

Sermon for Sunday, December 9, 2012
Dr. Dan Doriani
Jesus and David
Hebrews 11:32-38

11:32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

I hope to see the Hobbit in December, but I'm apprehensive. I've seen previews and notice that this film is rated PG-13. The book is PG, so I wonder if Peter Jackson has taken a gentle, idyllic book with episodes of danger and adventure and made it into a violent action movie. Will the spirit of the Hobbit be lost? It's a common concern. How often is the movie better than the book? But comics shift well to the screen, for obvious reasons. Comic book heroes came to life when film had no way to present the creator's vision. Now we can; the results can be superb.

I suggest a parallel between cinema and the life of Christ. Like a master artist, the Father wants to show us both the gentleness and the adventure in Jesus' life. But there are obstacles. We don't have a record of every word Jesus said. How often did he say, "Please, a piece of bread" or "I'm sleepy"? We have no portrait of his face, no video of his deeds. We do have four gospels - short books about his ministry. And we have about twenty epistles, long and short essays on the meaning of his life. Before that the prophets foretold essential aspects of his work.

Finally, we have types, foreshadows, forerunners of Christ sprinkled through the Old Testament. As we walk together through Advent this year, I want to focus there, so we can learn more about Jesus, seeing his life with fresh eyes. Hebrews leads us there, as the book constantly tells us how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament themes.

- ☐ Hebrews 1: God spoke to Israel thru the prophets, but Jesus spoke his final word. As a prophet he speaks and acts by creating, sustaining and redeeming the world.
- ☐ Hebrews 1-2: The psalms are about Jesus; how he leads the singing of psalms.
- ☐ Hebrews 3-4: Moses was a faithful servant in God's house, but Jesus built God's house and rules God's house.
- ☐ Hebrews 4: God gave a weekly Sabbath to his people, but Jesus earned eternal rest for his people.
- ☐ Hebrews 5-10: God gave Israel priests to help them gently and offer sacrifices. Jesus is the great high priest, most tender and He gave himself as a sacrifice for sin.
- ☐ Hebrews 11: Heroes of the Old Testament also point to Christ. By faith Abraham offered to sacrifice his only son. But Jesus, God's Son, actually sacrificed himself for sin.
- ☐ By faith Moses led Israel out of bondage and celebrated the Passover, placing the blood of a lamb over the houses of the people of Israel. Now Jesus is God's Passover, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

After Hebrews describes Abraham, Moses, he pauses: ³² *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephtha, of David and Samuel and the prophets* ³³ *who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,* ³⁴ *quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.* ³⁵ *Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life.* ³⁶ *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.*

The heroes of the faith are too numerous to examine every one, but Hebrews suggests the way we should see them. Some like Abel, Enoch, and Rahab only have a moment in Scripture. Others like Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and David have great roles. So Hebrews invites us to explore them on our own, so we can learn about faith and about Jesus. He also gives us a lens, a grid, in verses 11:32-36.

1. Some heroes did great things: They "conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises... became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight."
2. Some heroes are known for their escapes. Lions, flames, and swords threatened them, but they "stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword" (11:33-34).
3. Some heroes were faithful in suffering. They "suffered mocking and scourging... chains and imprisonment... They were stoned, killed by the sword" or wandered "over deserts and mountains" and hid in caves (11:36-38).

If we consider this list, many heroes fit in one of these categories, a few fit in two, but just one fits all three – David, and a second after him, Jesus.

- ☐ David was mighty in war, putting Philistines, Syrians, Arameans to flight.
- ☐ Goliath and Saul, the king David served, and others, tried to kill him with the sword. In middle age, he even escaped a lion.
- ☐ David's own king, later his own son, betrayed him, so he had to hide in caves.

Who put such great victories, such escapes and betrayals together in one life? A number of leaders do. Think of our greatest presidents. Washington and Lincoln suffered great victories, great betrayals. Julius Caesar and Winston Churchill too – victories, escapes, betrayal. Yet all of these leaders had weaknesses and made mistakes. Like all humans they earned some criticism.

David was a flawed man too, but it strikes me that his betrayals were completely unjust. Saul wanted to kill David because he served too effectively in the army and so gained fame. And when David rescued the small town of Keilah from Philistine marauders, the town leaders decided to turn him over to Saul to gain the king's favor. That is low! I can think of no one like David. He made mistakes, but he wasn't betrayed for that. He was betrayed doing good!

There is no one like David, but one was greater – Jesus the Son of David. Judas betrayed Jesus. Pharisees mocked. Soldiers scourged and killed him.

But before it was time for him to suffer, he escaped trouble. One time a mob wanted to throw him over a cliff. He walked right through them and no one touched him (Luke 4). Another time a band of soldiers came to arrest him. But his words mesmerized them; they went home empty-handed (John 7).

Above all, Jesus was mighty in battle, conquering sin and death. By his death he broke the power of death. By his resurrection, he gives us life. We can't examine David's entire life; let's consider some ways, from Hebrews, that point to Christ. Let's look at Jesus as singer, shepherd and sacrificial king.

1. Like David, Jesus gives us songs to sing

Question: who leads the singing in the church? Depending on the service, you may reply, "the choir" or "the team of singers up front." What if we think again? You might say, "The pastors who choose the songs" or "the composers who wrote them." If I say, "Deeper" you may say, "OK, the apostles and prophets gave us the themes." And behind them? The Lord himself gave them a message. He writes our songs and leads them.

Samuel calls David "the sweet psalmist" or "sweet singer of Israel" (2 Sam 23:1). At the end of his life, David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue." He wrote seventy psalms; the church sings many of them here and we adapt many more, now that Jesus has come. But there is more...

As we saw in Hebrews 1, many psalms that seem to be about God's work in the Old Testament day break the banks of ordinary history. They seem to discuss a king, through whom God will bless his people, but then they soar into the stratosphere.

For example, Psalm 45 praises a king of Israel for his strength in battle, on his wedding day (Ps. 45:9-11) But Psalm 45:6 exceeds the limits of praise for any king when it says, "*Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.*" We realize that David sings of Jesus, the royal deliverer who lives forever. Peter says this is a prophecy of Christ, his throne and his alone will last forever (1 Pet 1:10-12).

Even more, Jesus sings the psalms to us and for us. In Psalm 22, David is in terrible distress. Enemies threaten his life. He feels so alone, so he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus spoke those very words on the cross. Then something changed. He stopped saying "Deliver my life... rescue me... save me" (22:20-21). Instead he sang "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you" (22:22).

David sang, "My God... why have you forsaken me?" Then when God heard his cry, he sang, "In the congregation I will praise you." Hebrews says Jesus sang the same thing. He cried out. He told the Father "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you" (22:22).

You see the lesson. Jesus is our song leader. He declares God's name, his character, his glory in the congregation. That means that when we sing in church, Jesus leads the composers, the instrumentalists, the choir and the congregation. He writes the songs we sing. He gives the ability to understand them. The desire to sing them. He directs our singing. He sings besides us.

He stands before us and beside us. He tells the Father, "I will tell your name to my brothers." So Jesus just called us his brothers. He looks at us and says. "My brother." It makes me think of a great day, when I was fifteen years old. My grandfather had a wonderful voice and he said "Sing beside me." How rewarding, how liberating!

There is, deep in many of us, a feeling that we must prove ourselves. Yes, many of us aim low and are content to float down the stream, paddling just enough to avoid the rocks. But most of us want to prove ourselves by doing something notable in this life. We are a church of achievers – broken achievers seeking peace and wholeness. The principle that Jesus is singing with us brings great peace. Listen:

We all sin, we all fail ourselves and others. Worse, we cannot stop. We will never totally reform ourselves because original sin resides in us. That may sound depressing. We can get pretty miserable if we stare inward, at our sin.

But this truth – that Jesus sings to us and with us - turns us away from self and leads us upward to Christ. It brings pastoral comfort as we rely on Jesus, not ourselves. When we admit that our sins spread from our sinfulness, we cease our vain efforts at self-improvement. We stop trying to prove our worth to ourselves or outsiders by obedience or achievement. We look instead to the love of Jesus.

Almost anyone can feel pressure from two cultural forces: The spirit of criticism allows anyone to say anything to anyone. The spirit of merit says *perform or step aside*. The singing of Jesus lets us resist these enemies of the soul. He says, "I sing with my brothers and sisters." He doesn't say, "Achieve and you can join my family." Quiet the pressure to prove yourself. Turn down the volume of the critics. We know our failures, so does Jesus. He doesn't say, "Make amends" or "Try harder" but "I love you; rest in me. Find your peace in my work, not yours."

If we're unsure of ourselves, feeling low, it's great if a respected person calls us over and says, "Join my group, my team, work with me, sing with me, play with me." Jesus says, "Work with me. Sing with me." What wonderful music we have for Advent and Christmas. Jesus invites us to join his choir. He gives us songs to sing and leads the singing.

2. Like David, Jesus is our Shepherd

A few years after Saul died, after a period of strife, the people of Israel came to David, who was about forty years old and said, "While Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"

They were right. Saul failed miserably as a king. His main goal was to protect his throne, and even attacked his own people to keep it. So God called David to be a good, strong shepherd – a warrior king (1 Sam 16:18). He killed wild beasts with his hands (17:37). He defeated the armies that invaded Israel from east, west and north. He did justice and showed mercy. Example, he cared for Jonathan's crippled son Mephibosheth for all his days.

David was a good but flawed king. He could be lazy. He indulged his desires, took women for himself, and let his sons run wild for lack of discipline. So he leaves us longing for a better leader, shepherd. Isaiah looked to that shepherd, "The Sovereign Lord comes with power... He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart" (Isa 40:10-11, 63:11-12). Hear the blend – strong and tender. That's Jesus, the good shepherd.

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd" of Isaiah. He throttles wolves, cares for his sheep, knows them by name, lays down his life for the sheep. Hebrews 13:21 calls Jesus the "Great Shepherd of the sheep." What does that mean? Psalm 23 says, "the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." Why? He cares for us,

physically *and* spiritually. He leads us beside still waters. He is also strong. He has a rod to strike our enemies. We fear no evil; we dine in the presence of our enemies (23:1-5).

When Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd" we have one of his great "I am" statements: "I am" bread, water, light, a door, the way. When he says, "I am the good shepherd" he reminds us he is the mighty *and* compassionate caregiver. He meets all our legitimate needs. He satisfies our proper longings.

- ☐ We need light; Jesus is the light of the world.
- ☐ We need direction; Jesus is the way and he shows us his way.
- ☐ We need food and water; Jesus says I am the bread of life, the living water.
- ☐ We need loving care and defense; Jesus is the good and great shepherd.

It's hard for talented, strong, educated, skilled people to say, "I need a shepherd." Our honed skills, numerous connections and hard work have solved everything so far. So we dream we can care for ourselves, that we don't need Jesus as shepherd. But Jude warns about "shepherds feeding themselves" (Jude 1:12 English Standard Version (ESV)). "They shepherd themselves." That is, no one shepherds them, for they tolerate no authority.

Jesus is the shepherd we need. He saves his sheep from wolves, from attack – physically, emotionally. Beyond that Jesus says, "Whoever enters [the fold] through me will be saved." That means eternal life through faith (10:9).

The good shepherd directs his sheep (10:9). He leads us, gives direction. We get *where we need to go* if we follow him. Still we might not understand every step we take. If I tell my dog, "Go to the car," she goes. If I say, "We're going to the park" she gets excited. If I say, "We're leaving in thirty minutes" I might as well speak Ugaritic. She doesn't know why we're waiting. Still, she trusts us.

Jesus compares us to sheep or children (not dogs). We hear key words and grasp parts of his plan. We miss some things too. But we can trust that Jesus leads us well. He leads where we need to go – even if it's not our first plan. When we arrive, I hope we can say, "This is the right place, the place Jesus chose. I can live confidently and fully here (10:10).

Is Jesus your shepherd? Or are you shepherding yourself? If Jesus is your shepherd, you think or pray like this: Lord, show me where to go and I'll go where you lead. Or you're following a certain path and you know you KNOW it's wrong. But inertia or habit or some payoff is keeping you on the path. Say, "Lord, lead me so I get off this path. Get me in the right place." Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

3. Like David, Jesus is a sacrificial leader.

Matthew's gospel begins this way: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David." When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, they asked, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" (Matt. 1:1, 2:2). So Jesus is the long expected king, the Son of David. God promised David he would sit on the throne: "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you... I will establish his kingdom [and] establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

It's essential for David and Jesus: Both established God's kingdom, led God's people at great *personal cost*. They sacrificed everything, risked life, worked hard. For that they were loved, but first they were hated. Consider:

When Jesus was born, Mary, shepherds, angels worshiped, gave thanks, but Herod said, "I need to kill him." Jesus warned his disciples about the same sort of trouble. He quotes David, who twice said, "They hated me without a cause" (Psa. 35, 69). He knew his brothers envied him God's favor. Saul hated him due to his success in battle. His first wife despised him because he loved God too much and showed it when he danced before Lord with all his might (1 Sam 17, 20-26; 2 Sam 6). Jesus says, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first... they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father." This is to fulfill what is written in their Law: "They hated me without reason."

So for David, for Jesus, fall all leaders. Of America's presidents, who felt the most hatred and criticism during their service? They called Washington a coward, feckless leader, inept general. People slandered: "He's a power hungry despot. He wants to be America's king. His army had such rebellions he had to *hang* leaders."

They called Lincoln a traitor, liar, lawyer, destroyer. A fraud, trampler of state's rights and Constitution. One book on leadership said, Rule 1: Expect to be hated.

David's low point came when his son Absalom drove him from his capital. A certain Shimei stalked David as he fled, cursing him and throwing stones at him. David's general Abisheai responded, "Why should this dog curse the king? Let me kill him." But David said, "No, let it go. Maybe it's God's will."

You see the wisdom. For David did have flaws, as did Washington, Lincoln, FDR, Reagan, every other leader. All sin and err. They endure excessive hatred, but only one truly is hated "without a cause" – Jesus. They said Jesus led the people astray. He's in league with the devil. He blasphemes. Yet Jesus never let animosity or injustice deter him.

Whether anyone appreciated him or not, he was determined to fulfill his calling. His will to press on, to love and sacrifice without help and without praise may be the great reason why we love him. He sacrificed all the benefits of royalty, became an ordinary rejected leader. He bore great physical pain and emotional pain to redeem us. That elicits our love for him. It *should make us willing to sacrifice for him*. And if you're a leader, it gives you a model.

I once talked to a leader who knew the right course of action. But he refused. He said, "If I do that, I could lose my job." Yes, but he most likely would have been fine. Besides, his job required him to act boldly for the common good. Jesus had the call of sacrificial leader and king and he acted boldly in it. That's why we love him. He's the greatest leader, bore the greatest hate, did the greatest good.

The Son of David, the hope of Israel (Matt 1:1-17)

Hebrews says David conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises. That's a great summary of David's first twenty years (2 Sam 1-10). It's also a great summary of the life of Jesus, David's Son and heir. He conquered kingdoms. He did justice, tempered by love and taught us how to do justice too. He received promises and made promises – He will never forsake us. He will restore all things (12:23).

The people expected the king to heal the land, to remove pagans who defiled it. They expected healing for the people. As J. R. R. Tolkien said, "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer." So people asked Jesus for mercy and for healing: "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (9:27). The blind and lame, men and women, Jews and Gentiles (15:22). And people wondered and asked, "Could this be the Son of David?" (12:22-32).

When children saw that Jesus made the lame to walk and the blind to see, they shouted praise “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Jesus replied, “From the lips of infants and children God has ordained praise” (21:14-16). Let us be like children again. Lay aside carping and doubts, jealousy and skepticism. See Jesus in pages of Scripture. See him as our lead singer, our music director, our good shepherd and sacrificial leader – and worship him.

We admire our great presidents, flaws and all, for their courage and victories. Israel admired David, Samuel, Abraham and Moses for their bold faith, despite their flaws. How much more should we worship Jesus this year?

At Christmas we fret over friends who have everything. It's hard to find a need and meet it. But I believe everyone needs Jesus this year.