

DAVID – FAITH AND PATIENCE

Introduction

The Bible is about Christ Jesus, and his people. There are such close parallels that one is often used as an illustration of the other.

We have been studying the life of King David. There are striking similarities between his experience and that of both the Lord Jesus and other believers.

The early part of his story is one of faith in God's promises to him, and patience until God would do what he had said. That is also a feature of the Christian life – the 'faith and patience of the saints' (Revelation 13:10). Our Christian lives are defined by faith in what God has promised, and we are called to persevere in obedience to him until Jesus returns. And Jesus is the supreme example of the life of faith.

For that reason it is helpful to consider the stages of David's experience around the time he became king, then to consider two issues that arose – they have implications for the life of the Christian.

Stages in David's experience

After the death of Saul the people of Hebron invited him to be their king (2:1-4). It seems to have been a fairly low-key affair rather than the climax of a great struggle.

David followed that by making an overture to the rest of Israel (2:4-7). He commended the people of Jabesh Gilead for the loyalty they had shown to Saul (even though they had not supported David); and invited them to acknowledge his right to the throne. But they did not respond.

Then, just as the way opened for him to be king, a rival appeared in the shape of Saul's surviving son. It took years before he was king of the entire nation. He could be excused for wondering why the Lord permitted all this.

Those stages were reflected in the experience of Jesus.

His acceptance began at Pentecost. But most of the people still rejected him, and he is still not acknowledged by two thirds of humanity. He is still sending out overtures of mercy. There is intense hostility but God's promise stands.

The people of God have great and precious promises. 'The meek shall inherit the earth'. There will be a time of restitution (Acts 3:21). But they still have enemies.

Communion with God is hindered by indwelling sin. The ungodly still rule the world. Satan is still capable of harassing a child of God. The church is not yet seen as the Bride of Christ and suffers the mockery of the ungodly for its faith in the returning Jesus. Peter reminds us this is evidence of God's mercy – waiting for people to repent (2 Peter 3:3-10).

This is in spite of God's promise, and our efforts to overcome spiritual opposition.

And that apparent delay can affect believers' attitudes and conduct.

Issue: taking matters into our own hands

When we have to wait the temptation arises to take matters into our own hands rather than keeping to God's Word.

Abner was David's main opponent – it was he who arranged for Ish-bosheth to be king (in order to preserve his own power?). Joab was David's commander-in-chief. He also had a personal quarrel against Abner. When Abner changed his mind and visited David to hand the kingdom over to him Joab murdered him. But what seemed an act of loyalty to David was really personal revenge.

Although it helped David he disapproved so strongly that he publicly condemned Joab for doing such a thing. Instead of being praised Joab was disgraced.

In the case of the Lord Jesus a similar temptation presented itself. Satan encouraged him to receive the kingdoms of the world for the price of honouring him. But that would be treason against God, and he refused.

There are various ways the church or an individual believer can take matters into their own hands.

Frustrated with a lack of conversions the church has often taken short cuts.

It may be 'easy-believe-ism', when people are given a simplified gospel that does not reach their heart and are then persuaded to give their assent to it only to be told they are then 'saved'; often that type of 'convert' proves less than genuine – psychological pressure instead of the work of God.

Sometimes the church encourages people to have what they call a Christian experience (of the Holy Spirit) before the gospel has brought them to repentance and faith; it is one cause of superficial Christianity.

It has been common for the church to promote Christian ethics directly while bypassing the gospel – 'social work religion'.

On rare occasions the church has used political or military alliances to impose the Christian faith – a contradiction in terms.

A more subtle shortcut is legalism, where rules are seen as an end in themselves rather than as God-given means to instruct us in a living relationship with him, or as an alternative to the Holy Spirit's power in the believer's heart and life.

In the case of Joab a personal interest clouded his judgement. That can be so with the church or an individual Christian. Pride would have us succeed by ourselves rather than depend on Christ's help. Like David, and like Jesus, we need to keep the Lord's commands even when that means waiting for longer to have his promise fulfilled. Surely we do not want to lose our reward as Joab did.

Issue: having a right spirit

David must have longed for vindication – for people to acknowledge that he was innocent of Saul's accusations and that God had indeed chosen him. We may feel that too when we are falsely accused. Jesus was slandered more than most. How should we handle that?

One result of David's wait was that he developed a wonderful attitude to his enemies. He grieved at Saul's death; instead of taking vengeance on those who had hindered them he sought reconciliation. God would not have him as king until he had a right spirit in a matter as important as this.

It is the spirit of our Lord Jesus. We were his enemies by wicked works (Colossians 1:21), yet he came to reconcile us by his own death. It is the Spirit of God, and Jesus commands that for his followers so that 'you may be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Matthew 5:48).

Part of our problem is that we tend to take things personally instead of looking at the bigger picture. Principle should always be more important than our petty concerns.

Joab wanted revenge for his brother's death and he acted in an unprincipled way. If he had been concerned to keep God's commands he would not have done what he did. Similarly the Lord Jesus put his Father's name before his personal feelings. On the cross he did not revile those who persecuted him; instead he committed them to the righteous Judge; he even prayed for his enemies.

During the time of our waiting for heaven the Lord is conforming believers to the image of Christ. That of necessity requires us to experience the sort of challenges he experienced and to respond to them as he did. But many Christians resist that thought.

If all we want is to have our name cleared then we will find that God treats us the way he treats others; 'for judgement is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy' (James 2:13). Whereas if we act like David and like Jesus we will find the Lord honours us in his own time and way. Judgement will come, and Jesus the righteous Judge will show no favouritism.