

“Why David?”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)
Continuing a series *A King for God's People*

2nd Samuel 23:1-7 and 1st Kings 2:1-4,10-11

July 16, 2017

See the Scripture by clicking [here](#) and [here](#).

Someone asked me when David's story was going to finally be finished. Well, you just heard it. David's done. Except . . . we still need him. To understand the unfolding story of God's People, we need David. To make sense of Jesus, we need David. It seems God wants it this way. There is something about David!

In the whole Bible, who gets mentioned most? David! More than Abraham, more than Moses, more than Mary, even more than Jesus! Why David?¹

Many, many kings came after David. They are evaluated, not by their military successes, not by their great monuments, not by their wealth, but by how they compare with David.² Few compare well. Why David?

When things are not going well, when God's People are plagued by tragedy and disaster, when they turn away from God, and when God is achingly silent to them, what do they hope for? A new David.

Why David?

II

First, David is spectacular. He succeeds spectacularly. He messes-up spectacularly. And always, with a great story.

- You remember when little Davey crushed mighty Goliath.
- Remember when God chose Davey? God picked the least-obvious child, in a nothing family, from a nowhere town to rule God's People.

¹ Here are the counts I came up with, by doing word searches of the English Standard Version.

	Total	OT	NT
David	1141	1082	59
Jesus	966	0	966
Moses	852	772	80
Abraham	250	175	75
Miriam / Mary(s)	69	15	54 (includes all the "Marys" in the NT)

² Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen write, "David is invariably the standard by which each king's reign is measured." Also, "The primary interest is to show how each of the kings relates to the LORD; the author cares little for other kingly accomplishments, such as building projects. . . ." The Drama of Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 94, 95.

- Remember Dave's best-friendship with Jonathan? They can teach us about faithful, self-sacrificial love.
- Remember when King Saul was hunting Dave to destroy him? The tables turned, Dave had Saul in his hands, but then let him go. Dave shows us mercy.
- Remember David the dancer? He scandalized by letting loose and celebrating God.
- Remember David the poet and singer? His words soothed and inspired. His psalms give voice to the prayers of our hearts.
- Remember David the warrior? He saved Israel from its enemies. He expanded its border and influence. He brought peace to God's People.

We could write a glowing eulogy for David. But the Bible doesn't. It won't let us forget.

- We can't forget Bathsheba. David took her, slept with her, used her.
- We can't forget Uriah, her husband, whom David murdered to cover up his crime.
- We can't forget David's daughter Tamar. She was raped by her half-brother, Amnon. David did nothing to get justice for her.
- We can't forget Amnon, who was then murdered in retaliation by another brother, Absalom.
- We can't forget when Absalom made a violent grab for power. He almost overthrew David. Then David's general killed him.
- We can't forget David's broken heart.
- We can't forget when he caused turmoil and division.
- We can't forget when he acted with brutality.
- We can't forget when he showed terrible judgement.

The Bible gives us an unforgettable picture of David, and insists that we remember all of him.

Maybe that's why David gets to us. I'm not nearly so spectacular. But I am certainly a mixed bag too. You?

God is faithful to that mixed-bag David. *All of David*. David of the great stuff, and David of the disastrous stuff. God takes all of David. God takes all of us.

God is faithful. Everything hangs on this. The cosmos hangs on God's faithfulness. Humanity hangs on God's faithfulness. God's People Israel hangs on God's faithfulness. Israel's king David hangs on God's faithfulness. Not because the cosmos is healthy, or humankind is good, or Israel is obedient, or David's life is exemplary. Certainly not!

It's because of God. No matter what happens —no matter what David does, no matter what others do to him— God's faithfulness is never in doubt.³

God is faithful to *all* of David. David of the spectacular successes, and David of the shattering failures. God holds all of David, as smelly and prickly and disgusting as he can be sometimes. God holds David, faithfully. And God holds you. *All* that is you, faithfully.

III

Why David? He was spectacular. And his heart was toward God. We are told that David was "*a man after God's own heart.*" God chose David because God could see his "*heart.*"⁴

To us, "heart" is a metaphor for feelings, love, desire. In Hebrew thinking "heart" is different. Your "heart" is about your will, your decision-making, your life-orientation. When they said David was "*after God's own heart,*" it wasn't that God loved him more, or he was God's special favourite. It's that God saw that David would be the one to carry out God's purposes. His will, his life's orientation was toward God.⁵

Anyone with power, anyone who is successful, is tempted. We risk thinking we can do anything, we can get away with anything, and we don't need God. David had many successes. He gained much power. He was sorely tempted. Yet however he botched things, however he sinned grievously, David came back to God. His heart was God-oriented. He was vulnerable to God, depended on God. He trusted God to break him, and trusted God to remake him. David loved God. This was David's heart, so God knew David would live out God's purposes. So God made him the king of God's People.

As God searches your heart, what does God see? How is your heart oriented? Can you turn your heart more toward God? Well, how does our heart turn toward anyone? We come to know them. We discover if they are worthy of our heart. Our heart is drawn to them.

³ Walter Brueggemann, First and Second Samuel (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), 356.

⁴ 1st Samuel 13:14; 16:17.

⁵ Christopher Wright says, "The phrase 'a man after my own heart' does not mean (as it may sound in English) a special favorite of God. Rather since the heart is the seat of the will and intentions in Hebrew, the phrase simply means that David will be the one who will carry out the purposes of God." Also, "[W]hen David is anointed as 'a man after my own heart,' it must imply that the reign of David is not to be seen as in any way replacing or usurping the reign of YHWH, but rather an embodiment of it. David as the human king of Israel will carry out the purpose of YHWH, their covenant great King." Christopher J. H. Wright, The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 344.

Know God. Know God in Scripture, know God in worship, know God in prayer. Know God, and your heart turns to God.

IV

Why David? He was spectacularly great, and spectacularly tragic . . . a mixed bag, like us. And God was faithful to him, like us. Why David? His heart was oriented toward God. He entrusted himself to God.

Why David? With him comes a crucial turning-point in the unfolding drama of God's redeeming, restoring, and renewing of God's world.

For the sake of us all, God chose to work through a particular people. God crafted and called Israel to be God's representative people among a world of peoples that has rebelled against God. God made a covenant relationship with Israel for this vital mission. That was a turning point.

With David came another. God began working out that Israel-covenant through a king. God's covenant with David did not replace God's covenant with Israel.⁶ (Likewise, God's covenant with Israel did not replace God's relationship with all people.)

God decided that David and his dynasty would now lead God's People in being faithful to God. Israel will be a holy people, a faithful people, the kingdom of God — and God's king will lead them: lead them in being God's servant, lead them in living and showing God's ways within the world.⁷

That's the theory. That's the plan. That's the promise. But as it was with David, so it was with those who came after him. The reality of the king for God's People proved to be much more mixed, much more ambiguous, much more troubled. Israel's rulers become part of the problem: too often unfaithful, too often corrupt, too often compromised, too often terrible.

Still, there is the promise.

God's promise. God's promise to David. God's promise through David to all of us. God's faithful promise of a faithful king for God's People.

That's where I'll continue, next week.

⁶ God's covenant with David "needs to be seen not as a new covenant unrelated to the Sinai covenant but as a particular outworking of it in the context of monarchy." Christopher Wright, 344.

⁷ "The new element in the covenant with David is that kingship is grafted onto the Sinai covenant. Israel is now officially constituted as a kingdom; Israel will now fulfill its calling to be a light to the nations as a kingdom. Israel's human king will lead the people to be a holy nation and priestly kingdom. He will do so as he removes idolatry from the land and givesw Israel rest and shalom." Bartholomew and Goheen, 94.