

FAITH - 8: DAVID AND SAMUEL

Hebrews 11:32-34

32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, **of David and Samuel** and the prophets— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Introduction: they started young.

I want to talk today about two men of faith who go down as great men in the history of the Old Testament. They lived at the same time. They served God's purposes for their lives. And one of the things they had in common is that they had in common was that there were things happened when they were young that paved the way for their life's work.

I'm talking about David and Samuel.

Both of them had experiences when they were younger that paved the way for their life's work. That's something I want to stress in this message.

I wonder if you ever think about that, especially if you are young. Are you sensitive to the ways that God may be leading you through various experiences, confronting you with various challenges and putting various opportunities before you? Do you realise that as you make the most of these, God could be preparing you for your life's work?

Obviously there is enough in the life and times of these two men to fill more than one sermon. Books have been written and series of sermons have been preached on the story of David alone. He is one of the massive figures in the Old Testament, in fact in the whole story of the Bible.

If you want great stories, read the story of David. Who hasn't heard about David and Goliath? If you want great spiritual songs that seem to find a connection point with every human experience, you read the Psalms of David. David's throne and kingdom are established to last forever: his son, after many generations, is Jesus. If David is God's king in the Old Testament, Jesus is God's King. Full stop.

And that's not to mention Samuel. Samuel was a great leader in a different way. Samuel spoke the mind of God to the people. He was never king, but under God he was the king-maker.

Once again, let's remind ourselves that these two men are mentioned here because they were men of faith. They trusted God. Hebrews 11 is making the point that all the way through the story of the Old Testament people found favour with God when they trusted him.

That's how it was in the beginning with Abel. That's how it was during the time of the Patriarchs, the famous fathers of the nation of Israel. That's how it was with Moses at the time of the Exodus, with Joshua, entering the Promised Land. That's how it was even during the time of the Judges: that was a dark, chaotic time when many of the leaders were flawed men. By mentioning David and Samuel - though he could have had them the other way around to follow the chronological sequence - the writer shows that this is how it was into the time of the kings.

Patriarchs, Exodus, Judges, Kings. Whatever the phase of history, there were people who trusted God.

What in particular did the writer have in mind when he talked about Samuel as a man of faith? What was there in particular about David? He doesn't specify in the way he does with other characters, particularly the earlier ones. Where do we need to look?

Look again at verses 33 and 34:

33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

I think you find elements of all a number of these in the lives of David and Samuel. They both conquered - in different ways; they ruled justly and established righteousness. David, certainly, obtained promises: his faith was tested as he waited to become king.

Let's start with Samuel and a few details about his life. He was born to a mother who had found it hard to conceive a child. Her name was Hannah. She gave him back to the Lord and he grew up under the eye of Eli the priest.

The times were not good. Eli's sons were corrupt and were judged for their sin. The Philistines proved too strong for Israel and even managed to capture the ark of the covenant, one of the most precious items in their worship as it symbolised the presence of God with them.

Samuel emerges as a righteous, spiritual leader.

God actually uses him militarily too. It's in answer to his prayer that God moves and the Philistines are routed. In 1 Samuel 7 it is through the prayer of Samuel that the Philistines are routed. He wasn't a military leader, but if you think of how Hebrews 11 talks about putting foreign armies to flight, Samuel did it. And he did it through faith.

Look at what it says in 1 Samuel 7.

5 Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." 6 So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the Lord and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. 7 Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8 And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines." 9 So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. And Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him. 10 As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were routed before Israel.

He didn't lead the army: he didn't shoot an arrow or wield a sword. He cried out to the Lord on behalf of the people.

It's worth pausing for a moment here to ask ourselves how many great things are waiting to happen and God will do them when we cry out to him in faith? I know that there is a mystery of apparently unanswered prayer, but sometimes we need to think about the mystery of unprayed for answers.

He became a king-maker, appointing first Saul and then David. He was a reluctant king-maker because he didn't think this was the way the nation should have gone. But when God told him to appoint these kings, he obeyed him.

Saul - not mentioned in Hebrews 11 - was a real disappointment. Even God was disappointed (there's another mystery). Samuel had to tell Saul that God had rejected him. And then he went to anoint David. Some reckon that this was a significant act of faith in his life. Samuel had to face an element of fear in his own heart. But he obeys God.

All the way through he was a righteous leader of the nation of Israel.

In 1 Samuel 12:1-5 Samuel takes his leave of the people. He is able to be quite open with them and put his integrity on the line. No one can speak a word against him. He had served righteously. He didn't cheat, he never took a bribe to distort the cause of justice. He established righteousness in his nation. He became the voice of God to the nation.

When Israel needed to be called to repentance, Samuel spoke. When the nation needed to be reminded of their sin, Samuel spoke. When Saul needed to be told that his time was up and he had lost the kingdom, Samuel spoke.

By faith... Samuel... established righteousness ... put foreign armies to flight.

And it was when he was only a boy that started getting to know God. Here we get back to the point I started to raise at the beginning. God began to move in Samuel's life long before Samuel was a national leader. Samuel learned to hear God and obey him when he was still a young man.

The story of his call is one of the best known stories in the Old Testament.

Samuel had grown up in the temple. He had been given some responsibilities. 1 Samuel 3 says that he was ministering to the Lord under Eli. I don't know what age he was when God called him, the text says he was a young man. That doesn't need to mean that he was a little boy. But despite the fact he was serving in the temple, he didn't yet know God. He didn't recognise his voice because he hadn't heard him speak. In fact, no one was used to hearing God talk in those days.

So when the voice calls in the night, he thinks it's Eli. After this happens three times, Eli realises what is going on and he tells Samuel what to do.

He didn't know what was happening so he ran in to see Eli. The old priest eventually realised that God was speaking and he told Samuel to answer: "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

That's what he did. God spoke to him and gave him a very difficult first assignment: disaster was going to come on the family of his mentor, Eli. It was only through the encouragement of Eli that he was able to be faithful to the assignment that God had given him.

• **It's possible for young men (and women) to hear God's call.**

That's the most obvious point. Along with that there is the example of Samuel's attitude, his surrender to God. Lord, whatever you want to say to me, I am listening.

There were other young men in the story. Eli's sons were young men, but they were busy fornicating and abusing the privileges that were theirs as priests. Samuel grew quietly in favour with God until God spoke to him and he surrendered.

Young person, be different. Be different from your Christian friends, if you need to be. Make it your aim to get to know God and recognise his voice. Don't rest until you begin to get a sense of his presence in your life and his plan for you.

You will not necessarily get it all at one go - it would be surprising if you did; but find out what's next. Find out what he wants you to do now.

• **It's possible for imperfect mentors to give useful advice.**

In many ways Eli calls for our pity. His family had turned out badly; his sons had behaved shamefully and he was powerless to influence them. He got it wrong when he accused Hannah of being drunk when she was actually praying. It took him three goes before he realised that it was God who was talking to Samuel.

But he got there. And when Samuel was too fearful to tell Eli what God was going to do, Eli insisted that he speak. That was going to be a vital lesson for Samuel. God was going to raise him up to be his voice in the nation. Who knows what would have happened if Eli had not encouraged him to overcome his fear.

You don't have to be perfect to give useful advice to a younger person. There are some of you who are older and you think you have nothing to give. The sad thing is that there probably are ways for you to influence a younger person but your awareness of your own imperfection is holding you back.

A significant part of Eli's life was probably lived with deep regret; but he played a vital role for Samuel.

• **It's possible that today's challenge is setting the scene for tomorrow's work.**

He spoke to Eli; one day he would speak to the nation; one day he would speak to a disobedient king; one day he would have to face his fears and go and anoint a new king.

You cannot do that unless you learn that the most important thing is for you to do what God asks you to do and say what God asks you to say.

What you need to grasp when you are younger is that the things you face and the lessons you learn early, can set the tone for what is going to happen later in your life.

And that takes us neatly to David.

David.

Look at 2 Samuel 8:15:

So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people.

Think again of Hebrews 11. By faith they enforced justice (established righteousness). That's what David did. He did it as a man of faith.

I wonder too if the writer could have had David in mind when he talked about people who obtained promises. For David had to wait a long time and he had to survive many obstacles before he became king.

It's a lot easier to take up the throne when the previous king is not still trying to rule. "The king is dead; long live the king!" The sequence of events for David was different.

Between his anointing and his coronation, David had to wait. Waiting did not mean sitting in comfort in a royal waiting room. It meant surviving the jealousy of Saul who wanted him dead. It meant living life on the run.

Twice David had the chance to kill Saul and clear the throne for himself. The first time Saul went to the bathroom (to put it politely) in the cave where David was hiding. The second time David had the chance to kill him when he was sleeping in his military camp.

On both occasions the people with David encouraged him to end Saul's life. They even told him that it was God who had set up the circumstances: God had given Saul into his hands. All David had to do was say the word and the throne would be his. What do you do if there is something that God has promised you but has not yet given you and suddenly circumstances seem to say it's time to take your future in your own hands? David refused to act. It wasn't that he was not a man of action: it would be hard to find many more action-oriented men in the Old Testament. But here's what he said (1 Samuel 26:9-11):

But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" 10 And David said, "As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. 11 The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go."

David knew that the end would not justify the means. He refused to bring about God's will by taking things into his own hands. David had a conviction about the Lord's anointed. Perhaps he thought of the law that said that it was sin even to curse a ruler of the people.

Instead of taking things into his own hands, he left his future in God's hands. When God wants to end Saul's life, he'll end it. That's God's business, not mine.

It takes confident trust in God to do that. There are shortcuts that seem to get you to your destination more quickly: but they mean compromising your convictions.

I have previously mentioned the story of a young woman I knew in another church. She really wanted to get married. Her preference was that God would bring along the right man. But gave God a deadline. If God hadn't come through by the time she was 35, she would take things into her own hand. That's what happened. And it didn't work.

Sometimes faith means stepping out and taking action. Sometimes faith means holding back because you want to leave the future in God's hands.

By faith, David obtained what was promised.

He established justice: he obtained what was promised. But he also put nations to flight.

Not only was he a righteous ruler, he was a successful military leader. There were the Ammonites; there were the Syrians; there were the Edomites; there were the Moabites; and of course there were the Philistines.

By faith, he put foreign armies to flight.

And it's mentioning the Philistines that takes us back to the beginning of his story - just as we went back to the start of Samuel's story.

You can't really think about David without thinking about Goliath. I'm not going to retell the story just now - it's in 1 Samuel 17 (and I'll be back with it this evening at our communion service). For now, just notice these two things: David's faith and David's preparation.

David's faith.

David's faith in the story was his conviction that God would stand with him in dealing with Goliath.

He saw Goliath differently from everyone else. Everyone else saw Goliath as a daunting enemy that they could not face. David saw him as a unholy Philistine who dared to defy the honour of God. If it was God's honour that was at stake, David knew that he could trust God to act.

We need people who will see things differently. They don't just see what everyone else sees. In particular they see the places where God's honour is at stake and they are not prepared to stand back and do nothing.

David's preparation.

That was the beginning of David's domination of the Philistines. His name became a name for Philistines to dread. But his faith goes back even further than that.

1 Samuel 17:31-37.

When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. 32 And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." 33 And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." 34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 36 Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 And David said, "**The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.**" And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

He had proved God in the obscure and humble circumstances of looking after sheep.

It's fascinating to read three people talking about David and his sheep in these chapters. In chapter 16, when Samuel arrives with David's family hunting for a new king, all the older brothers are wheeled out but not David. The youngest son is not here, says Jesse: he's looking after the sheep. At his age he could look after sheep, but he wasn't likely to come into the running to be king.

Secondly, when David arrives at the scene of the battle his oldest brother says to him,

Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness?

In his mind, David belonged with "those few sheep." He didn't belong in a battle.

The third thing is what David says. He'd had to protect his sheep from bears and lions. He had managed because it was God who delivered him. David knew that the same God who protected him when he was looking after his sheep would protect him when he was taking on Goliath.

In other words, what for his family was an insignificant little job off in the obscurity of the desert was, for David, a place where he learned to prove the strength and faithfulness of God. As a young man.

Never underestimate the small things that you get to do in obscure places. They may be obscure in the eyes of some people, but they can become moments where God is teaching you things that are paving the way for your life's work.

What could possibly be the connection between looking after a few sheep in the desert and becoming a king who extends the borders of his nation and puts foreign armies to flight? When looking after sheep becomes an opportunity to prove and trust God, then there is a connection.

Don't underestimate the far-reaching consequences of what might seem like little things where nobody has heard of you. It's part of God's building and preparation.

Conclusion.

David and Samuel: establishing justice, routing foreign armies, obtaining promises.

I think these were two great men in the Old Testament. They certainly stand out ahead of many of the previous wave of "faith heroes", the deeply flawed people who fill the pages of Judges.

But they were not perfect and their lives were not empty of regret. Samuel had to live with the pain of knowing that his sons had not followed his spiritual footsteps. I'm not saying that that was his fault: but it was part of the pain he had to deal with. And of course David's biographers did not spare him the mention of his great moral failure when he sinned with Bathsheba.

Good men, but not perfect.

And that should remind us that whatever inspiration we might find from them, our eyes don't stop there. These men - especially David - point us on to Jesus, as chapter 12 urges us to fix our eyes on him.