

A PERSON AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

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The theme of my message today – “The perfect heart, a person after God’s own heart.” For some months now prior to the Easter season we’ve been sharing together out of 1 Samuel. As I looked at the last several chapters in 1 Samuel that dealt with battles and then Saul’s suicide I felt the unction of the Spirit on me that Samuel had now reached its concluding time. And that I should move on to other parts of God’s word. That one part of first and second Samuel should be struck as a kind of keynote to this part of God’s word.

To share with you just a few minutes some things from the life of David who was a person after God’s own heart. Nobody else in the Bible bears his name. One of the persons that he alone has the name David. His story spans from 1 Samuel 16 all the way through the rest of 1 Samuel and through 2 Samuel and into 1 Kings 2:12 and also 1 Chronicles 11-29, a total of 58 and a half chapters of the history portion of the Old Testament deal with his life and career. Out of the 150 psalms he writes 73 of them. In all, ten percent of the chapters of the Bible are devoted to this man’s life or to his writings. His name is mentioned 59 times in the New Testament. Never mentioned once disapprovingly. He’s a monumental person whom God puts in his word that we might get some insight and encouragement and strength for our own life.

Alexander McClaren, the Scottish preacher from another generation said that David’s life was much like the instrument he played – the harp. In contrast to Moses’ life which was like the trumpet or Sinai, one long note. David’s life has a greater variety. McClaren says none of the great men of scripture pass through the courts of so many changes, touched human life at so many points. None of them were so tempered and polished by swift alteration of heat and cold, by such heavy blows and the friction of such rapid revolutions. These quick transitions of fortune and this wide experience are the many colored threads from which the rich web of his songs is woven.

The thing that unifies his life however is the text by which he is introduced to us in human history. The words about him which Samuel first spoke to Saul in 1 Saul 13:14 referring to David: “The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart.” That’s what God looked for first. Not a musician, not a warrior, not a king. But a person after his heart.

That title was never taken from David in spite of all of his failures. In fact, Stephen, the New Testament deacon who is approaching martyrdom, in his address of Acts 7 says of David “He enjoyed God’s favor.” A man after God’s own heart. Yet he made critical mistakes. Isn’t that a word of encouragement for us? When you see a title like “A person after God’s own heart” equals “Be perfect. Therefore since I am not perfect I cannot be a person after God’s own heart.” David as you know is not perfect. He has fundamental flaws in his life. He was, on occasion, a situational ethicist. He made up lies to protect himself. He had multiple marriages and not in serial sequence either. At once. Polygamous. His most great failure was his adultery with Bathsheba and the consequent murder of Bathsheba’s husband Uriah. In a failure not commonly seen is the failure of incomplete forgiveness. When he brings Absalom back to Jerusalem, after Absalom spent a time of exile down in Hebron. David ostensibly brings him back to Jerusalem that he might be forgiven. Yet for two solid years Absalom is in Jerusalem yet David never sees him face to face. He never really forgave because he did not establish face to face communication. The tragedies of incomplete forgiveness are seen in the consequences that David reaped.

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Alexander the Great used to be depicted on the coins of his realm with his chin resting in his hand. The reason was that Alexander the Great had a scar it is said on his face that he preferred to hide by placing his chin in his hand.

When the scriptures give to us people they show to us the real scars. And the real blemishes. God could have glossed the negatives, he could have airbrushed out those debilitating factors of David's life. Or he could have given us a sanitized press release on David. But he gave us the real person, warts and all. And dares to say to us, Here's a man after my heart.

What does it mean to be a person after God's own heart?

In David you can see some things. The first one I cite is not necessarily the one that I'd identify as the most important but it's the first one chronologically that you see in examining his life. That is that David strove for excellency. He was not a person of halfway measures. We see him as the shepherd boy. Not growing up in western society where he would have been forced to have attended school 6-8 hours a day he had lot of free time. David has the very menial task of being a shepherd. But what is he doing out there when there's nothing but time on his hands, loneliness, watching sheep on the Judean hillside. He is learning to play a string instrument, a harp. Biblically it was something akin to our guitar. And he's learning to throw stones well. He could sling a stone and hit at a distance within a hair breadth. He put to use his idle time so well that in the playing of music he could lift depressed spirits. He learned to compose songs under the night sky. There along the slopes of the south Judean countryside is David talking with his God, learning to play and sing.

What excellency do we seek for in life? We may never have the skill of someone who is proficient in a talent. Bu what we should seek to develop is our potential to the fullest level that our potential can be developed. David did it.

That's part of God's purpose of putting us on this earth. Genesis in creating man and woman said, I'll put you in the garden and you're to have dominion over it. It's your mandate. Take and exercise the control and functions I've given to you in putting you in life. If you have the capacity to be an outstanding student, don't settle for something that is less than the best. Apply yourself.

Excellence in relationships. Whatever we do. That's part of an attribute of God, to do things well, properly. Not half heartedly.

Another thing we find in David that makes him a person modeled after God is that he relied upon or had confidence in the Lord. Tremendous faith and trust and reliance in the Lord.

We see this the first time we meet him in a public confrontation. He is going to take out after Goliath. We noted when we looked at the chapter that defeat was in everybody else. Nobody else was talking about the Lord. Everyone just accepted the fact that the situation was so opposing and forceful that it couldn't be overcome so they didn't talk about what God could do. David comes into the scene and he's doing God-talk. He's saying, the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid.

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He moves out in that tremendous confidence in the Lord and things happen as a result. David exercises that reliance and confidence all through his life. He was not simply an Easter believer who one day in 365 gave some kind of lip service to God. In the everyday fabric warp and woof of his personality he relies upon God.

We see it clearly in his engagement with Saul where 12 times specifically Saul sought his life and two times he had the opportunity to get Saul and yet each time he resisted because he knew if God had called him to the throne he could wait for God's time. He would not have to use wrongful methods.

Sometimes in our pursuit of something we think is God's will we force God's will by prematurely getting involved in the scene ourselves. We cannot use wrong means to achieve Godly ends. It was God's will, God's end for David to be king. But it would never have been right had David used the wrong methods. God is concerned not only with where we get to but how. David relied upon God to take care of him. And to keep his promises to him.

Temptation is simply an invitation to a short cut. It's like Jesus turning stones into bread. It was all right for him to eat bread but the temptation was a short cut. Skip over your humanity and do it quick.

So many things in life are temptations. When we fall to them, they're short cuts to get somewhere. For David a short cut – kill Saul, you have a right to kill him. But he refuses to take the shortcut of anger, bitterness, revenge, retaliation. He'll take the long way around. Forgiveness always takes longer. Tenderness, compassion, longsuffering is exactly that. It's *long* suffering. Not short suffering.

When we short circuit those processes by letting our behavior and our character get out of God's will then we step outside of our reliance and confidence in God. David shows himself to be a man after God's own heart by not doing this. In fact his words of eulogy in regard to Saul's death are among the most immortal of all literature. David because he relied upon the Lord harbored no bitterness toward this man and he's able to say at his death, honestly, "I found him pleasant."

In David we gain a great picture of the mercy of God. And that it pays to do things God's way. Every person has their Saul, their nemesis. Whether it's an actual personality or problem we all have a nemesis. David committed that enemy, that nemesis to God's keeping. In doing so he became a man after God's own heart.

The third quality in David that makes him a man after God's own heart is that his life made a difference. He really made a difference. Paul in acts 13:36 said "David served God's purpose in his own generation." I can't think of any more wonderful phrase to be said about your life that in your lifetime you served God's purpose.

Frequently when I dedicate a baby I'll make some reference to the fact, May this child live in such a way so that God's purposes in sending this child may be fulfilled. We all have purposes for our children and the children will grow up to have purposes for themselves. But the most important thing is what was God's purpose in sending us.

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David by God's will served God's purpose in his own generation. What a rich purpose he served. He is Israel's shepherd boy, the representative of the toiling classes. He was her musician. He was her soldier. He was her king. He was her priest. He was her prophet, proclaiming with his very last breath the everlastingness of his kingdom. He was her poet. He made a difference, a multi-faceted difference.

When Thomas Edison died in the 1920s then President Hoover wanted to find a fitting way to acknowledge the contribution that Edison had made to humanity. He explored the possibility of a presidential proclamation which on the day of Edison's funeral would involve at noon all electricity in the nation being shut off for one minute in honor of Edison. They soon discovered it couldn't be done. Too many hospitals now in existence that couldn't afford to go without electricity, too many essential services that the electricity could not be cut off. I'd suspect until Jesus comes the world will never again be without the efficient use of electricity. Edison did that. He made a contribution that was so mammoth that we couldn't go without it sixty seconds.

I couldn't last without David's psalms. When I'm down I need to get those things, get them again in my heart. When I think I had failed God in such a significant way that God wouldn't want to do anything with me again I just have to get out David's life and realize what a difference God had him to be for all of us.

We're ordinary people here. None of us are going to make the quantitative contribution that David made. But that's not to excuse us from making no contribution. I may in some way to some person in some place make a difference. That's what God calls me to. God calls me to make a difference. God calls you to make a difference. That's part of why we're the church. We're to live life with purpose and meaning.

The fourth and final thing about David that marks him as a person after God's own heart is that when he sinned he sought God's forgiveness. There was great travail in his life because of his sin. But he did the right thing. You can do two wrong things – sin and then after that sin if you don't make things right with God, that's compounding the wrong. But when we sin and come back to the Lord and admit in honesty our failure and ask his forgiveness, then that's doing the right thing. David did the right thing. "Be merciful to me, O God."

David by the way in Psalm 51 when he was praying says "If you would accept the blood of bulls and goats I would offer it." But David knew his Old Testament law and knew that first degree pre meditated murder there was no atonement under the Old Testament system. He couldn't offer an animal sacrifice if you had done first degree pre meditated murder. That's why David said in Psalm 51 "If the blood of bulls and goats would do that I would do it. But O God a broken spirit and a contrite heart you will not despise." David found a new way.

Forgiveness. There's a lot of confusion these days about forgiveness. What forgiveness does is it repairs the relationship with God. It does not always repair our relationship with other people. Nor does it always reverse the consequences of our sin.

For example, although David was forgiven by God he couldn't reverse some of the consequences his sin had set in motion. His son, for example, died. His credibility was never again what it was prior to his sin. Because you function in a leadership position by integrity, when the integrity is gone you can no longer have the same degree of influence. It isn't there. David found that to be the hard case. He had to live with that consequence. He had to live with the

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consequence that his capacity to govern declined after his sin. Rebellion and revolution breaks out in his realm. And things are really never the same after that. Then he had to face the fact that within his own household the sword did not depart. Shortly after his affair with Bathsheba his kids had such poor relationships among themselves that his daughter is raped by her half brother and in turn the full brother murders that brother. These things began to happen in David's life because there was a moment in his experience when he had blocked out service to God and family and substituted the priority of other concerns for himself.

He was forgiven. But forgiveness does not necessarily obliterate the human consequences. What forgiveness does is it spares us wreckage with God. God forgives him completely. David came to the truth of words that he had perhaps written years earlier as a shepherd boy: "He restores my soul."

God's forgiveness of David is not meant to lead us to an easy believism or cheap grace that says go out and do anything you want to and you can always get forgiven by God. David's story reminds us that when we go out and do anything we want to we can sure be forgiven of God but there may be consequences that even God himself is unable or unwilling to unwind. The consequences are there and David knows that and experiences that.

But he knows another side to God. He knows that God will have relationship with people who have done the most scummy things imaginable. God will get down into the gutter with David. God got into the grime of David's failure and said, No matter what you've done, I still love you. David knew that forgiveness was cheap and it wasn't easy. He humbled his heart and broke in God's presence.

I don't think the experience David received from God was like a formal handshake. I think it was accompanied by much shaking in his spirit and soul. But he sued God for forgiveness and got it.

Whatever and wherever we have failed in our life we can get to the same God for forgiveness.

None of us ought to think that simply because we have failed in our life that that discredits us from ever being used of God or forgiven of God. God knows what he's doing as he works on us if we'll yield ourselves to him he will complete his masterpiece in us.

God's going to work on us. The flaw in our life may be severe indeed. In the hands of anyone other than God we would be ruined. But God seeks to carve us out of the stone.

Lord, today we place ourselves anew in your hand. Unlike the piece of marble that has no responsiveness and cannot say no to the sculptor we are a living block of marble who can say no. We can frustrate your purposes or we can accede to them and agree with them. And see you do something wonderful and profound in our life. I pray that we would be people after your own heart. Persons in this congregation today who in their life need to reach out for excellence. However that word excellence can apply to us, Lord, may we be that for you have not appointed us to that dim and dreary region of average. But you've called us to a high calling, to be conformed to the image of God's own Son Jesus, our Lord. To have excellence in our spirit, excellence in the fruit of our life, excellence in character, excellence in forgiveness. Give to us Lord a spirit of excellence. May we too rely upon you in every moment of life. They who trust in you will never be put to shame. Help us to learn that

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from David. Help us to make a difference and where we have sinned, grant us forgiveness. Make us your people. Thank you for never giving up on us, Lord. Thank you for finding us – the least, the lost, the last. Thank you for coming us and wanting to do something splendid in our lives. Thank you for Jesus Christ who loves us above all others. Thank you for forgiveness. Through Christ, our Lord, Amen.