

August 2, 2009

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

“Promises and Principles”

Over the last decade I have observed something interesting: professionals seem to be getting YOUNGER! Doctors, lawyers, dentists, accountants, professors, surgeons, PASTORS! Some seem just a bit older than my kids. Some are my kids’ age. Some are now YOUNGER than my youngest kid!

I realize some of you have been noticing this longer than I have. Some of you are discovering professionals who are the age of your GRANDCHILDREN. Some of the professionals ARE your grandchildren! That joy lies before me, God willing.

Why has this been so troubling to me? Until I reached full adulthood I unconsciously believed there are generally grown-up, responsible people running the world. Time and experience have, of course taught me this isn’t true. There are dangerous people in charge of nations and movements, and in our own country behavior of some leaders makes me want to ground them for at least a couple months.

The truth is that there is NOT a consistently responsible, spiritually mature group of people in charge of anything much.

We realize this on some level most of the time, however there is one group of people we idealize or even idolize, thinking they are better, wiser, more spiritual, more HOLY than we are or could ever hope to be: BIBLE HEROES.

This is a problem. It can make us think the world and people of the Bible constitute a unique realm. How seriously do we take the Bible? Do we hear the stories and dismiss them- thinking they speak of a different KIND of people, in a different TIME than ours, without much bearing on us personally? I fear this is often true.

Well, here’s the truth: the world of the Bible is OUR world and the people are people JUST LIKE US.

Today, let's think about the great King David. What kind of person was this great Bible Hero? Did he live a holy life? Did he live by the promises and principles that were important to him? How does his life speak to our lives?

David was the second King of Israel, from 1000-962 B.C. His family was from Bethlehem. Jesse was his father and was the son of Obed who was the son of Boaz and Ruth (who was from a despised foreign people.) David had a least 6 brothers and 2 sisters. He was chosen, by God's direction, through the prophet Samuel to rule over Israel. If you remember from a reading a few weeks ago, David was a startling choice, as he was the youngest of all the brothers, and considered unimportant by his family, culture and even Samuel.

David was chosen to be King in place of the first King, Saul, who had not been obedient to God. Initially David was grateful, amazed and humble, astounded that God had chosen him. He saw himself as a SERVANT of God. He was willing to take great risks for God—consider him going up against the enemy's giant warrior Goliath, with only a slingshot for a weapon. And he won that battle! He was the "little guy" who made good.

Then David changed. He became a great warrior, accomplishing military successes, one after the other. He won his people's love and favor. All of this led to arrogance.

David desired a woman who was the wife of another. He took her anyway. He made her pregnant. Then, to hide his sin, he had her husband killed by manipulating his position in battle.

Friends, THIS is the great King David, revered for centuries, the one referred to in the Gospels when people called Jesus, "Son of David".

I am a person who believes in promises and in principles. What are the promises and principles we live by? Do our lives attest to them?

David promised to live by God's laws. He broke three of the Ten Commandments in our Scripture lesson: -- he coveted another's spouse; he committed adultery with her; he killed her husband.

This doesn't even touch on the violations of his principles:

He intended to serve his nation as an ethical, God-fearing leader. He knew the importance of directing the military's movements as wisely as possible for the well-being of his nation. He sacrificed these principles without hesitation.

What are promises and principles WE live by? Do our lives attest to them?

-If you are married you promised to love and cherish your spouse. Do you? You promised to be faithful to your spouse. Are you?

-If you are a parent you made unspoken promises, but they are still very real. You committed to spend time with your child.... Do you? You are expected to set your needs aside for theirs... Do you? God expects you to provide what they need to grow up healthy, strong, loved and loving. How is that going?

-If you are a member of this church you promised to follow Jesus. How often do you reflect on how you're doing in that "following"? You promised to support this congregation by your prayers, presence, gifts and service? Are you doing all four of these?

While we may not have sinned exactly as King David did, it really doesn't matter. Remember Jesus' teaching- that even if you have never committed adultery, if you have looked at another with lust in your heart, you are just as guilty.

This is a hard, hard teaching. We love to grade sins—to put them in a hierarchy, in an order of magnitude from greatest to least. Jesus calls us to another way. He tells us to forget about the magnitude business. He commands us to leave those judgments to God. We are to focus on OUR OWN INDIVIDUAL SIN, and the ways we betray promises and principles in our daily lives.

The first step in handling such betrayal is to recognize it. God sent a prophet to David: Nathan. He helped David SEE his wrong—and that seeing melted David's heart. Remorse and sorrow overcame him. And God forgave his sin.

David is remembered as a HERO of the Bible and of his people. In many ways, he was. But he was also a sinner, just like us—flawed and frail and in need of the grace of God to provide forgiveness and transformation.

That's the good news for today. As long as we can SEE our sin, we can confess it, receive forgiveness and begin again. God will send you agents and prophets to help you SEE your sin. If you start paying attention you will notice them. They might speak to you through a book you are reading, through a voice on the radio, through a family member, even through the voice of a child. The stories of Scripture, of course, address our sin over and over from many angles. We cannot be forgiven until we FACE our sin.

That's our homework assignment as we approach the next school year. If you are no longer in school, **DO NOT THINK FOR A MOMENT THAT YOU DON'T HAVE HOMEWORK ANYMORE!!** As followers of Jesus committed to promises and principles he calls us to embrace, we need to **WORK ON BEING FAITHFUL** every day of our lives.

Go home. Think about promises you have made and principles you believe in. Ask God to show you how you're doing. God will do that, don't worry. Be patient. Be attentive. Pray. Listen. God will help you. You are precious to him **JUST AS YOU ARE**, and God has a vision of **WHO YOU WILL BE** as you faithfully listen to his words and follow where Christ leads. Amen.