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A Passionate Heart: David & Saul: Doomed & Delivered

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1 Samuel 24:1—12

The story so far: in about 1040 B.C., David the Shepherd Boy was anointed by the prophet Samuel. David becomes a musician in King Saul's court, and at 16 or 18 years old he fights Goliath. With one shot from his sling, Goliath falls dead, and the Philistines run, and David returns to King Saul. On one hand, Saul is excited because the enemy has been defeated and Israel's pride has been restored. On the other hand, Saul is irked that it was a shepherd boy who caused this great victory for Israel. And, though he tried to suppress the emotions, deep down there was a jealousy about this boy. So the King decided he would send David out again and again. (In the hope that he would lose?) So, for several years David fought the Philistines. Each time when it seemed like David would be defeated, instead he brought victory; so that David's legend grew. God was with him. Finally David comes back to the palace, amidst hoopla and celebration, and something happens inside of Saul. Women are dancing and singing "*Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands!*" Uh oh. Scripture says "*Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him...and from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.*" 1 Samuel 18:7-9.

A jealous eye can take over your life. 12 chapters of 1 Samuel are devoted to what happens as a result. 12 chapters of the Bible! We'd better pay attention. Jealousy is that powerful. Because of his jealous eye, Saul decides that David is the enemy, though he has done nothing wrong, David is the enemy, because David is a threat to his own kingdom, and the jealousy nearly drives him mad. Twice he takes a javelin and tries to spear David to the wall. David finally flees from Saul and spends *10 years* in hiding, living among the Philistines. But 100s of men gather around David. And they fight for him, not against Saul's army, but against the other enemies of Israel, and they live off of the plunder from those battles. During this time, David's legend continues to grow so much that Saul half-mad decides *he* must kill David. **What did David do that so angered Saul? He succeeded.** So, after every battle, Saul takes his finest troops and goes looking for David among the Philistines to try to end David's life. With that background; grab your Bible:

1 Samuel 24:1 *After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi."* 2 *So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.* 3 *He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.* 4 *His men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.* 5 *Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.* 6 *He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord."* 7 *With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.* 8 *Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.* 9 *He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?"* 10 *This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord's anointed.'* 11 *See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.* 12 *May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you*

have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.”

If you have read all 1 Samuel, you know Saul had been anointed King of Israel, but after Saul started falling away, God sent Samuel the prophet to say to Saul “God has turned his back on you. God has called a new King, and neither you nor your children will rule over the house of Israel again. God has chosen a new king already, a man after God’s own heart.” And rather than understand that God had already set these things in motion, Saul does what many of us try to do when we know God’s clear will and yet decide to disobey. Saul said “I don’t *care* what God wants. I’m going to do everything I can to hold on to the Kingdom of Israel, so that *my* children will rule over the house of Israel.”

First of all, Saul is wrestling with natural jealousy, when someone else shows him up. *He* should have been the one in the battle defeating Goliath, but he stood and watched as the young man David defeated him. His driving motive was **jealousy**. And **fear** of who will be the next king. Saul sees David and it’s obvious. David sings these beautiful songs we call Psalms, of his love for God. He goes into battle with great courage, even though he’s a shepherd boy because he knows God is on his side. God gives him the victory again and again. Contrast this with Saul in his own life: Saul thinks he can outsmart God by simply killing this man. His motivation is reduced to his own **poor self-image**. How sad. I hope your motivation in life is not your poor self image, or jealousy or fear. Saul’s struggling because *he knows that he’s failed God*. That makes David seem like the enemy. *David did nothing wrong!* In fact, David did everything *right*. David’s victories in battle helped assure Saul his kingdom. David’s victories in battle brought security to the nation of Israel. David was a loyal subject! Yet Saul sought to kill him.

Saul is one of the dark characters in the Scripture. He wasn’t always a villain, but he allowed himself to become one. How far down that road are you? Every one of us in this room has the Saul syndrome in us, lurking. We have a tendency to watch people who outshine us, and not only to be *jealous*, but to *act* upon those jealousies. Studying, I realized “I’m like Saul”—and that’s freaky.

There was a business woman who was junior level exec who had extraordinary success, and was selected for a vice-presidency position over others, some of whom had been 2 or 3 levels *over* her in the company. Her promotion created a number of hard feelings. People watched *her* take the corner office when they thought *they* deserved it. And the Saul syndrome began as passive aggression. When they *saw* her, they would welcome her and congratulate her. But the moment she would walk out the door, those same folks would say “I wonder what she had to do to get this job? I bet *I* know what she did to get it.” And they would tear her down. They would question her abilities and her methods, and whenever she did something wrong, they were watching, like vultures. And instead of going to her quietly and saying “You know, we might want to do something differently,” they ran it up the flag pole, so everyone would see her mistakes. They tried to destroy her. You know what’s interesting about those folks? About 90% of them go to church. Good Christian people who are involved, and hear good sermons, week after week. The Saul syndrome got the best of them. Boy, does this hit me. It doesn’t just happen in corporate America. It happens in school. Someone new moves into town, and suddenly all the girls are interested in that new guy. It’s threatening, so the other guys make comments and look for ways to make him look like a fool. *Some* of those kids go to youth groups and Bible studies. It happens in our families and our neighborhoods and in Little League baseball diamonds. “Yes, he’s a good coach, but you should see when he loses it...”

The Saul syndrome is the inability to rejoice when someone else succeeds and the ability to tear them down: either to their face, or behind their backs. And the tragedy is, in the end, it destroys us. Like a worm eating away at our soul. It tears *us* down. It hurts *us*. Like Saul, we build the wall between God and ourselves higher and higher. Listen: these are natural tendencies. The question isn’t will you wrestle with these feelings or not, it’s what will you *do about* them? Will you act upon them or will you submit them to Christ? And pray “God, please help me rejoice in the victory of others. Help me to say encouraging words and not destructive words.” Jesus says it’s important that we love our neighbors as ourselves, and sometimes our neighbor is the person we *resent*. It’s the Golden Rule. So ask, “If *I* were the person who just got the promotion, or the win, what would I want those people to say around the coffee pot?” It might help us in moderating what we say. Someday, it may be you. Paul says in Ephesians 4:29-32. “*Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouth. Only that which is useful for building others up. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate toward one another, forgiving each*

other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.” The Saul syndrome is deadly.

Now the positive point is when we look at David, the warrior-rebel and how he *responded* to Saul’s attacks. The first time it happened, David shook it off. He didn’t take it seriously. The *second* time Saul tried to pin David to the wall, David had to listen. His response to Saul’s attacks: **He got out of the way.** He didn’t take a javelin and try to jab it *back* at the king. He *didn’t* go to all the servants in the palace and tell what a rotten jerk the king was. He got out of the way!

When you’re in the role of David and someone hurts you, or says something about you, shake it off the first time. But when they persistently hurt you, you say “Maybe I shouldn’t trust this person with my life anymore.” Step out of the way as much as you can, and say “I choose not to be wounded by you anymore. I’m going to love you, I’m going to care for you, but I’m not going to allow you to spear me to the wall.” When a friend betrays a trust over and over, you say “I’ll always love you, but I can’t put myself in a position to be wounded by you anymore.”

And then, when David could have defeated Saul, he showed great **mercy** toward the king. Here’s what happens. David was in En Gedi, an oasis in the midst of the wilderness. David and his warriors are hiding in the deep recesses of the caves. Saul and his mighty army heard that the men are hiding in the caves, so they go to search for them. Lots of men, lots of noise, lots of chaos. Meanwhile, Saul has to take a...bathroom break! His generals stand outside the cave, and he walks in, opens up his robe, and squats down to relieve himself. David and his men are watching this! The king can’t see them, but they watch him come in the mouth of the cave. They start talking to each other. With all the noise outside, the king can’t hear them. Besides, Saul’s probably humming to himself... ☺. David’s men probably offered David a dagger. (whispering) “Kill him right now!” In the laws of the time this would have been okay. All of David’s soldiers would have been put to death if they had been discovered. “Kill him! Kill him David!” And David said “*I will not destroy the Lord’s anointed.* But this is what I’ll do.” And quietly David creeps up while Saul is and cuts off a corner of Saul’s tapestry robe. What a scene! One lunge of the dagger, and Saul would have been dead, and no one would have known, and it would have served Saul right according to everyone else; but not to David.

Saul finishes his business, and heads back down to the valley to his generals, and they’re finishing the search, when David in his courage comes to the mouth of the cave, knowing he would be destroyed if Saul wills it. He calls down to the king “King Saul, my father!” And when the king turns around, he sees David, bowing low, clutching a piece of fabric. He says to Saul “Why do you listen when people say ‘David is bent on harming you’? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said “I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord’s anointed.’ See, my father, look at your robe, and look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but didn’t kill you. Now you know they are liars.” Can’t you see Saul looking down, and his face turning white as a sheet? “I could have killed you, king. But I didn’t take your life. You are my king.” Wow. David isn’t perfect. (We’ll get to Bathsheba!) But in him we also see his passionate heart for God.

Here is a biblical principle you can’t miss: God who is rich in mercy, calls *us* to be rich in mercy: toward our enemies; those who wrong us; those who hurt us. *All* of you have been David. Every one of us has had somebody who has said things about us that wasn’t true. They’ve questioned your motives, hurt your feelings, done things to you that undermined your credibility, destroyed your career. God understands your feelings of hurt and pain and desire for revenge. But here’s what God says: show mercy rather than judgment. Find ways to demonstrate the better person that you are and the Christ in you. Don’t do to them as they’ve done to you. David showed us this. He showed mercy to his enemy. Scripture teaches us a lot about this. Jesus said “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*” Matthew 5:7. And James writes “*Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful, for mercy triumphs over judgment.*” James 2:13. **David turned over judgment to God.** If *you* can do that, it’s great, because then you’re done! Turn it over, then you just get back to pleasing God.

David knew that in the end, God would take care of Saul. And **David chose to please God rather than seek vengeance.** (You’ll see what happens in the study guide). David knew that *his* highest and best will was to follow the will of God in his life. The ultimate expression of this biblical principle of mercy when Jesus

hangs on the cross. He looks down, and He says “*Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.*” Luke 23:34. David understood Saul, and he had pity on the man. And he trusted God to take care of him in the end, doomed or delivered.

Here it is: **Every one of us has the Saul syndrome inside of us.** We have the tendency to let insecurities bubble up, to watch other people succeed, and to tear them down and destroy them. We have the ability to find people who are doing well, and we hurt them. We have the tendency to talk about people behind their back, and spread gossip. That is a part of what’s inside the dark side of our human nature. God calls us to stop: because it destroys not the other person; it destroys us in the end. **Second, every one of us will be a David sometime.** And we will be faced with a choice: to get even, or to show mercy. We can have revenge, or pity, trusting that God will take care of business in the end. And God always does.

Prayer: Lord, in 1 Cor. 10 Your Word says “*these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.*” Help us realize our need for You, Lord. Thank you for your mercy and grace fulfilled in Jesus for all the ages. And may we live with that kind of passion this week, whatever may come, with hearts like Yours, offering hope, healing, mercy, and love.

(I am indebted to Adam Hamilton for his sermon “Stabbed in the Back” preached at The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection).

STUDY GUIDE

Monday—David Recaptures Ziklag from the Amalekites. 1 Samuel 30. Before reading this, remember David and his warriors were given the Philistine city of Ziklag by the Philistine king. They made their homes here while they were refugees from Saul. Now, the Amalekites capture it from the Philistines. Read 1 Samuel 30:1-6. Describe David’s feelings. His village and home are destroyed, his family has been captured, and his men started blaming him for this and want to kill him too! Notice the last line of verse 6. Read Psalm 13, likely written at a time such as this by David. Notice how the Psalm ends. Now, read the rest of the story. Read 1 Samuel 30:7-31. Remember that many of David’s followers were bad. But David continually makes clear to them that the Lord is God. Notice David’s wisdom and tact: As a refugee in Philistia, yet he sends some of the plunder from the Amalekites to the leaders of Judah (southern Israel), thus building good will and a coalition of support which will help him when he becomes King over Israel. How can you make clear in 2008 that the Lord is God, and the Lord is *your* God?

Tuesday—Saul & Jonathon Die. 1 Samuel 31. This is both the last chapter in 1 Samuel and the last chapter in Saul’s pursuit of David’s life. This paves the way for David to become King. The Philistines were fighting the Israelites while David, living as a refugee with the Philistines, was fighting the Amalekites. This is a tragic story. Read 1 Samuel 31. Saul knew that he would be tortured if found alive. He also grieved the death of his sons and warriors. His foolishness and poor leadership caused Israel to be defeated by their enemies; and he takes his own life. The ruins of Beth Shean, the city where Saul’s body was fastened to the wall, can be seen today. Notice the Israelites retrieved their bodies and burned them—an example of cremation in the Bible. Note in 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul makes clear that we receive a new body in heaven. Can you play out your own sin-struggle and see death as its ultimate end?

Wednesday—David Learns of Saul and Jonathon’s death. 2 Samuel 1. Read 2 Samuel 1. It’s hard to understand why David had the Amalekite put to death, even though he was being merciful to Saul. David believed no one should kill the King. Perhaps David believed God would have delivered Saul. Notice the lament-song David composes to honor Saul and Jonathon. Despite Saul’s attempts to kill David, David honored him in death. Whom do you need to honor, either in life or death?

Thursday—David Anointed King Over Judah. 2 Samuel 2. Notice by now that several times “David inquired of the Lord.” Have you searched God for issues in your life? When Saul died, there was confusion over who would be king. Some of Saul’s sons were still alive. David is anointed King over Judah (one of the 12 “states” of Israel). Meanwhile, Saul’s general, Abner, has one of Saul’s sons anointing as king. So Israel is divided: sons of Saul reigning over the northern regions and David over the south. This goes on for 7 years. Read 2 Samuel 2. Note how Abner’s speech shows reason prevailing for a time, halting the battle. Do you have any enemies you are battling? Is there a way to show mercy or reason with them?

Friday—Abner Trades Sides, Follows David. 2 Samuel 3. Read . Talk about an election year! Revenge, murder, switching alliances... There were 2 great generals leading each campaign: Abner led Saul’s son Ish Bosheth’s campaign, and Joab led David’s. Abner secretly hoped to take the throne from Saul’s son. Abner took one of Saul’s wives. When Ish Bosheth confronted Abner, Abner decides to give his support to David, which helps give David more

of the nation. Would you trust Abner if you were David? David accepts him, but likely doesn't trust him. Their negotiations are nearly ruined when Joab in his anger and desire to avenge his brother kills Abner. David's grief shows the Israelites he was not to blame for the death. How has *your* life become convoluted because you aren't pursuing God's best?