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The National Presbyterian Church

David, the People's King

Psalm 51; Romans 1:1-6

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At the end of the life of Moses, Joshua and the people enter into the Promised Land. The land is between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. During the time of the judges the people are tribal, disparate. In fact, the book of I Chronicles begins by noting all of the tribes, and the fact that they struggled with each other, a rag tag group. And the people then came to the prophet Samuel and requested of him that they have a king. And the first king was Saul.

But then a strong, new leader will come into their life and will make a permanent imprint on the story before the grand story. It was said of this man that he was the man who was raised on high, anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel. And that man was David, the king. He was the nation's songwriter, and so many of the psalms in the book of Psalms are written by this man, King David. He was also a warrior. In fact, it says in I Samuel, "Saul has his thousands, David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). He began to reign at the age of 30, and he reigned for 40 years as the king. His date is the easiest date to remember in the Old Testament: 1,000 B.C.,

one thousand years before Christ.

Under David, Israel during those 40 years will win all of its important battles. After David, they will win no battles. Think of it. Think of this history. We're tracing right now the story before the grand story. From Abraham who is 1,800 years before Christ, until the time of the first century, that's an 1,800-year span, and in those 1,800 years, think of this, if you're a nation or pondering your nationhood. In that 1,800-year period there is one moment of glory and it's the 40 years of King David -- one moment when you are a victorious people winning all battles. After David, his son Solomon will be the king, who is his second son with Bathsheba. Next week we'll look at Solomon. Soon after Solomon, the Egyptians will come and strip all the gold out of the temple in Jerusalem. And then, civil war will break out. It will be a permanent civil war, really, until the North and the South are destroyed even more. The Northern Kingdom will be called Israel and the South, Judah. The Northern Kingdom will fall to invaders in 710 B.C. And then in 586 B.C. the South will be destroyed.

The Babylonians will take the remnant of the people who will be captive for 70 years in Babylon, and then finally the Persians will bring them back. After David, all of the history is the history of the Jews living under the control of great powers around them, right up until and into the time of the first century. Before David, they're a collection of tribes. During David, they become a nation and have 40 years of glory, and after that everything is a story of decline; but a story, nevertheless, of survival.

He is that great moment. And he is so important to this long history that when the people of the first century will look back in fondness to their history, or look forward in hope in what we call their messianic hope for the Messiah to come, they will center that messianic hope together with that memory in terms of three great heroes of their history. One way of understanding Old Testament history is to understand those three great heroes of that history. The one is Abraham, the father. He's the one that gave them their identity. When they think of their identity and who they are, they always think of Abraham, the father -- not only for the Jews but also for the

Arabs. Isn't it ironic that the three great monotheistic religions of the world, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, all look to Abraham as the father who gives identity? And so when the Jews look back to the father like Abraham, their first great hope would be the yearning for a father like Abraham, for that memory of knowing who we are, fulfilled.

If you saw the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," one of the great musicals I think ever made, Revtevy starts that musical with a wonderful song called "Tradition." And that humorous song is a song that answers the question 'Who are we?' We know who we are because of the tradition. We are children of Abraham. We know our name. That's the Abrahamic thread that goes all through the Old Testament into the New Testament.

The second great thread is the Mosaic thread. Last week we looked at Moses who is the shepherd, deliverer, law giver. Both Abraham and Moses are granted by God a covenant. The covenant with Abraham is the covenant of blessing, that God would bless this people and give them an identity as to who they were. The second covenant is given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the covenant of the Law, where God shows his will for life. Moses is, first of all, the deliverer who delivered the Children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt; and in the gift of the Law we are delivered out of the bondage to ourselves. And so when Moses goes up Mt. Sinai he is the absolute leader. When he comes down Mt. Sinai, the Law stands over Moses, the Ten Commandments, the second great covenant, the covenant of God's will for our lives.

The third grand covenant hope is the Davidic memory for a king like David, the yearning is for a king like David. That is a yearning for kingdom, the yearning for fulfillment, for happiness, for joy. And that comes into the New Testament. In fact, it becomes very dominant in the New Testament memory.

When Peter begins his sermon on the day of Pentecost he doesn't really mention Abraham, nor does he mention Moses. He mentions David primarily. He says a promise was made to David interestingly enough by the same prophet Nathan who later confronted David. He earlier gives a promise to David and says, "I have a word from the Lord for you that upon

your throne a king shall reign forever,” the Davidic throne, the kingdom. So Peter will start his sermon noting the promise that was given to David that upon his throne would be one that would last forever, the One. Who is the One that fulfills this everlasting kingship, who is the Son of Jesse? David was the son of Jesse. Peter asks, “Who is this Son of David, who is it?” Jesus Christ. He is the inheritor of Nathan’s promise from God.

St. Paul starts the book of Romans that same way: “Jesus Christ, descended from David” (Romans 1:3), fulfilling David. When the blind man Bartimaeus on the side of the road wants to be healed he cries out, “Oh, Jesus, thou...” He doesn’t say ‘Jesus, son of Abraham,’ ‘Jesus son, of Moses;’ he says “Thou Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:48). And so this Davidic hope is primary. In fact, Mt. Zion is the most holy site in the Holy Land, and that’s the site of the tomb of David. He’s the hero. And these three great memories, these three great heroes are a key to understanding the Old Testament yearning, as the Old Testament looks toward Messiah. The Messiah must be like a father, like Abraham, he must be a deliverer and fulfill the Law. Notice our Lord said, “Think not that I’ve come to destroy the Law. I’ve come to fulfill it” (Matthew 5:17), and the Messiah must be a king like David.

How is it that this man David can have this enduring influence? Well, there are two reasons that can justify it. One is because he was a hero. He was notable for his achievements. He brought the people together and made them a nation. He was a brave and victorious warrior. But he’s also a man who is morally flawed and flawed in a very grave sense. His moral failure is portrayed clearly and definitely in Samuel’s narrative (2 Samuel 11-12). Samuel, one of the first of the great historians of the Bible carefully sketches in the failure of David. David stole the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah. Then he arranged for the murder of a man who would’ve died for him. David had fallen in love with Uriah’s wife Bathsheba and then slept with her and she became pregnant. He had hoped that Uriah, coming home to Jerusalem after awhile at war, would sleep with his wife, so that he wouldn’t be found out. But Uriah doesn’t. He sleeps with the soldiers at the palace entrance. So then David is in an exposed position and he arranges for the execution of this man. Uriah carries (think of the irony), he carries a secret

order only for Joab the general. And Uriah carries the order back to the battle line; the order to Joab says engage the enemy in battle. Put Uriah in the front of the troops where the fighting is the fiercest, then withdraw so that he'll be killed and then send me word as to what happens to Uriah. Uriah is slain in battle by the enemy. And David is apparently safe.

Except that the prophet Nathan comes to visit the king. Nathan, who had made the great covenant promise to him, now comes and says "I have a story to tell you, David." And he tells him this parable about a man who had many sheep and then he saw one sheep and he took it. "And what would you do with a man like that?" David rails against such injustice, and then Nathan's answer is one of the most famous lines in all the Bible, as Nathan the prophet faces this king who is so powerful, who the people love so much that he can do anything he wants to do, and he points to David and says, "Thou are the man" (2 Samuel 12:7). And now we see that even the king, according to the prophet Nathan is under the Law like Moses was. The Ten Commandments stands over the king just like it stands over the prophet and over the people. David has a moment of truth there. He could arrange for the execution of Nathan as he arranged for the execution of Uriah. But instead David does something that maybe is the second reason why we honor him in that great messianic memory. He repents. He accepts the Law and says, "I am guilty. I am under the Law. I broke God's law" (2 Samuel 12:13). And then his great psalm is written.

David wrote so many psalms, but perhaps his greatest psalm is Psalm 51. And Psalm 51 begins this way, with a prescription. Not all psalms are identified before the psalm is read, but this one is. It says, "To the leader, a psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Then the Psalm, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my transgressions." David is now no longer the absolute king, just as Moses was not absolute when he came down Mt. Sinai. He was when he went up but not when he came down. And now David is under the Law too. "I know my transgressions. My sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone have I sinned" (Psalm 51:1-3).

Don't misunderstand the word 'alone' here. It doesn't mean that he hasn't sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba. He has sinned against not only Uriah and Bathsheba but all the other soldiers that were thrown into a needless battle so that Uriah could be killed. David committed treachery, not only adultery but treachery. And so he said "against you" and "alone" means "you supremely;" it is used in that alone supreme sense, you supremely. He saw that when he sinned against these folks around him, he'd sinned against God, because God loves them, and David saw that connection. Cain didn't see it when Cain killed his brother Abel. "God asks, 'Where is your brother?' He says 'Am I my brother's keeper?' And then God says to Cain, 'Yes, you are, and his blood cries out to me'" (Genesis 4:9-10). But now David doesn't have to hear that. David knows it. He knows the Law and he submits himself to that great Law, and that is the greatness of David.

"I know my transgressions. My sins are before me, against you supremely have I sinned and I've done what's evil in your sight. So you are justified in your sentence and you're blameless as you pass judgment. Indeed, I'm guilty. I've been guilty my whole life. I was born in sin. I'm guilty." And then he says, "You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me" (Psalm 51:3-6). And then comes one of the most marvelous lines in this Psalm 51. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation" (v.10-12).

Why is David honored in the first century, in light of this realistic portrayal of the Old Testament narratives, which are different than other ancient accounts. Egyptian histories, which of course are portrayed in Egyptian hieroglyphic, offer no portrayal of any Egyptian pharaoh that is less than perfect. Every pharaoh is perfectly portrayed and that's why Egyptian art is so predictable, because there are no flaws in the faces of the pharaohs. They all look identical. They're flawless, and there's never a record in Egyptian hieroglyphic of any pharaoh that lost a battle. No battle is lost. And that's true of other ancient histories, even the accounts of Alexander the Great by the Greeks later will feature Alexander strictly as a hero. But the Jewish histories are different. The Jewish history, starting with Samuel, narrates

the flaws of all these characters. We see this man in his flawed state. It is all there. So then why does he become one of the great heroes by the time of the first century memory and the theme of the first century messianic hope?

I've tried to think that through. Well, one reason is because he did repent, and in that repentance, in this great psalm and others he wrote, he shared his repentance. He discovered that God, the one who makes the covenant, is able to heal the brokenness. Secondly, to him a promise was made that there would always be a Son to sit upon the throne of David, and that promise is not taken away even though David sinned, because David is forgiven. And so in a way that's one reason why he's remembered as a part of the grand memory and the grand hope of the people in the first century who looked forward to the Messiah.

But there's another reason too. I thought about it this way. David is the messianic figure for us, first of all, because the Messiah must be able to fulfill David's greatness. David's greatness needs to be fulfilled. Our Lord himself when he taught the Lord's Prayer to us, honored David. Did you realize that in the final line of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus quotes David? It's one of David's final psalms. And that line is, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen." That line is put at the end of the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father prayer by Jesus, quoting David. Jesus Christ will fulfill the greatness of David. He will fulfill the kingdom yearning that we have for fulfillment and joy and that good sense of victory.

But there's a second reason. Jesus Christ as Messiah must fulfill David's greatness, but he also must be able to heal David's tragedy. Have you ever thought of this: of the heroes of the Old Testament David is the greatest man in the Old Testament. It said in one place that he was a man after God's own heart. The greatest man in the Old Testament is King David. Now hold your breath. David is also the worst man in the Old Testament, because he committed treachery, and according to Paul's list of sins, treachery is the worst sin; those who not only do evil but approve those who do evil, who actually plot harm. That's why premeditated murder is worse than manslaughter, because premeditation means that it was planned. And David did that. David committed treachery. He arranged for the death of a man who would have died for him. He committed treachery against

Bathsheba. She was helpless. She was standing there; he sees her; he's the king. Who can speak against the king? He committed treachery against his own general Joab who was compelled to order a fraudulent battle in order to have a man killed. In one way, the worst man of the Old Testament is King David, yet he's the greatest man of the Old Testament. What a complexity.

Jesus Christ as the Messiah must fulfill both. He must fulfill David's greatness and he does. And he must be able to heal David's tragedy and he does. Jesus Christ is able to heal brokenness, not only David's but yours and mine as well. He's able to do that, and so he's able to fulfill the Davidic memory.

Heavenly Father, thank you for that. Thank you for that very victory that our Lord won, a greater victory than David's battles against the Philistines and others. Lord, thank you that you are able to fulfill the greatness of this man and to heal his brokenness and the brokenness of those around him. Lord, we thank you for that. We thank you that we have a father like Abraham, a deliverer like Moses and a king like David. In Jesus Christ, may we know him and experience his love in our lives. In his name we pray. Amen.

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Sunday Worship at 8, 9:15 & 11 a.m.
Classes for Adults, Youth, and Children at 9:15 a.m.

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