saul as Jesse's son. The occasion was when Saul wanted a skilful musician who could soothe his moody temper caused, as the Bible records, by an evil spirit.

Later, we find David back in Bethlehem looking after the sheep once more. All his brothers are with King Saul attempting to fight the Philistines who were occupying some of the territory of Israel. We can read about this in 1 Samuel 17. This is the well-known story of the defeat of Goliath by David. My point is that, at the end of the chapter, the question is asked regarding the identity of the victor and slayer of Goliath. Again, the answer comes that he is David, son of Jesse from Bethlehem.

May I digress for a moment and use this incident to highlight what I feel is the most important truth in the New Testament. I am talking about the identity of the man at the centre of Christianity, the man Christ Jesus. If I apply the question 'Whose son is this?' to the figure on the centre cross, then, I suggest, that this is the most important question that has to be answered by any person. The New Testament is in no doubt regarding the answer. I cite just one verse, but we could refer to many. It is from John 20:31. "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name."

We might say that there are many things in this verse that we can't understand but we are asked to step out in a venture of faith. Personally I am in no doubt that belief in Jesus as the Son of God is at the very heart of the Christian faith. If we are unable to identify Jesus in this way then we are missing the very essence of Christianity.

To return to David as the son of Jesse, which, as we have seen, is the way he referred to himself, I want to show some used it as a term of contempt. One particular incident is in 1 Samuel 25:10: "And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, 'Who is David?' And who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master."

The gist of this story is that David, who had protected Nabal's flocks, along with their shepherds, was looking for some return now that the shearing season had arrived. Nabal was having nothing of it, even to the point of insulting the future king. At that point in his life David was little more than an outlaw. Nabal found it easy to denigrate David by

pointing this out. From his remark ‘Who is this son of Jesse?’ I think we can assume that David’s family was not influential either.

There is, perhaps, another reason why the title ‘Jesse’s son’ had the possibility of vilifying David. We learn from the book of Ruth that David’s great grandmother was a Moabitess. To have an alien, or non-Jew, in your ancestral line could be a lever that released disparagement from malicious persons. Some, like Nabal, would be quick to seize such knowledge to use it in a negative fashion to denigrate David.

Whether that be so or not, we do know that David took the title ‘son of Jesse’ to the throne of Israel, as we can read in the 1 Chronicles 29:26. “Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel.” He also used it as a signature to close off one of his Psalms. This time I quote from Psalm 72:20 “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.”

From these verses we can appreciate that David was not ashamed of his origins. He was always conscious that it was God who had taken him from the sheep-fold to the throne.

Here, too, is a message for us who have experienced God’s good hand of blessing. We should always be aware that it is only the grace of God that has brought us salvation and the knowledge of Him. The greatest privilege we can have in this world is to know God and that knowledge has not come by our own efforts. The great mystery of godliness is that God revealed Himself in flesh. When we have been grasped by this truth we should never be puffed up with arrogant pride. We ought always to remember that by nature and nurture we are sinful creatures. That God loves us with an everlasting love should result in hymns of grateful praise.

The second of the statements that David made about himself was that **‘he was raised up on high’**. Now, looking back over the years, he affirmed that it was the Lord who had made him king. To get to that point he had travelled far and endured much. The journey had not been easy for there were times when David despaired of ever reaching the throne. In his youth he had been subject to the corrosive envy of King Saul. He had had to leave his father’s house to dwell in caves and forests to escape the fate that Saul planned for him. Even then he did not answer like for like, for when the opportunity arose he did not injure the king, even when urged to by his followers.

It is apparent that occasionally David thought he would never reach old age, let alone be crowned king. We learn this from such passages as 1 Samuel 27:1: “And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any border of Israel. So shall I escape out of his hand.”

It is easy for us, who know the end of the story, to criticise David for lack of faith and trust in God. Even in this attitude, however, David is an example of human behaviour. We all have occasions when we are down and fail to trust as we should. Let us learn to trust and follow even when our faith grows feeble. We know from the early chapters of 2 Samuel that David was eventually accepted by all the tribes as king in the place of Saul, who had been killed by the Philistines. His coronation day had dawned. He had indeed been raised up on high.

Even then his troubles were not over, for later in his life he had to endure the wilderness experience once more when his son Absalom usurped the throne from him. Perhaps it was this ordeal that moved him to write Psalm 23. He certainly needed the Lord’s protection and care when he fled from Jerusalem. By such episodes, as he witnessed divine care, was he convinced that his destiny had been ordered from above. Eventually his rule was regarded as a high point in Israel’s history and a measuring stick for all of her kings.

Our third point is that David was **‘the anointed of the God of Jacob’**. As we have just emphasised, he was alive to the fact that another power was at work in his life, a power that had placed him upon the throne of Israel. David traced this back to the time when Samuel called upon Jesse to anoint one of his sons. Again, we have to turn to 1 Samuel to read about this. It is well worth reading the whole of the account in chapter 16 but we have only time this morning to read verses 7, 12 and 13. “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart ... And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and of a beautiful countenance, and handsome. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him; for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day onward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.”

The reality of his anointing was the promise to David of what he was going to be. All through his fugitive years, whilst he was gathering a band of supporters and living in the cave Adullam, he was looking to the time when he would be crowned. Occasionally, as we have seen, he lost the vision, but, generally, he waited patiently for the crown to adorn his brow. It is important to note that Scripture makes it plain that he never tried to hasten that day by being party to killing Saul.

Surely, this is another lesson that we can take from the life of David. We sometimes say to our children that patience is a virtue. For those living the life of faith it's certainly true. In 2 Peter 1, Peter records that patience is one of the characteristics that should mark the Christian. Like David, we wait for the crowning day but this time it is for great David's greater Son. The New Testament states clearly that the moment will arrive when Jesus will be acknowledged as Lord. We are to wait patiently for that day.

The other point I wish to emphasise about the anointing is that it is by the God of Jacob. Within this phrase is much that is encouraging to us today. Often the mistake is made by some non-church goers that Christians have an inflated view of themselves. Perhaps we sometimes give them reason to take this view on board, but the reality is that the church is composed of people who, in themselves, are not good enough for God. There is no way that we could ever make ourselves holy or righteous. The phrase 'the God of Jacob' tells us that God is the God of a man who cheated people, even stooping so low as to trick his blind father. We must also note that Jacob didn't remain in that state but by belief in the living God became a spiritual man. His name being changed to Israel helped him to take on the character of one who was a prince with God.

We also, through faith in the Lord Jesus, can live the spiritual life, but we must never forget from whence we came. He was the one who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Such were we. If, through grace, we hear and answer His call, we can enjoy the privileges of the children of God. We get a hint of how much we owe to the Lord in one of Wesley's great hymns. I quote from the verses two and four.

*“Jesus, the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
It turns their hell to heaven.*

*O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
Would all mankind embrace.”*

I think those words adequately complete the thought of the loving kindness of the God who concerns Himself with the fallen of this world.

The last element of David's life that I wish to consider this morning is that of **being 'the sweet Psalmist of Israel'**. That the warrior king could be capable of such poetry as recorded in some of his Psalms says much about the depth of his character. We look at some of the famous soldiers of history and consider them thoughtless slayers of their fellowmen. Sometimes this is true, but also we must admit that sometimes they have other facets. David certainly falls into this latter class. He lived in a war filled age, spending much of his time leading his soldiers in battle. In fact, in 1 Chronicles 28:2-3 we can read that David was aware of this. We also read of its effects. "Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: but God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood."

It is interesting to note that the temple, known as Solomon's, was built with the materials that David had prepared. In many ways it ought to have been known as David's temple, so thorough and complete were his preparations for it. Still further grasp of David's spiritual yearnings can be gained from a study of his Psalms.

The most well known is Psalm 23, which I hardly need to say, begins, "The Lord is my shepherd." It is not my intention to try to give a verse by verse exposition of this Psalm, tempting though that might be. The attractive imagery and descriptions draw the affections into the realms of worship and praise, but we have not the time to dwell too long. It is necessary, however, to point to the maturity and confidence of the writer of this poem. David knows in a personal way the loving provision of the Lord in the guise of the shepherd. From pasture to pasture David is led until he reaches perfect safety at the end of his journey. In this Psalm David demonstrates the depth of his life with God. One can but point to such confident faith as an example to us all.

I would repeat, that I am of the mind that this Psalm was written, following such a crisis as the rebellion of Absalom, when David had to flee from Jerusalem in a hurry. He hid in the wilderness at Mahanaim where he trusted that his son could not find him. Whilst there he was fed by a few of his friends, one of whom was eighty years of age. In such an experience David saw that he had walked through the valley of death to a place where a table was prepared. This provision and care he traced back to the Lord.

Other Psalms draw cries of deep penitence from the soul of the king. The Bible never veils the acts of sin committed by some of its main characters. David's attitude to Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, is downright wicked and this must be the most unpleasant period of his life. It's strange, but true, that a person can be walking along a path of righteousness one day only to fall into dreadful sin the next. It behoves us to be constantly vigilant and to pray that we may never be led into temptation. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian church warns the Christians there regarding the possibility of falling from the standards of Christianity. In verse 1 Corinthians 10:12 he says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Uriah, certainly, would have gained great benefit if David had followed such advice. If you aren't familiar with David's failure you can read about it in 2 Samuel 11.

The measure of the king's repentance is recorded in Psalm 51. In verses 2 and 3 we read, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."

He also realised that repentance was more than a veneer, for in verses 16 and 17 he continues, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

There is much more we could say about David's Psalms but time does not allow, except for a quick comment on the closing verses of Psalm 72. I wish to quote only the last three verses to demonstrate that David had a view of God that, perhaps, exceeds that of some of us in the church. "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended."

Note, in passing, how David linked Jesse's name with his as he ends his prayers. I have no doubt that David prayed again many times. This was not the last time he ever ventured before the Lord in prayer, but it was his final thought. He had no greater hope than that the whole earth should be filled with the glory of God. Christians, too, take up the same thought as David, when they pray for the Kingdom to come. The New Testament tells us that one day every knee will bow and own that Jesus is Lord. Those who love and serve the Lord Jesus eagerly await the time of His appearing.

With this we also come to the end of our talk on David, the man of God. Without any shadow of a doubt, he is one of the central characters of Scripture. Much of the biblical narrative revolves around his life and times, and his faith and failings are reported faithfully. He is held up as an example of the ideal king. David is linked to the very last description we get of the Lord Jesus in the Bible. This is in Revelation 22:16. "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."

This is sufficient testimony to the importance of David as a man of God and I would emphasise the phrase 'the man of God'. In the economy of God it is not our wealth, intellect or social standing that is crucial, but rather, our reception of the message of salvation that is in Christ. May we all, by God's grace, have faith in the living God, a faith that parallels David's, the son of Jesse, the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob and the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.