

THE MESSAGE for July 31, 2011**Isaiah 55:1-5*****King David... Witness To All Nations*****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

You're standing in line at the grocery store and see the magazines rack and the headlines are unbelievable. Or you are exercising your thumb on the remote control as you flip through the TV channels and come across a show like "Access Hollywood" or "Entertainment News" and you are shocked by what you hear – although not really surprised! It's just another celebrity scandal.

Celebrity stories sell. The more sensational the scandal, the better! Sports heroes gone bad, music idols doing the outrageous, political figures caught in compromising positions. It happens! There's something interesting, even captivating, in a story about someone else's downfall, isn't there? We'll skip the truth and seek out the lies if the story is juicy enough. We love the dirt on others! Don't we?

We have one of those stories today. It's a sex and murder scandal of a prominent religious/political leader; a good guy gone bad. It's quite a story.

His name is David, chosen at an early age by God to succeed King Saul on the throne as king of Israel. He is the youngest son of Jesse and doing the work nobody else cares to do, tending sheep. He is an accomplished musician and gets a job entertaining King Saul in the palace. He is best known for his skill with a slingshot killing the unbeatable warrior, Goliath. The shepherd boy saves the nation and becomes an instant hero. He's given command of the King's armies, proving himself a great leader. He befriends Saul's son, Jonathan, and they become like brothers. This brotherly love saves David from Saul's anger and rage as Saul grows increasingly jealous of David's popularity.

When Saul and his son Jonathan are both killed in battle, the kingship is up for grabs. David is anointed king of Judah and Saul's fourth oldest son is chosen king of Israel. They compete for the entire kingship. Saul's son is murdered, and that opens the door for David to become king of both Israel and Judah. A united kingdom! A dream come true! David is the means for that dream! He defeats all the enemies, bringing peace and prosperity to the nation. Who wouldn't vote for this guy in an election? He is nothing short of a savior.

Surely this new leader, King David, can do nothing wrong. Blessed by God in so many ways, David plans to build a majestic temple in the capital city of Jerusalem, to house the Ark of the Covenant, showing the permanent and lasting presence of God with God's people. But God has other plans, instead God makes a promise to establish David's house forever. Through a Messiah from David's household!

It doesn't get any better than that. David is a hero with a heart, a leader with a longing for God, a king with a compassion for God's people. But all that glitters is not gold. King David becomes the stuff of tabloid news with one name: *Bathsheba*.

This is what happened. David is on the roof of the palace looking out over his kingdom. He sees a woman bathing on the roof of a house. His mind starts to wonder – Uh... Oh... He lusts after her – Uh... Oh... He summons for her to come to the palace, commits adultery with her, gets her pregnant, and then plots to kill her husband by sending him to the front lines of the war, just so David can have her to himself.

Of course, every sin needs a cover-up! Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, is killed. David marries her. It's all supposed to be kept hush-hush. Nobody is supposed to know. David's reputation is not to be tarnished. The people need a leader who they can trust and believe in – someone strong and capable and perfect. This guy is chosen by God, how could he do such a thing?

Sin has a way of revealing itself. And once it does, it becomes public property. It's time to bring another "someone we looked up to" down to size. It's time for accountability. Instead of the paparazzi storming the palace to get the exclusive, shameful story, God sends a prophet, Nathaniel, to confront David with the reality of his sin.

Political leaders in our day, when confronted with similar sin, have denied it. I believe Bill's words were – "I did not have sex with that woman!" But David responds differently. He was a man after God's own heart. Instead of denying it, he confessed "I have sinned against the Lord!" David repents and takes responsibility for his actions. He does not blame Bathsheba.

He pays the price for his sin, losing his son with Bathsheba and losing the respect of the people. Amazingly though he remains in favor with God. David is brought to his knees in repentance, admitting his sin, pleading with God for forgiveness and restoration. A good guy gone bad, yet restored and remains in God's favor.

David is seen as one of the greatest servant leaders in the history of God's people. I wonder - why? What makes him so great? Why is he someone we can look up to and learn from?

- His political power? Yes... but his reign eventually comes to an end.
- His military skill and accomplishments? Yes... but he's no longer commander of an army, anywhere.
- His perfection? Certainly not.... he was as flawed as they come.

So what sets David apart?

- 1) He never tries to be God.
- 2) He lives into the promises of God.

Our reading for today from Isaiah is for people in exile. Isaiah recalls the glory days of David, hundreds of years earlier, when things are good and God's promises are crystal clear. These are important memories for a people in bondage! God's people are cut off from their homes, their religion, their history, their everything, and they wonder if God has forgotten them.

Where is the promise God made to David? Why are we stuck here in Babylon? Can you hear the people asking?

Isaiah speaks a word of truth and promise to a people far from home. God is faithful. Isaiah reminds the people. God's promises are trustworthy and true. Isaiah invites the people to look backwards to what God has done in order to look forward to what God will do. God is preparing your future. A banquet is being prepared for you. God is doing this, just as promised!

(Read Isaiah 55:1-5)

David was imperfect, yet blessed by God. The people were imperfect, yet blessed by God -- blessed even in their imperfect situation. God's promises call for faith no matter what the situation. That's because God's promises offer hope and new life.

David was the means of God's promise. Through David, Jesus comes. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise. David wasn't the fulfillment of God's promise. He was the means. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises.

So what makes David so great? Why is he a witness to the people?

There is an assumption that religious people must be perfect. We expect perfection from anyone who professes a relationship with God. David gives us a different perspective. His power is not in perfection. He is definitely flawed, and he would have been crucified in the media like Arnold Schwarzenegger if he were king today.

God's story is not about perfection, it's about promise. God's promises restore life and gives hope to the best and worst of people. God's promises are for you and me and we are called to live by those promises for others. We are the means for God's promises. That's how David lived and that's how we are to live too. In other words, we are blessed to be a blessing to others.

As long as David lived for others, he did great things. As soon as he lived for himself, he messed up royally. And that happens to us too.

Last week I asked you to read and reflect on Romans 12 which is all about living for others – being a blessing to others – overcoming evil with good. Romans 12 is all about living life by the promises of God – witnessing to the goodness of God in our lives. If you didn't get a chance to email me your reflections, please consider doing so today. I'll be watching for your email.

Imagine a world where we hold one another accountable for our sins, yet dare to forgive and restore one another as people of promise, not people of perfection! That would change everything for good.

I leave you with this final thought... If your name and your story were to appear in the news would it be a story of scandal or a story of faithfulness? The choice is yours because the promises of God are yours. Live accordingly, for Jesus' sake. Amen.