

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, January 20, 2008**

**A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART**

**Acts 13:16-23**

Before reading today's Scripture passage, I want to tell you two brief stories. The first is about a woman named Norma McCorvey who, while pregnant and unmarried in 1970, was recruited as the plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking to overturn the laws against abortion in the state of Texas, where she lived. At that time, abortions to terminate pregnancies were illegal in Texas, as in many other states, unless the life of the mother was endangered. To protect her identity, McCorvey was known only as Jane Roe in the court case, which went all the way to the U. S. Supreme Court, which issued its landmark decision declaring abortion to be a constitutional right and making it legal in all 50 states 35 years ago this week, on January 22, 1973.

Norma McCorvey did not have an abortion. Her child was born before the court case was decided, and given up for adoption. At the time of the lawsuit, to sensationalize the issue, she claimed her pregnancy was the result of rape. She now admits that was not the case.

In 1995, Norma was answering phones at a Dallas abortion clinic called *A Choice for Women* when a pro-life group moved into the office space next door. She tried trading insults with the pro-lifers, but they responded to her jabs with smiles, Scripture, and an invitation to church. Several months later Norma left her job at the clinic and publicly announced her conversion to Christianity. She wrote a book about her experiences and her journey to faith in Christ called *Won by Love*. The reality is that Norma McCorvey was won by the combined forces of love and truth. It was the love demonstrated by those pro-life Christians, including a seven-year-old girl named Emily, along with the truth of the gospel, the truth of God's Word, and the truth of what abortion really is, that God used to transform Norma McCorvey into a follower of Jesus Christ and an ardent pro-life advocate. She has said: "It wasn't until I had a regenerated heart that the truth of what abortion does could find a place in my intellect. Once that truth took hold, there was no turning back."

I tell you this story today to remind you of the power of love, the power of the truth – the power of God – to change the most hardened, deceived heart. Let that encourage you as you pray and work for change in our society, and as you seek to be God's instrument of change in the lives of those He has put in your life.

The second story is about a husband-and-wife team serving as Christian missionaries in the Philippines in the 1980s. The wife became pregnant, and during her pregnancy, she contracted amoebic dysentery through contaminated drinking water. Her doctor told her that the medications she needed to combat the dysentery would cause irreversible damage to the child she was carrying. He advised her to have an abortion.

She refused, and in 1987, her son Tim was born healthy and robust. Tim is not 20 years old, and last month, after an outstanding season as the quarterback for the University of Florida football team, Tim Tebow was awarded the Heisman trophy, the highest honor given to a college football player. It never would have happened if Pam Tebow had followed her doctor's advice and had an abortion.

In the past 35 years, since the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, some 49 million babies have been aborted in America. We can only imagine the number of future leaders, teachers, doctors, nurses, inventors, musicians, missionaries – even potential Heisman trophy winners – whose lives have been ended by abortion before they were given an opportunity to live. Praise God for parents like Pam and Bob Tebow who have chosen life, and for ministries like Sanctity of Life and the Alexandria Pregnancy Help Center, who give help and support and counsel to women and couples who find themselves facing an unplanned pregnancy. Praise God for their demonstration of God's love and their resolute commitment to the truth and power of God's Word.

Only God knows, ultimately, how we have been diminished as a nation and as a people by all those we have missed because they were aborted. That we have been diminished is beyond dispute. Not just in numbers, but in the scarring of our nation's soul. The Bible says that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7). The legacy of *Roe v. Wade* and 49 million abortions has left scars on the souls of us all, and it has robbed us as a nation of greater blessings from God.

May the Lord have mercy on us and bring us to repentance as a people for our acceptance and practice of abortion. And may His blessing be upon all who choose life and minister to others with life-affirming alternatives to abortion and the life-giving message of the gospel.

Now let's turn to God's Word in Acts 13:16-23.

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Today we begin a series of messages on the life of David. Did you know that the Bible contains more stories about David than any other biblical character? Except for Jesus, that is. David was a shepherd, a musician who played the harp in the royal court of Saul, a poet (or song writer) who composed many of the psalms in the Bible, a giant-killer, a warrior, a great king who ushered in Israel's golden age and enlarged the nation's borders during the 40 years of his reign. And he was the direct ancestor of the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus, who came from David's line. If you look at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, you will see that Matthew traces the ancestry of Jesus from Abraham through David up to the birth of Christ.

In his sermon at Antioch of Pisidia recorded in Acts 13, during his first missionary journey, the apostle Paul declares in verse 23 that it was from David's descendants that God brought to Israel the Savior, Jesus, just as He had promised.

If you look at what Paul says in this passage, the way he describes the history of the people of Israel is remarkable. God is the subject of almost every verb. Paul's emphasis is on what God has done. His focus is centered on God and His initiative of grace. His provision. Paul understood that the history of redemption, the history of God's dealings with His people, is just that: It is HIS story. It is God's story. No less than 11 times in these eight verses (16-23), Paul shines the spotlight on what God has done.

1. In verse 17, it was God who chose the people of Israel from all the peoples of the earth to be His own and to carry out His purposes.
2. It was God who blessed the people of Israel in Egypt and made them prosper (17b).
3. It was God who led His people out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses (17c). John Piper says: "God flexed His muscles in Egypt. God made an unusual display of his power. God meant to be seen as the mighty deliverer of His people." Indeed, He was. It was God who did it.
4. Verse 18 says that, after bringing the people out of Egypt, God "endured their conduct" – He put up with His people, with their stubbornness and lack of faith, for 40 years in the wilderness.
5. Verse 19 tells us that God defeated the seven nations occupying the land of Canaan. The people may have employed their swords and spears and shields, even their trumpets, but it was God who gave them victory.
6. God then gave the land of Canaan to His people as their inheritance, just as He promised. The whole earth belongs to the Lord. He owns it. It is His to give to those whom He chooses.
7. Verse 20 says that God gave judges to Israel to lead them and to deliver them from the oppression of their enemies. It didn't just happen. God raised up the judges to serve His purposes.
8. In verse 21, Paul says that God gave Israel her first king – Saul.
9. Then in verse 22, we read that God removed Saul from the throne. Daniel 2:21 says that it is God who sets up kings and deposes them. And Daniel 4:32 declares that God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes. It was God who made Saul king. And it was God who removed him from the throne.
10. We also see in verse 22 that God chose David and made him king. As Piper says, David was "a young nobody who was good with a sling shot and liked to play the harp and write songs. God took Saul down and put David up." God is the One who did it, according to His good pleasure and His sovereign plan.
11. In verse 23, as we have already noted, it was God who brought to Israel a Savior – Jesus – just as He promised. It was part of God's plan. God planned it and God made it happen.
12. History is HIS story. It is the story of what God has done. And we do not understand history, we do not understand the Bible or God's plan of redemption, if we do not understand the ultimate sovereignty of God in all the affairs of people and nations. Including our own.

As we think about David and God's sovereign purposes in his life, I want you to notice what God said concerning David in verse 22: "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart." That is the essence of what God said through Samuel in 1 Samuel 13:14, when the prophet chastised Saul and told him he had forfeited the kingdom through his disobedience to God and lack of faith. Samuel said: "The LORD has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of His people, because you (Saul) have not kept the LORD's command."

A man after God's own heart. Only one person in the entire Bible is described this way. Only David. As we get to know him, we discover that he was a man of great gifts, a man of strong faith, and a man of giant flaws. Chuck Swindoll says that.

David distinguished himself as one of God's greatest men. In battle he modeled invincible confidence. In decisions, he judged with wisdom and equity. In loneliness, he wrote with transparent vulnerability and quiet trust. In friendship, he was loyal to the end. Whether a humble shepherd boy or an obscure musician before King Saul, he remained faithful and trustworthy. Even in his promotion to the highest position in the land, David modeled integrity and humility.

But, as we shall see, he (like us) was anything but perfect. Having earned the public's trust and respect, he forfeits it all in a brief season of sensual pleasure. Then, as the consequences kick in, we discover another side of the man's makeup – lustfulness as a husband, weakness as a father, and partiality as a leader. It is all there, written for all to learn, preserved for all to remember.

The Bible makes no attempt to hide David's failures and flaws, his weaknesses and shortcomings. In the pages of the Bible, we find that David is a great sinner, guilty of pride (in his decision to take a census of the nation, in direct disobedience to God), adultery with Bathsheba, betrayal and even murder in the death of Bathsheba's husband Uriah, who was one of David's most loyal soldiers.

And yet, God still called him "a man after (His) own heart."

We see something of the truth that God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9) in the Lord's choice of David to be king over His people Israel.

Why does the Lord choose the people He chooses to serve His purposes? Paul gives us some insight into this in 1 Corinthians 1. He urges the Corinthians to consider the wisdom and power of God demonstrated in the saving work of Christ on the cross. Then he says, beginning in verse 26: "Think of what you were when you were called (to faith in Christ). Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the

lowly things of this world, and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him” (1:26-29).

One translation (the New Berkeley Version) translates verses 28 and 29 this way: “God also has chosen the world’s insignificant and despised people and nobodies in order to bring to nothing those who amount to something, so that nobody may boast in the presence of God.”

God takes nobodies – or those the world thinks of as nobodies – and turns them into somebodies. David was a nobody. He was just a young shepherd boy in the household of his father Jesse. With seven older brothers, nobody had great expectations of David. But God saw something special in his heart.

In 1 Samuel 16, the Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem, and told him He had chosen one of Jesse’s sons to become king in Saul’s place. When Samuel saw Eliab, Jesse’s firstborn, he was impressed and felt sure he was the one of God’s choice. It is possible that Eliab may have reminded Samuel of Saul in his appearance. But appearances, as we know, can be deceiving. And God said no. Eliab was not the one.

The Lord taught Samuel an invaluable lesson that day. He taught Samuel that He (the Lord) looks at people and situations and circumstances differently than we do. It is a lesson we need to learn as well, lest we be too easily impressed by a person’s looks or charm or charisma instead of their character. Concerning Eliab, the Lord said to Samuel: “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. [I.e., he is not the right man.] The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

God judges people not by their appearance, not by their physical attributes or abilities. God judges by the heart, by the inward qualities of faith and character. This is God’s principle of choice. Chuck Swindoll has said: “If I could change one thing about my focus or vision, (it would be this): I would like to see people not by face but by heart.” Amen to that! “But only God can do that. So we have to look to Him to give us, with our limited focus, that kind of discernment, because we don’t have it in ourselves.”

Samuel slowly caught on to this principle. Jesse paraded Eliab, then Abinadab, then Shammah and four more sons before Samuel – seven in all – and each time the Lord said no. When it appeared that Jesse had run out of sons and Samuel’s mission would end in failure, Samuel asked if Jesse had any more sons. “Just the youngest,” came the answer. “But he is out tending the sheep.” Samuel told Jesse to send for him. And when David came and stood before Samuel, just a teenager who smelled like the sheep he had been tending, the Lord said to the prophet: “He is the one I have chosen to be king. Anoint him” (1 Samuel 16:6-13).

In Psalm 78, where he recounts the history of Israel from their sojourn in Egypt to the reign of David, Asaph wrote this about David:

He (the Lord) chose David His servant  
 And took him from the sheep pens;  
 From tending the sheep He brought him  
 To be the shepherd of His people Jacob,  
 Of Israel His inheritance.  
 And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;  
 With skillful hands he led them (78:70-72).

“His good heart made him a good shepherd; he guided his people wisely and well”  
 (78:72, *The Message*).

The Lord saw that David was a man after His own heart. What does it mean to be a person after God’s own heart?

It does not mean you have to be perfect, because David certainly wasn’t perfect, and you and I aren’t. Only one person who ever lived on this earth was perfect, and that is Jesus.

To be a man or woman after God’s own heart means, as Chuck Swindoll says, that your life is in harmony with God and His purposes: “What is important to Him is important to you. What burdens Him burdens you. When He says, ‘Go to the right,’ you go to the right. When He says, ‘Stop that in your life,’ you stop it.” When you have a heart after God’s own heart, your heart is broken by the things that break the heart of God, and you rejoice in the things that bring joy and pleasure to God’s heart.

To be a man or woman after God’s own heart does not mean that you are without sin. It means that you take sin seriously in your life and repent of it eagerly and sincerely. David sinned many times, but when confronted with his sin, he was quick to confess and repent of it. So must we, if we are to cultivate a heart after God’s own heart.

To be a man or woman after God’s own heart means, if you will, to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). It means that our hearts are completely His. In 2 Chronicles 16:9, a prophet named Hanani said to one of David’s descendants, King Asa of Judah: “The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.” Completely His. Fully committed to Him. Nothing held back. No locked closets. Nothing swept under the rug. No corner of your life kept from His inspection or rule.

The Lord found David “a man after His own heart.” May it be so in our lives as well, to the glory of His name. Amen.