

Series: KING ME! God's People Get MORE Than They Ask For

October 10, 2010

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BRIGHT SPOTS IN DARK PLACES

1 Samuel 30

1. Have you heard a common theme this morning in all these stories? For the most part, those who spoke faced a difficulty—sometimes a frustrating, hopeless place. And then God began to work—and it was like dawn after a dark night. And it became clear that was at work—even in the dark.

-If you were going to write the story you would live, what would it be like? For most of us—it would be a success story—with no pain, or little pain—just pretty much up and to the right. Get sick? Instantly healed. Financial loss? Humiliation? Either non-existent—or instantly resolved. Question: Would you go to see a movie like that? I was listening to an interview with Don Miller, the guy who wrote the book **Blue Like Jazz**—and he said that when they wanted to do a movie of his book—he realized that there **was** no story. A good story—like a good picture—has light and shadow. It usually has a problem where there's desperation and pain---that somehow gets resolved.

-Right now—you are in the middle of a story. It might be the beginning—where the sky's blue, sun's shining, fish are jumping, Daddy's rich and Mama's pretty. Or you might be in the **hopeless** part—where you feel trapped in the cold and darkness. Your story looks a little like these pictures [pics]--a confusing, senseless mass of color.

- a. Today, I want to talk about story. I don't know your story—but I do know that all of us are part of a much larger story that has been going on for thousands of years. There's an insurmountable problem in this story—sin, wrecked people, and an entire creation that's been drastically affected.
 - b. There are heroes in this story: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Peter, Paul—and many others. But the main character, the main hero—is God. God works behind the scenes in the lives of all the other heroes—with the goal of making everything right that's gone wrong. And **you** have a part in this story, too. You just have to decide what it will be.
2. Have you ever noticed that for a picture to make sense—to have any depth to it—there needs to be both light **and** shadows? Well, that's the history of the world, isn't it? There have been times of incredible progress and hope—and times when the entire world was engaged in a struggle of survival. Sometimes it has seemed like hatred and oppression were winning the day—and sometimes it has seemed like love and kindness won the day. Light—**shadow**—light—**shadow**.

-That's exactly what you see in this 500 year period of the kings of Israel. Having read the whole panorama of it—I find myself more surprised by the light than the darkness.

For example, there's a series of fathers and sons who reigned, and the contrast is astounding. The first in this series was Ahaz—and you get the feeling that he did everything he possibly could to flip God off and fill his Kingdom with pagan worship. He's an **awful** king! He even closes up the Temple and uses it as a warehouse. -You'd think, "Wow, his son is going to be even **worse!** And yet his son, Hezekiah, cleans out the temple, depends on God for help—and is this amazing bright spot in Israel's history. And God honors his faith with **powerful** miracles. Not only was Hezekiah healed of a fatal disease, God miraculously delivered Jerusalem from Assyria, the superpower of that day.

-So, you'd think Hezekiah's son would watch his Dad's example, see the power of God, and think, "My role is a sacred obligation! I need to make sure I keep God front and center!" Instead, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, goes in the opposite direction—and doesn't just fill the land with pagan worship—he fills Jerusalem with oppression and murder. And under his leadership—Israel takes a downward slide that makes defeat and exile inevitable.

3. Now, I think most of us have seen enough of history to see the dark and the light—and understand the rhythm. The hardest things for us to understand is how God is at work when it ceases to be theory—and gets personal. See, history is **always** personal!

-And this is where we struggle in life, isn't it? It's when the freedom of choice that God has given to others—or the mistakes they make has devastating effects on us personally. I was watching Larry King Live the other night—and he was interviewing the person behind a moving coming out—next week, I think, called **Convicted**. It's a true story about a woman whose brother, Kenny, was wrongfully convicted of murder. She had no education—but went to law school, became a lawyer, and proved his innocence. But he **still** spent 18 years in prison. Life can be **very** unfair!

-There's a dramatic story at the beginning of these kings over Israel. We touched on it last week—in the story of Saul. Initially, he seems like a great choice as a leader—but he turns into this jealous madman of a king—who devotes himself to killing that man God had anointed as the next king. David. And Saul hunted him like a **dog!**

- a. At the beginning, it seems like David has the blessing of God on him—and can do nothing wrong! He takes down this giant warrior no one else would tackle—Goliath. He marries the king's daughter and is best friends with the king's son. He leads the troops into battle as a hero.

-But after all this sunshine—there were dark shadows. When it became clear that Saul was going to kill him, David lost **everything** in a single day: home, job, wife, friends, country, money—**everything!** He actually tried to get taken into the hometown of Goliath—the city of Gath—but **this** time he's afraid, and pretends he's insane, talking crazy, drooling in his beard, and writing graffiti on the gates to the city. He actually ended up living in a **cave!** The only cave-man in the Bible!

- b. Well, eventually, David **did** have company in his cave:

David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him. (1 Samuel 22:1-2 TNIV)

-Now *that* must've been one happy, cheerful party! Imagine—all your relatives—plus 400 discontented, stressed out, debt-ridden people around you! For **10 years!**

- c. All this time that David is a fugitive, he stays loyal—ironically, to the man who was hunting him down—and to God. We know—because his songs are recorded for us. There were times when he said, “God—where **are** you? Are you sleeping? Have you forgotten me? **Please show up and do something!**” But he continued to trust that God was in charge—even of the dark places. Remember Psalm 23?

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4 NIV)

David found himself in the shadow of death for almost **10 years!** And **he** was a man after God's heart!

- d. And then it got worse. David and his posse—about 600 men by this time, came back to the city they had made their home—only to find that it had been raided and burned. All of their wives and children and possessions were gone. And David gets blamed for the whole thing!
- e.

David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God. (1 Samuel 30:6 TNIV)

-This would be a great time—a natural time—for David to write a book like this one by Charles Templeton—**Farewell to God!** “I've trusted You through all this stuff—and now **this?** But David didn't defect to the other side. The record says, **But David found strength in the Lord his God.** I think David would say, “Why would I turn away from the **only** One who has ever kept His promises to me—when I need Him more than **ever?**”

-The short story is that David pursues the raiders—and they get everyone back unharmed. On that same day, the light began to dawn on David. Saul is killed in another battle—and David ultimately becomes king.

-From that moment on, figuratively speaking, the sun rises higher and higher for David and God's people. He has the chance to become the king God anointed him to be—and the nation gets a leader who obeys and loves God—and loves justice.

- e. So, what was all the tough stuff about? Anyone here ever seen the process that steel goes through to make is tough and durable? Well, in short--they heat it white hot, add things to it—then pound it. Bam! Bam! Bam! And when they're done—it is **incredibly** strong. What you realize is that not only was God writing an incredible story—he was using the cave time in David's life to make him someone people **still** celebrate as a hero.

-David had no way of knowing all this, but from this time on, every king would be measured against David's integrity—and David's devotion to God. But David's heirs would fail—and it would seem that God's promise to give him a Kingdom that would never end—never happened.

-Then one day, about 1000 years later, a baby would be born in Bethlehem—David's home town—and the angel would tell His mother,

“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:31-33 TNIV)

-Mary, this teenage girl, didn't fully understand it—but through her, a descendant of David, God was taking on the form of a man. And about 30 years later, on a cross outside Jerusalem, He would establish His Kingdom by dying—and then defeating Satan and death once and for all by rising again.

-And the bottom line is that **God** is writing the story—and He will finish it. Even though, sometimes, we make defiant choices in God's. He calls for love; we choose apathy. He calls for patience—we take things into our own hands. He calls us to forgive—we refuse. But His Mission **will not be stopped!** We can't even slow it down. We just have to choose if we play a key role in the greater story He's writing.

4. God's ultimate plan was for Israel was that she would exemplify what it's like to live under the perfect leadership of a king who is **King of all kings** and be a light to the nations. They wouldn't cooperate.

-So God started all over again—and came here in Jesus. And by giving his life on a cross—He settled the score, made things right between us and Him, and offers to place His Spirit, not just in one king at a time—but **everyone!** And because of the Holy Spirit—we have the incredible privileges of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

-That, friends, is an **amazing** thing! To think that the Power that is behind every good thing that's happened, every prophet who's prophesied, every act of courage in the face of evil—lives in **me** and lives in **you?** Absolutely amazing!

-What we struggle with is...the light and the shadows. I mean, I think we all understand that light and shadow makes sense when it comes to pictures—but when **life** gets dark as midnight? Hmmm!

-I once fixed the door to the ensuite in our bedroom by sawing a hunk off the top of the door. The problem was that I took off **too** much! I'm reminded of that just about every night when someone uses the bathroom—because the light shines through that space right into the eyes of whoever is in bed!

a. My point—and there **is** a point—is that sometimes when life is dark it would be **so** good to know that at **least** there's light **behind** the door. It would tell us, "Something good is coming—God is at work—someday the door **will** open! **Hang on!**" But that's not the way it seems to happen. Sometimes it seems like we're stuck in a bad season of life--like David. It's **wintertime!** Cold. Hard. Dead. Frozen. People—even great people--have always struggled in times like that.

b. In a short period of time, Job lost everything--children, wealth, reputation—even his health. He did not, however, lose his wife, who said, "Curse God and die, Job! Get it over with! Even Job's friends said, "It's karma, man—what goes around comes around. You've sinned!" And Job cried, whined, complained—but hung onto God until the dawn broke.

-Elijah—a powerful prophet—flamed out after an amazing victory—and asked God to kill him. Moses, after seeing unbelievable victories, had to lead 2 million grumbling, angry, defiant people through the wilderness—for **40 years**—and said, "God, why don't you just **kill** me!" Elijah made one of the grandest exits this world has ever seen—in a chariot of fire, no less! And Moses saw the promised land.

d. And it was Moses and Elijah who were called to encourage Jesus before he went to the cross. Jesus went through it too, didn't He? There was rejection, abandonment by his closest friends when He was sweating blood. And then he faced on the cross what no human has **ever** experience—the total abandonment of God—while carrying the weight of human sin. At the darkest point—in the wee hours of the morning—Jesus gasps, "**Please** don't make me go through this...But I want **your** will, not mine." Dawn breaks—and he walks to the cross. Dawn breaks 3 days later—and he walks out of the grave!

-I hate the darkness; I hate dark, cold places of the soul! I don't understand them—but I have been in them! I do know this. Good things happen in dark places—because as lonely as it seems—God is there!

5. Billy Graham is reported as once saying, "I think I was God's second choice for this job!" Know who he thought God's **first** choice was? A Canadian by the name of Charles Templeton! So—how does a book like **Farewell To God** come from a man like that? I have some thoughts about that. Templeton—and many other atheists—have decided **not** to believe in God because of evil. Shadows. Whether it's in their lives or someone else's life.

-See, because of how God has revealed himself—there's a relational dynamic there. If we believe that God is a giant, impersonal **IT**—passionless force, eternally oozing everywhere—then there's nothing to be upset with. Life is either pre-destined—or **un-**

destined—it just *is*. But if God is both the epitome of love—and the epitome of power and Ruler of all—that changes everything. Then it gets **relational. Personal.**

a. Think about how relationships twist and turn and fall apart. Relationships start with **expectations**. If someone loves you—and pledges themselves to you, as they do in marriage, you will be **disappointed**—because you’ve married an imperfect person. If you don’t re-adjust your expectations or come to some understanding, the next stage is **disapproval**. This is not a nice place to be—for you, the disapprover—or the other person, the disapprov-ee. Sometimes that stage lasts a long time—and if you don’t find a way to fix it—the next stage is **apathy**—and, finally, **rejection**. And that’s where you write a book like ***Farewell To God***—or—whoever.

b. And that’s what people sometimes do to God when they’re in caves—like the one David found himself in. Remember David’s early years? As I mentioned before—it was this incredible winning streak where things were **up and to the right!** At a young age, he found himself at the top of the heap with teenyboppers swooning when he rode into town from battle! And Justin Bieber wasn’t anywhere to be seen!

-I’m guessing that David thought, “I’m the one God anointed as the next king—so things will continue to go up—right to the throne! Imagine his disappointment when he ended up—not on the throne, but in a cave! His songs reflect that disappointment—and even some disapproval. But he **never** dips into apathy—or rejection. His faith sees him through the shadows. In fact, right in the middle of being hunted, God gave him rest. He says:

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Psalm 4:8 TNIV)

Even though he struggles with disapproval of how God is handling his life—there is this deep faith that dawn will come and God will keep his promises—and darkness will turn to day. And that’s what God honors. Faith. Faith when things don’t turn out like we plan. Faith when things are not moving nearly as fast as we think they should. Faith when life seems cold and dark—and it would appear that **God has left the building!**

6. Now, why am I talking about stuff like this on Thanksgiving? Around some tables—today, tomorrow—yesterday—next month—whenever you celebrate Thanksgiving—there will be joy, happiness—and the gratitude will flow freely. The consensus will be, “Man, isn’t God good! We have so, **SO** much to be grateful for!”

-But there will be other homes where those around the table will only be slightly more grateful than the turkey on the platter. I know—it took you some time to get that! Why? Because it’s the cave. You’re in the shadow part of the story where the pain hasn’t been resolved. What God is up to is **very** unclear—He’s not telling you why.

-You need to know that **this** is not a disapproving message saying, “Come on! Jesus is Lord. God is Good! Have faith—and suck it up! At least **pretend** to be grateful!

- a. What I **do** want to ask of you is this. Hold on. **Hold on!** The ending to your story hasn't been written yet—so don't write it. Several years ago, some surprising things from Mother Theresa's diary were revealed—that much of her life she felt distant from God. All this while people stood in awe of her. But she clung to God—like all of God's people have done through history. That He is a **GOOD** God—and that He is up to something phenomenally **GOOD**—even when our part of the picture seems lost in the shadows.

-There comes a time when, like David, all you have to cling to in the cave is God's promise. That's what's going on when at his **darkest** time—right before dawn, the record says, "**David found strength in the Lord his God.**"

-Our promise is that God will **never** forsake us; and that He is at work in **all things**—good and bad—using them to form us into the image of Jesus. In this case, God was forming David into a man with steel in his soul who would set the bar for every king who would follow him. Remember how steel is made? It's a hot, brutal process!

- b. There's something else here. God's goal isn't to give everyone on the planet a pleasant life; it's to accomplish His Mission of reversing death and bringing **all** people back to Himself. That, friends, is a difficult, messy process—but **it will happen!**

-Say that to most people in our world and they'll laugh in your face, **You've got to be kidding! Tell me, do you see any signs that this is happening?** And the thought, sometimes even for Christ-followers, is, "Why should I throw my life at a mission I can't see? Why should I give my resources to feed hungry people—when there will be even **more** hungry people tomorrow? The darkness is **so** complete and **so** profound—it's hard to stay hopeful.

-And I'd have to say—this is where our faith kicks in. Is God...really God? Is **He** behind it...or not? Is it possible that God, being eternal and all-knowing—has a plan that goes beyond the obvious? It's not only possible—it's **true**. But it's like light shining from behind the door. With God being a much better carpenter than me—there's **way** more light behind the door, but not as much shining **around** the door!

-God is at work in deep and profound ways—but just like you can't see **Him**—you can't see what he's up to. But He does call me—and He does call you to join him!

7. In the meantime—I want to leave you with two pictures—literally. Look at this painting. Do you know what it is that makes things visible—and beautiful—and brings depth? If it was all light—almost nothing would be visible. It's the shadow that makes sense of the picture—of any picture, really. Is it possible that what God does—the story He's telling—is similar?

-A second picture. Remember the pictures I showed you earlier? Lori's step-mom Ruth, gave us a book **filled** with pictures like this—years ago. The pictures look like blobs of meaningless **until someone teaches you how to look at them**. The secret

to seeing what's there—is to squint your eyes—and stare deeply into it—as if you're looking through it. There's this **aha!** moment when you finally see it in 3D!

-And Life is sometimes like that—on the surface, anyway. A series of meaningless blobs of dark and light, good and bad. I would say—and I think God would say—look **beyond** the surface. And if it still isn't clear? Today—just be grateful for **small** things—the light **around** the door. And if you can't find **any** small things—I have **one** small thing for you here—if you like fudge!