

The Lord Won't Let You Down

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

Sunday, 19 November, 2023

Children's Talk: King David and Jesus

We are going to talk about a man you all know something about: David. Who can tell me something about David?

I want us to spend some time thinking about the kind of person that David was. To do that I first want a volunteer to come up here. We are going to go through some of the jobs that David had. Here is the first one:

1Sam. 17:34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, ³⁵ I went out after it and struck it, and delivered *the lamb* from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught *it* by its beard, and struck and killed it.

So what was David? David was a shepherd! He took care of sheep and protected them when danger came.

Now I need another volunteer. David also had a special skill:

1 Samuel 16:23 And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play *it* with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

Now David didn't actually play a guitar; he played a harp, but I had a hard time finding one of those! But he played a stringed instrument, and it chased away the evil spirit that was troubling king Saul.

Now we come to the most famous story about David: he fought against the Philistine named Goliath:

1Sam. 17:45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

David was armed with nothing but a sling and a staff; but he was also protected by the Lord and so he won a great victory.

Lastly, after the evil king Saul died, David was made a king:

2Samuel 5:1 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, “Indeed we *are* your bone and your flesh. ² Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, “You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’ ” ³ Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel.

David ruled over Israel for many years.

So David had a lot of good qualities. But where do you think he got all that from? It was from the Lord! In fact, everything that we see in David that is good, comes from the Lord. Now I have a picture of the Lord here, and He doesn't have a sheep; he isn't playing an instrument; he doesn't have any weapons; He's not wearing a crown. But even though He didn't have any of those jobs, He still showed the same qualities that those jobs do:

As a shepherd protects the sheep, the Lord protects us. He makes sure to keep things that are good and loving and innocent safe. And what's amazing, He can help us do the same! You can protect things that are innocent and good.

As a musician chases away the bad influence of hell, and invites the influence of heaven, the Lord pushed away all the evil spirits He encountered, and invited the angels to draw close. And what's amazing, we can do that too! We have the power to get rid of bad influences and be an influence for good.

As a warrior fights against giants, the Lord fought against evil and falsity, and taught goodness and truth. And what's amazing, we also can be warriors for the Lord when we stand up for what is right and good, and fight back against selfishness and lies.

As a king leads his people from a loving and wise heart, the Lord leads and guides us, telling us the best ways to treat each other. And what's amazing we also can lead people to the Lord, by teaching them, but also by our example.

David could not have done any of these jobs without the Lord; but the Lord allowed Him to do them all. He does the same for us. We can each of us be like David, and so like the Lord, protecting what is good, getting rid of bad influences and being a good influence, fighting against things that are evil, and leading people to what is good and right.

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This sermon is actually a little preview of Christmas. David didn't just embody some of the Lord's qualities; he prefigured the coming of the Lord Himself. Jesus was born of Mary, whose husband was Joseph, and so He was born into the line of direct descent from David. Many Christmas prophecies even refer to the everlasting throne or kingship of David as a way of referring to Jesus. One of the more well-known ones comes from the prophet Isaiah:

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, God, Mighty,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.

Now when Jesus came to take up the throne of David, He was a different sort of king: Jesus did not have a physical throne or an earthly kingdom. Jesus' kingdom is a heavenly one, and He rules as king to the extent that each individual accepts Him as his or her ruler. As we discussed in the children's talk, David represented the Lord in the sense that from looking at David's life and what he stood for, we can learn some of the important things that Jesus stands for.

That's only one part of the story. For all that David is a courageous and inspiring figure, he's also, to put it bluntly, a disappointment. As king he got comfortable and stopped leading out his men personally. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then to cover it up deceived, misled, and ultimately murdered her husband. His poor parenting led to infighting and rebellion amongst his children. He

violated the rules against numbering the people and in doing so brought a plague upon the land. Can a guy like this really represent the Lord, Jesus Christ? How can we hold both ideas in mind at once, that on the one hand David embodied the very qualities of God, and yet on the other hand fell so very far short of those qualities?

This is the way things always end up with representations; the thing or the person doing the representing is always going to fall short of the real deal. The Teachings of the New Church indicate, for example, that all kings, by virtue of being kings, stand for the Lord, in spite of the fact that many of them were (and are) straight up evil (*Secrets of Heaven* §665). David, as king, represented the Lord; and the same could be said insofar as he was a gentle shepherd, a skilled musician, and a mighty warrior. But insofar as we look at David the individual, he displays selfishness, lust, deceit, and arrogance. He is, once again, a let-down compared to what he represented or stood for.

And that's what happens with life: we have an image, or a picture, almost a symbol, of what the Lord will do or be for us, and then we find ourselves let-down. We see this in a very simple way in gifts. We at last come back to this gift. In one sense, opening a gift can be a let-down because it isn't what you wanted. I have here a pair of socks. And don't get me wrong, that can be a very good gift! But if you were expecting something a little more, if it's from a loved one who you would have hoped would put thought and care into a personal gift, socks aren't ideal. But it can also be a let-down in the sense that what you wanted isn't actually what you needed, or it doesn't actually fill the need you felt. Let's say it's a beautiful new watch; and at first you feel proud of it and show it off; but quickly you realize that it hasn't made you happy the way you wanted and life is still pretty darn unsatisfying.

David, for all his amazing good, is a let-down in both senses: the people wanted a king, an earthly king. Saul, the first one, had quickly departed from following the Lord; but David was supposed to make up for that! Yet even he failed, and that's the history of the Kings of Israel: they never could live up to the hopes that people had. But beyond that their very desire for a king in the first place was earthly: in their tyrannical, disobedient, unfaithful kings they got exactly what they asked for! But it turned out that that could never satisfy. No earthly king was ever going to satisfy their needs, no matter how good he was! Even the best king could not have been a satisfying replacement for the Lord.

Let's think about some of the things that we expect to make us happy but end up being disappointments: The vacations that didn't actually repair family disconnect; the projects that didn't give you the sense of purpose and accomplishment you wanted; the relationships that didn't fulfil your longing for partnership; and so on. Some have looked for solutions in all the wrong place, from exercise to work to tv and phones to drugs and alcohol. We can even think of this when it comes to preparing for Christmas: we have such high expectations for what we will feel and how meaningful the time will be, and yet the day itself may not live up to it, or even if it does, come January we may already have come off the high and feel let down and despondent about the drudgery of going back to work.

One way to deal with this disappointment is to give up expectations. Many people do go this route, especially as they leave behind the simple trust of childhood and accept the cynicism of adulthood. But that is not the path the Lord puts before us. There's a reason that the Lord, in His Word, puts before us figures like David, who insofar as they fulfil a good role can remind us of the Lord's good qualities; it is because that reminder helps us see the real thing, the real goodness that only can

come from the Lord; they give us hope in what is to come; but we have to patiently wait for that reality, and not lose sight of it. The Lord's promise is that we can have that real, true, perfect, reliable, good thing from Him, that good thing that will exceed our expectations.

Think of it like a husband who carries around a picture of his wife in his wallet. When he is away on business, he pulls it out and looks at it fondly; it reminds him of her and all that he loves about her. Now that picture is no substitute; it's not like because he has the picture he never needs to see her in person! Imagine if she should walk into the room and instead of going to her he just pulled out the picture. A substitute is never as good as the real thing. A lot of our expectations, and hopes, and images of what the Lord will do for us, are like the picture of the wife; imperfect, but a useful reminder. But the real deal is what matters, and when we have the real deal, we have to let go of all those expectations. The reminder is nice, but it can never replace the person. These people in the Word who remind us of the Lord are nice; but they can never replace the Lord Himself. The people in our lives who exhibit qualities from the Lord are amazing! But they can never replace the Lord Himself.

The big question is how do we get best the external idea and encounter the real thing, the thing that really will satisfy our deepest desires? To some extent we find the answer in the Christmas story: at the first Christmas the hope of David's kingship was realized, and realized fully, in the Lord Jesus Christ. The hopes they put on David could never be realized with an earthly king; but in a heavenly king they could be. This is why the Lord's coming is described as a continuation of David's rule; not because David himself would return, but because the Lord embodies all those qualities that David simply represented as if in an image. They never got what

they wanted or hoped for in David; but the time would come when they would be able to get all that they needed and more in the Lord.

But how do we encounter that?

In discussing the Holy Supper, or communion, the Teachings of the New Church lay out the most important things that will elevate the ritual from being a mere symbol and make it a chance to interact with the Lord Himself:

From this it follows, that so far as man is in the goods of charity and the truths of faith, so far he is in the Lord and the Lord in him; for conjunction with the Lord is spiritual conjunction, and spiritual conjunction is effected solely by means of charity and faith. (*True Christian Religion* §372)

Need to have all three (faith, charity, Lord)

Even then, the presence won't be felt right away;

Sounds really mundane and general

But will open our eyes to the moments that come from the Lord alone

Moments that are not created by the perfect vacation, or the right gift, or etc. etc.

If we get caught up in all these ideas, and what they would mean (or we think they would mean) we may miss the perfect moments the Lord creates for us.

There can be that moment of looking into husband/wife's eyes and being fully satisfied; that is from the Lord; or holding your child and realizing that this is the perfect child for you; that is only and could only be from the Lord.

Not the idea of what family *could* be; be the ideal of family as only the Lord could make it, the real thing.

Not the idea of what a relationship *could* be, the ideal of marriage as only the Lord could make it, the real thing.

Practice charity and love towards the neighbour; develop a personal faith in the Lord and understanding of what is true; and through this form a relationship with the Lord.

Yes we have let-downs with the most important things in life; but the Lord does not let us down with what He provides. Not just a hope that isn't fulfilled; not just a temporary fix; not just a moment of goodness before going back to the mundane; but the real deal: lasting, joyful, fulfilling life.