Five Smooth Stones - Part One

# The Process of Providence

## (1 Samuel 16:1, 17:1-15)

Welcome, I am excited to have all of you with us this morning, because we are kicking off a brand-new sermon series about a very well-known story in Scripture about a most unlikely hero named David. Now, the reality is that for many of us, during this season of life, we’re going to run up against an obstacle or challenge that feels impossible and overwhelming. Maybe for you it’s a chronic pain that you don’t think you can endure another day. Maybe it’s a health situation, a dream or a vision, something that you’re trying to accomplish, and you are beginning to wonder if it’s ever going to become a reality. And we could address that this morning, but I believe that there is so much more to be learned from this story than God’s ability to deliver his people from the giants they are facing in their lives.

And so, as we kick off this series today, I believe God wants to teach us how to be kingdom minded. We’re going to start on the ground floor, and we’re going to work our way up, and this morning I want to talk to you about the calling that God has placed on each of your lives. You see, the Bible teaches the providence of God, the power of divine destiny, and one of the things that God is doing in each of our lives is that he has called us to serve him wholeheartedly. And I believe that once you and I grab hold of this concept that God has placed within each of us the seeds of divine destiny, there is no stopping you and I from living a life that he has called us to live.

If you have a Bible with you, turn with me to first Samuel, we’re going to camp out here for the next several weeks looking at the story of a young boy named David. Now, most of you know him for being the boy who killed a giant named Goliath, but what many people don’t know is the amount of preparation involved in this one moment of his life. Nor the great amount of time between David’s calling to be the king, to that moment of his great victory over Goliath, and then the time before he actually became king over the nation of Israel. And so, we’re going to begin by talking about the process of providence, the process that brought David from being a glimmer in his father’s eye, to a young shepherd boy, a mighty warrior, and the greatest king over the nation. And what we’re going to see is that there was so much going on behind-the-scenes, but it really was a process as David faithfully lived for God, working out his calling one little thing at a time.

Now, to set the stage and give you a little bit of context, the Bible tells us that the current king of Israel was Saul, but his heart had turned away from the Lord. Saul had disobeyed God, he had rejected God’s leadership, and so God had chosen a replacement. In first Samuel, chapter 16, God said to the prophet Samuel, because of Saul’s disobedience, I have rejected him as king over my people Israel. So, he says in verse one,

"Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Samuel 16:1).

And so, Samuel goes down to Bethlehem and arriving at Jesse’s house, he invites Jesse and his sons to come worship with him.

Now, at this point no one including Samuel knew that God had chosen David, but that is the way elections worked in Israel, because God is sovereign over all things including the affairs of man. The Bible is very clear that,

“The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth” (Psalm 135:6).

And so, God simply appointed one of Jesse’s sons to be king. This is the understanding given to King Nebuchadnezzar that he realized in his dream and shared with Daniel. He said in chapter 4, verse 17,

“The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men” (Daniel 4:17).

And so, God simply appointed a new king and called Jesse to present his sons to Samuel in the place of worship. Seven times Jesse brought one of his sons to stand in front of Samuel, and seven times the Lord said, “Not this one.” Finally, in verse 11, Samuel asked Jesse,

“Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse replied, “but he’s tending the sheep…” (1 Samuel 16:11).

You see, no one suspected that God would have chosen the youngest and the smallest of his son, but Samuel believed God and so he said, “Send for him.” Jesse sent for his youngest son David to come in from the field and stand before Samuel. In verse 12, the Lord said,

“Rise and anoint him; he is the one." So, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power” (1 Samuel 16:12-13).

Now, I assure you that nobody expected this, even David didn’t see this coming, but God had his eye on him. He was singled out in the presence of his brothers to be the next king of Israel.

What’s really interesting about this story is that a lot of you have been in a similar situation. You have been overlooked by the people in your life, but God picked you, he called you out, and the Bible says,

“He chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4).

In other words, God had his eye on you from the very beginning, in your mother’s womb he was forming you, before you ever hit puberty, he was shaping you and creating experiences and relationships in your life. In fact, he was even working with the dysfunction in your family to bring you to a place where he could use your life for his glory.

Now, God had ordained all of David’s days, and so we know that he had been divinely prepared and called to accomplish God’s purpose in Israel. And so, as the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power, the Spirit of the Lord left Saul leaving his house unoccupied. Just as Jesus warned in Matthew chapter 12,

“The final condition of that man is worse than the first” (Matthew 12:45).

And Saul’s attendants recognized that something was seriously wrong with the king. They said to him, “An evil spirit is tormenting you, let us find someone who can play the harp and help you to feel better.” Saul agreed and according to the providence of God one of his servants spoke up and said,

“I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the Lord is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18).

Saul sent messengers to Jesse telling him, “Send me your son David who was with the sheep.” And David came to Saul and entered his service, Saul liked him very much and…

“David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him” (1 Samuel 16:23).

And so, it’s in that context, as all of this was going on with Jesse and his sons, that we come to chapter 17.

Now, this is a pivotal moment in David’s life, because not only was he a shepherd, but he was serving the king both as a musician and an armor-bearer. And so, it seemed as if David was living out his full potential, but we are about to discover that there was still so much more, because he had been called to greater things.

David was invested in the process of providence, and so as we come to chapter 17, verse one tells us,

“Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them” (1 Samuel 17:1-3).

“A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him” (1 Samuel 17:4-7).

“Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified” (1 Samuel 17:8-11).

“Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul's time he was old and well advanced in years. Jesse's three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah

David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem” (1 Samuel 17:12-15).

Now, I want you to recognize that for David this was just another day, for his brothers this was just another battle, for the Philistines it was just another fight, but for God this was a carefully orchestrated plan. And when we start to understand life according to the providence of God, we start to recognize the precise timeliness of God’s preparation for the future, and we must realize that we are considering things that God was working on before Jesse ever even met David’s mother.

Let me go a little deeper, because if you understand why David’s great-great-grandmother Naomi left her home in Bethlehem when there was a famine in the land. And if you understand why she went to live in Moab and after her husband died, her two sons married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other named Ruth, then you will begin to understand why,

“After they had lived there about ten years, both (of her sons) Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband” (Ruth 1:4-5).

And so, after 10 years, Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem, but you’ve got to understand that if Ruth had not decided to go back with her mother-in-law, she would have never met Boaz. And if she had not met Boaz, he would never have become her kinsman redeemer, but as it was this was all part of the process of providence.

In fact, we discover in chapter 4, that Boaz took Ruth to become his wife, and she gave birth to a son. Verse 17 says,

“They named him Obed. (Who) was the father of Jesse, the father of David” (Ruth 4:17).

And so, we must recognize providence, that in all of this God has been working for generations, because it was important that David’s great, great, grandfather would trace back to Boaz, because that was the lineage of Israel’s great king, and God was positioning David to be that King.

And so, what we see right now in chapter 17 is this kid, just a young boy, a teenager, but God has been working on this for generations. And what we must recognize this morning, even though it feels like an ordinary morning, just another day in the kingdom, is that David had to step out of his comfort zone. He had to walk away from what he knew, taking a step of faith into his destiny, when it would’ve been so much easier just to play it safe and stay home. But the Bible says,

“David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem” (1 Samuel 17:15).

What I hope you will see in the coming weeks is that if David had not responded to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, if he had not faithfully gone back and forth, if he had not kept to that schedule, he would miss what God had been planning for generations.

In fact, I believe that there are many of you, whether you are a teenager, a young adult, a mother or father, or grandparent or great grandparent, who are just now coming into that moment, that opportunity, that God has been setting up for generations. And I hope you will realize that God has been setting the stage so that you would be in the right place at the right time. First, that you would be here in Emmitsburg, that you would be here in this church, and then that you would be here at the right time as we are preparing to build a new building with new ministries and new opportunities.

This is the time where David finds his life intersecting with God’s providence. It’s unmistakable, undeniable, and it doesn’t always make sense, but God has strange ways of getting you in the right place at the right time. You know, Naomi had to wonder why she was left a widow in Moab, or even why she left Bethlehem in the first place, but it wasn’t really the famine that caused her to go to Moab, it was God’s providence orchestrating her life so that Ruth would meet the kinsman redeemer, showing us that God has a plan for unworthy Gentile idolaters. And so, into the lineage of Jesus comes Ruth, a Moabitess, and even though Naomi didn’t understand it, even though she was bitter about her life and her experiences, God had a purpose in it.

And today, there may be things that you are struggling to try to understand, and it may take years or even generations for you to understand why you had to lose what you had to lose, why you had to go where you had to go, and why you had to do what you had to do, but nobody really understands providence. However, the thing that you need to understand is that God is a planner, he’s a strategist, and that’s why the Psalmist said, it’s not from the East or from the west, it’s not from the wilderness…

“But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another” (Psalm 75:6-7, ESV).

In other words, he says, “I am God and beside me there is no other. I decide who comes up and who comes down.”

“Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand” (Jeremiah 18:6).

And so, you’ve got to trust God, even when it doesn’t make sense. You’ve got to believe that God is shaping something, shifting something, putting something together, that your great, great, grandchildren are going to benefit from.

Now, I don’t know whether that’s too deep for you, whether you can handle that or not, but it doesn’t have to make sense to you, because God didn’t have to explain to Naomi why she had to move, or why she lost her husband, or why she lost her children, because over time she would recognize that he never lost control of her life. And so, even when it felt like her life was out of control, when it felt like the devil was winning, and it felt like she had lost everything, she had to trust that God never lost control. She had to believe that God was working in all things, because…

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

And so, God moves this and that, he moves Elimelech to Moab and brings Naomi back with Ruth, he brings Saul down and raises David up, because he’s working in all things. He’s always working on something, and he’s been working on this for generations according to his purpose. As David was going back-and-forth from serving Saul to tending his father’s sheep, he thought he was just being faithful, but he was doing so much more than that because God was positioning him for his destiny.

Just like his great-great-grandmother Ruth “went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech” (Ruth 2:3).

And so, she was in the right place at the right time, because God had planned for her to be there. In other words, it wasn’t by chance that she caught Boaz’s eye, and yet if she had stayed in Moab, she never would’ve met him. But God’s providence positioned her in the right place at just the right time because the Bible says, everything has been…

“Predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).

And so, God will cause you to love who you love, to like what you like, to go where you go, to be sifted where you are sifted, because what God is doing is so much bigger than what you can imagine.

David’s brothers went back to the front lines, they followed Saul to war, they went back to where the action was, but the Bible says,

“David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem” (1 Samuel 17:15).

He went back-and-forth between tending sheep for his father and serving Saul.

I wonder if there is someone listening to me today that feels that way? Maybe in your job, or raising your children, or whatever your responsibilities are, but you feel like everybody else is on the front line where the action is and you’re just going back-and-forth, doing what seems to be so insignificant, just going back-and-forth to a job you hate, back and forth from cleaning up one mess after another, back-and-forth doing whatever it is you do, but let me assure you that it’s not insignificant. Whatever God has assigned for you today is not meaningless, and that’s why the Bible says,

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23).

And I want to encourage you today to recognize that from the beginning of time God has been shaping you, forming you, positioning you, and he has a calling on your life. He has chosen you and anointed you, and even if you are in that time in between, of when God called you, when he gave you his promise, and when he revealed his purpose for your life, and maybe you feel like you’re just going back-and-forth. You feel like there must be something else, there must be something greater, but I want to encourage you to continue serving in the little things, keep tending the sheep, keep going back and forth, continue to do the little things, because it’s all part of the process.

You see, God is working, he’s put you in that place, he’s given you that responsibility, and he’s going to use you to make a difference. And so, I just want to encourage you to remain faithful, because one day you will hear these words,

"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things” (Matthew 25:21).

And so, just like David, no matter how insignificant it seems, I want to encourage you to get involved, keep running back-and-forth, keep tending sheep, keep serving your father and serving the king, because God is preparing you. Even now, he’s getting you ready for what lies ahead, he’s preparing you today for the battle that you will face tomorrow.

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