

David – Plucked from Obscurity

The Life of David

By Chris Hand

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Bible Text: Psalm 78:56-72; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

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Crich Baptist Church

Market Place, Crich

Derbyshire. DE4 5DD (UK)

Website: www.crichbaptist.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/crichbaptist

Last Lord's Day, we began a new series looking at the life of David. Some life it is, isn't it? And we're not going to attempt to look at every single detail of it. This sermon series would extend and extend. But we'll be looking at some of the key events, some of the biggest of the events that happened in David's life and try to understand something about the man and how God used him. Last time we saw that he is a man after God's own heart. And that heart was a heart that had been thoroughly converted. That was the beginning of it. He was a man who was justified. He understood justification by faith. He understood it well before Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, because it was there to be understood. And we saw in Romans 4, it refers back to Psalm 32 to prove the doctrine all divine.

There is David in Psalm 32 speaking of justification by faith. He was a converted man. And he loved God. If we can just somehow sum up his life, there was so many words that we could use about it. He was a man of faith, a man of boldness. But if we could say he is a man who loved God, now that would say a lot. And that would help us to understand how it was. That he was a man after God's own heart. That that response to God, that love for God, that God takes pleasure in such people. That's how it is to be lived. That's how we were meant to respond to God with a wholeheartedness, with an absolute everything in, and that was David, wasn't it? And for most of his life that was the situation.

Well, we gleaned that God had an alternative king minded to replace Saul who had failed. He had disobeyed. He had exposed his own un-spirituality, his own lack of love for God. He was actually more interested in himself, his reputation, his standing, of being a king, the wealth that came with it, all the trappings, and that had come through. And Samuel had solemnly told him that God was going to take away his kingdom and give it to somebody else, a man after his own heart. His name was not known at that point.

And later on again in 1 Samuel 15:28 when that warning to Saul is repeated, Samuel again, another failure to obey God. When he was told to destroy the Amalekites, and he doesn't. He keeps the king. He saves him and saves some of the best of the flock and the herd. And that attracted again Samuel's anger that speaking, really, as a prophet of God, as then God had now taken it away, emphatically taken it away, the kingdom from him, and would give it to a neighbor of his.

So, the name not yet revealed. And awhile it takes before that name becomes clear. And we come to 1 Samuel 16. We read in the title, we should say, is plucked from obscurity. That is David that's in Psalm 78:70-71. There he was out in the sheepfolds looking after the ewes with young, and then brought from that place to be the shepherd, Jacob, to be the ruler of Israel. That's what the Lord delighted to do. But how did he get to that point of doing it? Psalm 78 telling us about the event. Well, 1 Samuel 16 speaks to us about that particular happening. Familiar to us I am sure it is. But let me just read some of the Scripture.

1 Samuel 16:5 to the end there of verse 13. Samuel is gone to Bethlehem. That is significant, isn't it? That attracts our attention. I am sure it attracted his attention too when God sent him on this errand somewhat under cover, because of the danger to Samuel's life, because of the way Saul was behaving. And he comes, and the people ask, "Do you come peaceably?" And he said, in verse 5, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.' Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice. So it was, when they came, that he," Samuel, "looked at Eliab and said, 'Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him!' But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.' So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, 'Neither has the LORD chosen this one.' Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'Neither has the LORD chosen this one.' Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, 'The LORD has not chosen these.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all the young men here?' Then he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here.' So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the LORD said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!' Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah."

That's the event. And how curious an event. Mysterious! Because nobody really understood, apart perhaps from David and Samuel, what was happening here. Jesse didn't seem to understand. The brothers didn't understand fully what this anointing was. They might have begun to guess, but it wasn't announced to them precisely what was happening. Though there was a transaction, deep transaction, and that anointing, we read, don't we, that the Spirit of God from that moment was upon David and indeed, no longer upon Saul.

So, here is David plucked from obscurity. And I am going to suggest, as many commentators think, that actually David was already aware of what God was preparing him for. That he already was immersed in the purposes of God. Already converted, young man that he was. That he had responded with that love and that conviction, and he had already had some intimation of what it was that God was preparing him for. So, let's proceed.

Our first heading. We can all be fooled by appearances. We can all be fooled by appearances. There is Samuel, the aged prophet. A man who was come to various places, minister as a seer, called a seer, a prophet, and that's what the prophets were called at that beginning. He, in a way, is the first of the prophets, and he establishes the school of prophets, and under him others are perhaps versed in prophecy, like Nathan maybe and Gad who also ministered to David. So, there is Samuel. His insights into things of such depth, who brings the word of God, who knows Saul is no longer to be the king, who in appointing Saul predicted the signs that would accompany his calling, extraordinary insights that he has, yet still capable, basically, of getting it wrong.

Here he is, going now to this feast that he is calling Jesse and his sons to. And before him appear this firstborn in the family. Such stature and impressive bearing, the maturity of those further years beyond David, and Samuel is struck. This is a young man of caliber, quality. And second guesses that this must be actually the one that God has chosen. This is what I have been sent to anoint. Anoint somebody in this family, and, well, he thinks, I will look no further. This surely is him. And the Lord has to speak to Samuel to overrule him and to say that he is not to look, because apparently Samuel had looked at appearances here, at the physical stature of Eliab. And the Lord says, "No, I have refused him. I am not looking at what you're looking at. I am actually able to look at the heart." Samuel could very often by God's working look at the heart, yet here was withheld from him to be able to do that. And he is working there just on natural reasoning, and it led him astray. And so, "No," the Lord said. "I am looking for the man who is after my own heart. Eliab is not that man." Later on, when we see his attitude toward David, well can we see the wisdom of God in that. No, the Lord's work is not promoted through appearances and seeming stature that people might have. Some people cut, don't they, very impressive kind of figure and have a sort of natural bearing. And they can impress people. Sometimes for good reasons, and sometimes for not such good reason. And our Lord does not need that in order to work out his purposes. Indeed, he works contrary to that. The opposite of that. Delights to work to the opposite formula than that.

And various places in the prophecies of Isaiah, we learn of the nature of the Messiah. How humble his origins will be. How unexpected in respect of his kind of birthplace and his upbringing. But if you're looking for him in a palace, you will be mistaken. If you're looking for somebody who is going to have great sort of regal bearing who is just going to, that very appearance just strike you like that. No, he is going to be of greater substance than to rely upon background, and status, and appearance.

Isaiah 11:1. "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots." What of him? Verse 2. "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." Well, in a smaller sense, that was fulfilled with David. Sure, David is the youngest in the family. The one who comes out of the stem of Jesse, kind of growing out of his roots, not sort of coming out of the main kind of tree, but rather more obscure, rather an unhappy looking beginning here. Here that is the one. As the Spirit was there upon David, as we read.

Well, there is a greater one to come. And our closing hymn will speak of great David's greater son. Here is the Lord Jesus Christ, and his obscurity. And this backwater branch true off the line of David. True. But nobody was looking at that family and saying, "Ah, this family is destined to produce such greatness!" There is Joseph. The carpenter's son. The carpenter rather there. There was his wife, his young wife Mary to be. You wouldn't think that they were going to be the people. That Mary would be there the mother of our Lord Jesus. And Joseph should have to act in the capacity of an earthly human father to him. Nobody would have expected that from that family. That was some obscure part of David's family. The line of Jesse. A rod from the stem of Jesse. A branch growing out of his roots.

Well, later, Isaiah 53, and well known passage there speaking of our Lord's sufferings and in Isaiah 53:1-2. "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him." There's obscurity to him. There is not something that's immediate. There's Eliab. Samuel straightaway is, "Oh!" Catches his breath. He's taken aback. And it has to be that shepherd boy out in the fields, who at that point nobody even though worthwhile inviting him to the feast. He is the one. And here is our Lord Jesus Christ again, not coming from some illustrious family, not in terms of where they were at that time. Their heritage was good, and needed to be in order to be the family that would be bringing into the world the Savior of the world. But they hadn't got much to show for it all. And living in Nazareth, that was not the place, if you had succeeded in life. Nazareth would not be a first choice. Well, that's where he was to grow up.

No comeliness. No form. When we see him, no beauty. No kind of Eliab like stature that we should desire him. It's root growing out of dry ground. Nobody was expecting anything to grow there. So Nathaniel's question. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That's dry ground! No, there is a root coming out of there, our Lord Jesus Christ. It says in Matthew, doesn't it, "So he shall be called a Nazarene." That puzzles commentators exactly what it means. But it's thought that that was like to say, "Obscure." He's not somebody who will be really at the forefront, somebody who is much more in the background, backwater kind of place. A backwater kind of upbringing, if you like. That's what he will be called. They recognize something within these prophecies that made that an appropriate thing to say about the expected Messiah. No, it is him. And he comes in that way. Not into a palace, but into perhaps a stable. Not enjoying a retinue of servants, but having fisherman, and tax collectors, and zealots, and others to attend to him and to be those who would follow him. This is not the stuff of greatness as the world would account it. And though there was a throne for him, that throne could only be ascended to through suffering. The only crown on earth that he could have would be a crown of thorns. Only later would he be exalted.

And this is the way that the Lord works. And we read in 1 Corinthians 1 that really in accordance with this, Christ crucified, stumbling block to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks, they couldn't see anything in this. This was what they needed if they were going

to be saved, they would have to believe on him. Otherwise, no salvation. This is the power of God unto salvation. It's him. It's believing in him. It's the message about him and we can see how the Lord works in that way, that understated way, delighting to overturn the expectations of the world, and how the world thinks that things ought to happen. That the greatness that the world is attracted to, well the Lord is not. And he reverses it. And he works in unexpected ways, unexpected people, unexpected places.

So, verse 26 of 1 Corinthians chapter 1. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence."

Nobody is going to be able to say that they had some innate stature, accomplishment, beauty, physical attraction, some intelligence or wisdom. No, none of that will count. God will show it doesn't count, because he will actually bypass a lot of those people and choose instead weaker people and people that are not doing an awful much in the world's eyes. He will delight to pluck them from their obscurity and then to place them where he wants them in the life of the church.

Paul himself had to counter the expectations of the Corinthians who were taken by the noble and the wise, the disputers of the age, the scribes, the speakers. Paul says, "I am not even going to try and compete with them." So, in 2 Corinthians 10, and he speaks there in verse 10 about what the church was saying about him. Well, he knew what they were saying about him. "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." They didn't think he was the things that are. For them the things that are will be more impressive, impressive oratory, more impressive in terms of your, just the impression that you make on people. They say, "Ah, bodily presence is weak. Doesn't come across as a strong, mighty man, and his speech, well, compared to the orators of Corinth, definitely second rate."

Well, Paul is not saying that that is the right criteria to use. He's saying, "That's the wrong criteria." God doesn't work by that way. And in the next chapter, chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians, there in verses 5 and 6, he says, "For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things." Conscience of how to affirm that he's been speaking the truth and that his life is consistent with that truth. And if he hasn't got all of the trappings of the great Corinthian orators, it matters nothing, because he has been telling them what they need to know, what they need to listen to.

So, God works in that way. That is how he delights to bring to pass his purposes. In unexpected ways plucking people from obscurity. Nurturing them there. Hidden, out of the way, places, then bringing them forth when he chooses. Still too much weight in the

life of the churches is put on performance, eloquence, credentials, charm, personality, whatever it might be. And so often the church learns to its cost that brilliant, brilliant people can be deeply flawed characters, and a character in the end could be anything but Christian, and then some spectacular failure is brought to light just only in the last few weeks or so in the Christian world.

So, he chooses tax collectors and fishermen. Things that are not to put to shame the things that are. So, we can all be fooled by appearances. Church, sadly today, often is, and there is great Samuel, a great prophet, off guard there momentarily. Just taking it a little bit too much by what he saw in Eliab.

Second heading. God promotes his candidate. So, the seven sons, there is Abinadab as well. Not him. Shammah. Not him. We're going down the line. Down the line. The seven sons that are actually there. And Samuel is puzzled, isn't he, in verse 11. And he asks Jesse, "Is this it? Are all of them here?" And he learns that no, actually, they're not. There is one who remains, the youngest, and there he is keeping the sheep. And it isn't as though Jesse then says, "I'll go and fetch him then." It's as if Jesse doesn't think it's worth even fetching him. And in a way, that's been communicated, because he wasn't in the feast in the first place. It's not every day you get the prophet Samuel coming to your town. And if he's there, you would want everybody to come and hear what he's got to say. But somehow, it didn't seem worth the bother to fetch David in from the fields to have him there.

And Samuel would have none of that. And verse 11 continuing. "Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here." You can just imagine Eliab and Shammah and Abinadab talking among themselves. "What's he want him here for? What's this? What's with David here?" And they all have to wait. The feast has to wait. It's on hold. We don't know how far it is, because they sent and bring him in. How many fields they had to cover before they found him out there, but in he comes. And of course, he is the one. He has that heart that will love God. Indeed, already does. That's already there. That's already happening with this young man. He is the one God knows will serve me. He will be the one who will make the big decisions when he is king.

And that call, which we read of in Psalm 78 in our reading earlier when it speaks about how firstly, things under the rule there, the judges constantly falling back into the hands of the pagan nations around that encroached. And then Shiloh and the taking of the ark by the Philistines in battle. What low times those were. But God, of course, had in view, beyond Saul, David.

And then verses 17 and 71 of Psalm 78, he also chose David his servant. He took him from the sheepfolds from following the ewes that yet young, he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance. So, he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. God knew who he wanted to be king.

Psalm 89 is a further Psalm that covers this ground slightly there. Psalm 89. Let's read a few verses. Verses 19 to 21. "Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, And said: 'I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people. I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him, With whom My hand shall be established; Also My arm shall strengthen him.'" This is the Lord's candidate. And he makes sure that he is found. He could be in the furthest, remotest part of Jesse's estate if you will. He could have been occupied in whatever task or duty as the shepherd there. God would have that young man brought in, brought before Samuel that it might be there and that his anointing is now revealed. Samuel now knows. David knows. And the work will progress from there.

He will see to it that his candidate is there. He will see to it. He will arrange circumstances. He'll make sure that Samuel asked the question, "Are they all here?" Samuel might have thought, "Well, I am just perplexed at this. I thought there was somebody here. Obviously not. I must have heard this wrong. I'll go back to Ramah." But no, he realizes, "No, there is something wrong here, because there is a son of Jesse, and that means there is a son of Jesse. I've seen, apparently, all the sons of Jesse. So there must be another one. Where is he? Call him in. Quick. Bring him here." And of course, that's absolutely right. And the Lord ensured that Samuel was alert enough now and aware enough now. He's much more on message. And that he would ensure that David is found. The Lord has his way of promoting his candidate.

Why, it's a mystery. I won't dwell on this though for long there, not perhaps so relevant to us. But maybe to some listening, I don't know, but the calling to the ministry. Calling to the ministry. One is called to be a preacher, a pastor, whatever that gift may be called. And how it is despite ourselves, really, that we can often be in all the wrong places it seems, nowhere in the main stream. And yet, the Lord will have his way moving things here and moving things there. And there is feel, there is a tang of supernaturalism about that. So, even on this day, not of extraordinary callings, but what we call ordinary callings. Not prophets and evangelists in the New Testament sense, and certainly not apostles. That God, even in the calling of pastors and teachers, there are always curious, curious things.

Oh, he'll put us in a place of influence that we hadn't expected, hadn't looked for. And suddenly, we find ourselves in a position that, from where we started out, we could never have foreseen that we would end up. And God is working a way there for the person he wants, his candidate at the right place at the right time to do the thing he has appointed him or her to be doing. We have to wait on God for that, even if we have some sense of it and that's why we suggest David may well have had that sense of this calling that was growing on him as he is out there tending the sheep. And as we imagine, already composing inspired psalms and having a sense of God speaking to him and through him, that that work of preparation is happening there, and he had some intimation of it. But he has to wait on God. Couldn't thrust himself forward. Couldn't, as it were, work by what he thought was happening, kind of rush to Samuel and say, "I'm your man." Or anything like that.

No, he had to just wait patiently. He didn't know Samuel was coming that day from Ramah to Bethlehem. He didn't know there was to be a feast and that God had already told Samuel that one of Jesse's sons in Bethlehem is the one that I am going to have as my king. He didn't know any of that. He finds himself called in from the fields. Probably told that "Samuel is here, and we're having a feast, and we're not starting until you're here. Rise." And now, it all makes sense. And Samuel hears God saying, "Arise! Anoint him, for he is the one I have chosen." And something there clicks for David. Something makes sense. But he has had to wait, and he has had to be patient to get to that point. But then God would ensure that he will be found, and he will be summoned, and that he will then advance into the work he is called for.

And so, we will arrive where the Lord wants us to be. He'll overrule Samuel if he needs to. He would have jumped perhaps at Eliab. He overrules Samuel in order to promote his own candidate.

Final heading. Obscurity is a good training ground. Obscurity is a good training ground. Some are promoted early in their Christian life to great ministry, if you will. C. H. Spurgeon stands out in that regard. The preparation that that young man had undergone is remarkable. Books he read as a child. Well, you can see how he was actually very well prepared at a very young age for the responsibilities that he was to carry. But there is a bit of an exception. More often than not, we have to go through whatever it is that we are going to be called to do, whatever our vocation, whatever our career path, through that training.

But obscurity in that, and a bit of nonrecognition, or lack of recognition, that can often be the making of us, not the breaking of us. It can often be the best preparation, not the worst preparation for us. Lamentations 3:25-27 reads like this. "The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." There is a word there, isn't it? Bear the yoke in your youth. Well, we ponder that. But it's part of what we're learning here. Good to wait for him, to seek him. Good that one should hope and wait quietly, whatever restrictions. Perhaps in our younger years, we may chafe a bit at it and wonder, "Well, why does it have to be like this?" God is often doing his training while in our young years we are bearing that yoke. And the benefit of that will only then become apparent in the years to come.

Some folk sometimes have it very easy it appears in their younger years. Well, look out. There are going to be catch up lessons, and hardship, and affliction, bearing the yoke. God will see to it that they will have to endure something there of a check, something of obscurity perhaps that they will have to travel through. And of course, as Lamentations asks of us, will we be patient in it, will we wait quietly in that, or will we get impatient in it? And perhaps then miss the way. So, that obscurity can be a very valuable training ground.

How do we react to being overlooked? Well, we can ask that of ourselves in anytime, can't we? Think of David out in the fields. There were other brothers at home. Didn't

know they had a feast at that point, sure. But they were all at home, perhaps being groomed for other things, expectations that were upon them that there weren't upon David the youngest. Maybe there was no great thought that he would do over much. They might have resented that. He might have felt it hard done by there. Might have felt quite antagonistic towards his brothers in that. Might have felt antagonistic towards his father in that. There he is looking after his father's sheep. What are his brothers up to? Far more interesting things that they are doing, it would appear. And it could have worked very badly in him.

But it doesn't. He is content. He is prepared to be overlooked. He is settling there in his heart to do the will of God. And if the will of God is for him to look after these sheep, he will do that. Not to say perhaps there is intimation that there is a little bit more. But he is going to wait. And he is going to not get resentful or want things to happen more quickly, get impatient with his father or whatever else.

Another lesson learnt in obscurity is often this. Learning to be faithful in small things. Learning to be faithful in small things. Luke 19:16-17. Part of the parable. The minas there. "Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'" There us David, being faithful looking after the sheep, ewes that have young, now he is going to be given command of a nation, but a people, not sheep. And the skills that he has been learning, well, they are going to come into play in that. He is going to shepherd his people, just as he shepherded the sheep with skillfulness. And that same skillfulness is going to come into play when he is now shepherding people. It is. He has been faithful in small things, God is now going to appoint for him greater things. And it works to that principle. Whatever we are given to do, whatever is our calling, that if we are diligent in it, then there are perhaps other things that the Lord will provide for us.

Colossians 3:23-24. We're told there, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." We know with small things, isn't it there, whatever it is that we are doing, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men. David had his eye ever on the Lord, even in the small things of being the shepherd boy out in the fields, and God saw to it that that was preparation to then be able to take greater responsibility, being responsible in those smaller things when nobody else is looking, good preparation for other things to come/ When we learn skills and character is developed in these things, later on when we get in a fight against Goliath, he tells the king, Saul, that he has fought against the lion and bear, rescued sheep from their hands. Used the means that he used for that, and that is why he is going to refuse the armor that was given to him by Saul to wear. He learned, out in obscurity he was learning actually great lessons which are now going to be applied, well, very, very clearly, very exactly when comes to defeat Goliath.

And finally, this. Solitude. Solitude, not loneliness. No, but solitude. That can often be a very good thing being on our own with the Lord pondering, reflecting, outside when he's

out in the fields. Not part of the politics at home perhaps, and disputes, and things going on. No, his mind is on looking after the sheep, but also able to commune with God.

And how valuable that might have been we can only really surmise. Perhaps some of the Psalms like Psalm 8:3-5. Let me just quickly turn to that and read those wonderful verses there where he reflects, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.” Is that the shepherd boy out in the fields looking at the stars above? Is that where that moment happened and God spoke to him in that way? Solitude, what he learnt about God as he was there before him able to pray, commune with God, and hear from God, and have his spirit, as it were, impacted.

So, there is a place there, isn't there, to be alone with the Lord and to be able to unburden our hearts, to be aware of who we are, our longings, desires, our unrealized hopes, fears, sin. Confessing these things to him. Wherein that solitude the Lord can also then minister to us, and bring his grace to us, and open our minds to things perhaps we hadn't noticed before which now have a relevance, and when we go back to be with other people, we're bringing something of the things we learnt in solitude to our relationships, and friendships, and everything else that we are part of. Solitude can be the obscurity that we need, and the place where then back among people that we're bringing something of the good of that with us. Certainly, I think it was with David, and perhaps we are the beneficiaries with maybe quite a few of the psalms that actually came out of that period of his life as the shepherd out in the fields reflecting on the things of God, and having God commune with him to the benefit of his soul and ultimately to the benefit of our soul. Plucked from obscurity. Well, how often that is the way that the Lord works.

DAVID - PLUCKED FROM OBSCURITY: Psalm 78: 70-71

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Psalm 78: 56-72.

David is a man after God's own heart. He is converted and now showing his love to God by the kind of man that he is. We learn from Samuel's rebuke to Saul that the Lord is raising up a neighbour of Saul's to replace him as king (1 Samuel 15:28) but the identity of the person is not revealed to Samuel until 1 Samuel 16. Samuel makes the journey to Bethlehem as he now knows that the Lord is providing Himself with a king from among the sons of Jesse. But it is still a mystery to Samuel as to which son the Lord intends to choose. We would, perhaps, be right to think that the Lord has been preparing His servant, David, in the obscurity from which he is about to be plucked.

1. We can all be fooled by appearances.

Samuel is called a 'seer', or 'prophet', and is often given remarkable and clear insights by the Lord. Yet, as we see in this episode, even a prophet or seer is capable of misinterpreting what is before him. A feast is held at Jesse's home and seven of Jesse's sons are present. The eighth, David, is still out in the fields and had not been thought significant enough to invite to the special feast where Samuel, the well respected and well-known prophet, is present. Eliab, the eldest son, catches Samuel's eye (v6), perhaps due to his stature, his height, and his all-round impressiveness. But the Lord tells Samuel that this is not the one. The Lord's purposes are not to be advanced by people that might look impressive in the eyes of the world.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not have the background or stature to give Him some edge in the eyes of the world (Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 53:1-2). He is called a Nazarene as an indication of His unspectacular background and social standing. The Lord Himself would come from an obscure place, an obscure family, and an obscure background. He would not have a stately home to live in and His crown would end up being a crown of thorns. He would only reach the throne by way of the pathway of suffering.

The Lord delights to use unspectacular people and methods to achieve His purposes (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). The apostle Paul was not showy in the kind of person that he was, to the disappointment of the carnal Corinthians (2 Corinthians 10:10; 11: 5-6).

Today, in much of the Christian church, there is still too much weight put on learning, eloquence, charm, and personality. Yet, all too often, it turns out the heart of the person, who has been given a public platform, is not right. The Lord puts more weight on the inner man or woman. We often mistake external trappings for real substance.

2. God promotes His candidate.

With all of the seven sons who were present at the feast having been rejected by God, Samuel is puzzled. So, he asks Jesse whether he has another son. The answer is, of course, that he does, the youngest, and so Samuel insists that he be brought in from the fields. It would have been so easy to imagine David being overlooked, with Samuel traveling back to Ramah perplexed. But the Lord ensured that His anointed should be found and commissioned. The Lord knew the heart of David, even if his own family had perhaps overlooked him and consigned him to the most menial and uncomfortable duties, looking after the flock out in the fields. The Lord knows that this is the man to be the shepherd of His people and who will do His bidding (Psalm 78:70; Psalm 89: 19-21).

There are various things that come to our attention here.

Firstly, there is the nature of the calling to the Lord's service. The Lord has His way of bringing forward His choice, often despite the reluctance and obscurity of His chosen vessels. In this respect, there is always something supernatural to accompany and validate the choice He has made.

We can also learn that the way to serve the Lord is not to be pushy or to try to be noticed by people. We must wait on the Lord and His timing. He will bring things to pass. This is not to say that David did not have some intimation from the Lord about the work that was before him and for which he was being prepared. Certainly, the Lord was secretly preparing him through all the experiences that he was gaining through being a shepherd, alone in the fields.

Finally, we can be confident in the Lord, whatever the sphere of service that He might call us to, that we will arrive where the Lord would have us to be, if we are attentive to His will. We need not fret. The Lord will, if necessary, overrule Samuel and move others out of the way to fulfill His purposes.

3. Obscurity is a good training ground.

Some people are ready to be promoted early into the public sphere, such as C. H. Spurgeon. Most people need longer training, and young people are often given burdens to teach them to be able to bear responsibility later in life (Lamentations 3:25-27).

Some people seem to have it so easy. This is not necessarily a good sign. Success comes quickly and easily to some, but there have to be some 'catch-up' bitter lessons learnt

further down the way. Invisible obscurity is often the place where the Lord raises up His people for future work. When we are in that situation, we have to learn to be patient and test our hearts as to whether we can be content with this or whether we are wanting too much, too quickly. We may have to learn to adjust our expectations through the training that the Lord might be giving to us.

There are some interesting and character-forming experiences that can come our way if we are in obscurity. For example, how do we react to being overlooked? David is the forgotten member of his family, lightly esteemed, no great future mapped out for him. He could have grown sullen and resentful, feeling perhaps negative towards his other brothers and towards his father. This could, all the more, have been the temptation if the realization was beginning to dawn on him that the Lord was preparing him for something special in the future.

A very important lesson that we have to learn is to be faithful in small things (Luke 19: 16-17). We have to show that we are able to get on with our appointed task when only the Lord is there to see us (Colossians 3:23-24). Do we get on with things to a good standard and with diligence if we know that no-one, apart from the Lord, will ever know what we have done? Do we do it with a willing spirit or not?

Learning to be faithful in small things is a valuable part of the development of our character. David learnt to be courageous in rescuing the sheep that were seized by lions and bears (1 Samuel 17:34-35). There he learnt to value individuals, to be bold and valiant. These were things that would be valuable when he came to the throne of Israel.

Finally, although David's calling would eventually see him involved with lots of people, he also learnt the value of solitude, in particular being alone with the Lord. His meditations, when alone out in the fields, were perhaps the places and times when the Lord spoke to him and gave him such inspired poetry as Psalm 8:3-5. Holy solitude is the place where we are able to be better acquainted with ourselves, our fears, our weaknesses, and our sins. We learn how frail we are and then learn to implore the Lord for help. It is the place where the Lord can minister His truth and His love. All of this better prepares us for future service, and the responsibilities and obligations that this brings. It will also better prepare us to build strong relationships with others.