

The Heart of God the King

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[0 : 0 0] fallen. The weapons of war have perished. Amen. So today we are thinking about leadership matters, and we're doing that because I think we all understand that leadership matters. You think about what's going on globally. This seems to be a season of leadership campaigns, leadership changes. So in the UK, we've just gone through a general election. We have new government.

We are hearing about the presidential campaign in America. If you've been watching the news over the last couple of weeks, you'll have seen and read of violent protests against particular forms of government in places like Bangladesh, claims of voting corruption after an election in Venezuela, and it points us to certain truths that we all recognize. And it's true in government. It's true in a workplace. It's true in a family. It's true in a church that our leaders matter. Who is in charge is important. How they come to power matters, and their character matters. We come to 2 Samuel chapter 1, and we are in the national life of Israel, where they are on the brink of leadership change.

Their first king lies dead. The nation is mourning. And in this moment, David, who we've just been reading about, he is now on the brink of power, because after all, he is the Lord's anointed.

Now, what I want us to do for the next few minutes is to put ourselves within this story. Okay, so we find ourselves today in the city of Edinburgh. I want us to imagine ourselves in the city of Ziklag. Now, where do we find ourselves in this story? Not as King David waiting to be crowned in due course, but imagine we are one of the men, the women, the boys and girls living in this city.

We are watching. We are learning. We are listening to David. We've said this before. The message of the book before these books, the message of judges, is that God's people needs a king. One of the big messages coming to us in 1 Samuel is that David is God's anointed king, the king after God's own heart. So, today, as we gather in Ziklag, we are going to learn some truths about the heart of God's king.

[2 : 5 2] And as we do, and as we then think about our own lives where we maybe find ourselves in positions of leadership or where we live with the authority of different leaders, we want us to move beyond human leadership to think about God's leader, God's king, to think about King Jesus, to think about what we discover about his heart that stands as good news for us, perhaps as we wrestle with some of the struggles that we have with leadership. So, let's get into our story, a story that reveals the heart of God's king. And we're going to begin with the reports.

In the first 12 verses, we get a whole range of different reports, beginning there in verse 1 and 2, which set the scene for us. So, Ziklag, it was a city recovering from rioting.

Think about our own nation. There has been violent raids. Buildings have been burned down. Men and women and children have been taken hostage. David has gone and recovered them and brought them back. And now we're in the midst of a cleanup operation. No doubt as well, a time of enjoying happy reunions. But in the midst of that, after two days of recovery, from over the hill comes a man clearly bearing bad news. His clothes are torn. There's dust on his head. And so David asks him to give a report. Where have you come from? And what we get is a battle report. And it's bad news.

Israel's. Israel's army has been defeated and they're on the run. Israel's king lies dead. His son lies dead. A moment of national tragedy. God had said the people need a king. Here is Saul, the first king. He's united the whole nation. Now he's dead. Struck down in violent defeat.

This is huge news. And so David, as if he was a BBC journalist, he wants to fact check. He wants to verify. These claims are so huge. The impact is so massive. As you look at verses 5 to 10, we get a more detailed report from this man who is an Amalekite. He's come from Saul's camp.

[5 : 28] And he paints the picture for us. In verse 6, we get the scene being captured. It all happens on Mount Gilboa. The young man said, there was Saul leaning on his spear with the chariots and their drivers in hot pursuit. We get a sense of the battle. And here's where it has the ring of truth for David. He knows how connected Saul is to his spear. Because remember, two times Saul has tried to pin David to the wall with that spear. And then the Amalekite moves on to give report of a conversation between King Saul as he lies dying and this Amalekite. And the conversation in effect has Saul saying, put me out of my misery. I am dying. Strike me down.

And then in verse 10, we're told of the man's actions. I stood beside him and killed him because I knew that after he'd fallen, he could not survive. A mercy killing. And then the symbols of royal rule, the crown and the arm bracelet, they're taken to David. This is a scene that's full of irony.

There's lots of striking down and there's the Amalekite always there. So, David, beginning of the story, has been having success striking down the Amalekites. And we are supposed to know that's good news because the Amalekites are God's enemies and he has said, strike them down.

Saul, in chapter 15, is a king who is rejected by God because he failed to strike down the Amalekite king. But what happens to Saul as judgment comes, he himself is struck down by an Amalekite. So, there are many ironies, but there is clearly a scene that is full of tragedy in a defeated army and the death of the king. So, in verses 11 and 12, we get the final report of the response of David and his men. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son and for the army of the Lord because they'd fallen by the sword. Then we move on from the reports to an act of judgment. Verse 13, after the time of mourning and grieving, the young man is brought back in. But before we think about that, here's a good question for us to ask. What did the Amalekite expect to happen next in Ziklag?

Because this man, he could have stayed quiet. He could have stayed in the shadows. He could have remained anonymous. But instead, he chooses publicly to come to David to say, I killed the king.

[8 : 42] And it's really interesting because this report of the death of Saul, if you compare it with what happens in 1 Samuel chapter 31, there's differences. And so, we need to ask, why are there differences?

So, in chapter 31, the message is that Saul killed himself. Okay, so how do we square that with what's happening here? Either Saul tries to kill himself and this Amalekite man helps him along, or Saul does kill himself and this man is flat out lying. And so, we need to ask the question, why? Why does he then bring the report? Why does he come with a crown to David? What's he expecting? He's expecting reward.

This is how kingship typically operated. You know, you fought for your own power. You fought to gain glory. And in that context, if someone else works on your behalf, backstabbing, showing treachery, well, that was fine. That was just part of the way the system worked. This Amalekite thinks he is doing David a favor, and he expects he's going to gain status and security and reward. And that's what he would have got if David was just like every other king. A little bit like David's men. Remember, David's men said to him, in effect, when they were in the cave and Saul was in the cave and Saul was vulnerable, kill the king and grab the throne. They too misjudge David's heart. Back to the questioning. David asked the man, where are you from? Turns out he's Amalekite. Remember, the Amalekites are the sworn enemies of God's people. And so, David announces judgment on the basis of his own words.

Let's your blood be on your own head, your own mouth testified against you when you said, I killed the Lord's anointed. And he asked him, why weren't you afraid to do that? Because David understands if you kill the Lord's anointed king, you are acting in deliberate rejection and rebellion of the Lord's anointed leader. So, judgment falls. And next, we come to a song. David pens a personal and then a national lament for the king. Again, we're in the city of Ziklag. What reaction would we expect as David hears that King Saul has been killed? Remember that King Saul twice has tried to kill him?

Remember that David and his men have been forced to flee and take to the mountains and to the caves, driven away. Saul has made himself an enemy of David. So, what do we expect?

[11 : 50] Maybe a sigh of relief. We don't have to run anymore. Perhaps we might expect to see in David a sense of personal victory and vindication. Maybe we might expect a party, a celebration to break out.

I was thinking of this text as I was remembering, watching the Olympic high diving competition. And the commentator, I think, probably spoke for many, at least if you are British and you are watching. He said, to be very honest, he said, I know I shouldn't say this. This was as everybody was coming to their final dives, but I hope our competition falls flat on their faces.

That might well have been what we would have expected to see in Ziklag. A sense of joy, an enemy, an enemy, the competition has fallen in the dust. Think about the Wizard of Oz, ding-dong, the witch is dead. When an enemy dies, a sworn enemy, you might expect a moment of celebration, but instead we have heartfelt lament for King Saul and his dear friend Jonathan. We don't have time to look at the lament, but just to pick up some of the themes, see how it begins and ends in verse 19, the theme, how the mighty have fallen. Think about how David looks to show honor to Saul. Verse 23 is a good verse. Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted.

They were swifter than eagles. They were stronger than lions. Appreciating those aspects of Saul's character that were good. How the mighty have fallen. David is not gloating here. David is grieving.

We are witnessing something very striking in Ziklag on this day. In a culture full of revenge stories, where you might hire an assassin to kill off a rival, where you might, if you were the new king, you might murder the whole family line of the former king to make sure you held on to power, where the use of force and violence to take what you thought was rightful, yours was fair game. David stands apart. We had a glimpse into David's heart. He puts the nation first. This is a moment of grief and uncertainty. He is able to recognize and to honor what is good and noble in Saul, and he refuses to play the political game.

[14 : 45] In our own day, when it might not be uncommon in the political sphere to hire people to try and dig up dirt to find the skeletons in the closet to deliberately attack and destroy an opponent's character. In a workplace setting where it might not be unusual to see people fighting and backstabbing and stepping on others to get ahead, chasing power and influence as an end in itself, don't we find ourselves sometimes longing for different kinds of leaders? Leaders with integrity and dignity, with character that puts others first. As we have that longing and as we meet with disappointment, it reminds us, ought to remind us to look beyond, to look beyond human authority to Jesus Christ, God's true King. And that's what I want us to spend the rest of our time doing, having thought about the story, to draw some lessons together that we might see the heart of God's King, that as we see the heart of David, it might show us the heart of King Jesus. Four lessons for us. The first is this, we see in David a King who refuses the way of disloyalty and violence.

He judges the Amalekite, he doesn't reward the Amalekite. And that's the consistent pattern of the life of David. He would reject those clear chances to kill Saul. He would ignore the suggestions that he takes matters into his own hands. His rule will not be connected with corruption. And that matters as he stands as a signpost to Jesus, his greater Son. We admire this kind of integrity, don't we? I think as Christians, it reminds us to pray for those in authority, to guard our own hearts as we find ourselves in positions of authority also. But most of all, it prepares us for the beauty of Jesus' integrity. Because remember, shortly after Jesus was baptized and he begins his public ministry, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness to be tempted. And one of the things that the devil tempted Jesus towards was towards the ultimate disloyalty. The devil said to Jesus, worship me and I can give you all the kingdoms. You can have it all. How did Jesus respond? Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. Towards the end of his public ministry, when the enemies of Jesus came to arrest him, there would be no resorting to violence. Put your swords back in their place. He said to his disciples, if I wanted to, I could call down ten legions of angels. But he would go like the lamb led silent to the slaughter. He knew as the king, he would receive a crown of glory, but he must first walk the path of suffering and death. And he would not swerve from that. Nothing and no one would shift him from that.

We have a king who refuses the way of disloyalty and violence. A second lesson we learn from David is that we have a king who takes no delight in the death of the wicked. Why did the Amalekite presume that David would reward him? Because he imagined that as Saul had made an enemy of David, that David would rejoice.

remember the number of times that David had shown faithfulness in his words and his actions to Saul.

Saul, I've got no intention of doing anything to harm you. I'm not going to grab the throne. But Saul had made it his life mission to destroy David, to keep the throne for his family.

[19 : 11] Now, whether we're thinking about rival football players and their fans, France, Argentina, Hearts, Hibs, school where you will, whether we think about opposing political parties, whether we're thinking about bullying behavior in a school or a workplace, our instinct, when there are those who oppose us, if we see them defeated, if we see their downfall, that can easily prompt us to joy.

So often it's revenge and not mercy that pours out when we hear of the downfall of those who oppose us.

Wonderfully, David is not like that. David is the man after God's own heart, and David gives us a glimpse into the heart of our God and to his son, the Lord Jesus. We heard earlier Ezekiel 33, which is a short reading there where God calls his prophet Ezekiel to stand as a watchman.

A watchman would stand at the top of the city walls and watch out for any enemies that were coming over the hill, to warn the people to come back into the safety of the city and to get ready.

Ezekiel was called by God to be a watchman, to warn the people of God's coming judgment. They turned their back on him again. But why was he told to be a watchman? What was God's design?

[20 : 56] Turn, turn, live. Why would you die? Do you remember the reading? God's pleasure is not in the death of the wicked. His pleasure is that people would turn to him and live.

And so God, through Ezekiel, was holding out salvation to the people. Turn away from your sin. Turn to me. Choose life. And then we heard a very short New Testament reading. Jesus' words approaching the city of Jerusalem, a city that would a few days later cry, crucify him. We have no king but Caesar.

Does Jesus say with tears in his eyes, I longed to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks under his wings. I longed that you would find protection, that you would turn and be saved and live.

But he says you were not willing with the result that judgment would come for those who wouldn't choose to turn to a life-giving Savior.

And then we hear Jesus on the cross, hanging there between two criminals, one who continues to pour abuse on him, but another at some point who turns and sees Jesus.

[22 : 33] We get what we deserve, but this man, he's done nothing wrong, recognizing Jesus an innocent one, and recognizing Jesus as a king with a kingdom.

And as he turns and he says, remember me, when you come into your kingdom, what does Jesus say of this wicked man who'd lived killing people and robbing people?

You're getting what you deserve. No, he shows mercy, he shows grace today. You'll be with me in paradise. Because he turned and he looked to his Savior and he lived.

And the wonderful thing about our risen and glorious King Jesus, who came as a Savior, that his heart in heaven is unchanged. And still he says to you, to me, to our world, turn.

Why would you die? Why would you die in your sin? Why not live? Have eternal life knowing me. Here's a third lesson that we learn from our king here in Ziklag.

[23 : 44] We have a king who laments the death of his friend. To read the lament is to understand that David felt a sense of grief about the death of Saul, what it meant for the nation.

But we also see, don't we, the deep pain he has at the loss of his dear friend, Jonathan. Verse 26, I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother.

You are very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women. Jonathan and David had entered into a covenant together.

They were bound to one another. And David knew that Jonathan was somebody who always pursued his good. He was the friend he could turn to.

His companion, his advisor. Even when Jonathan's father Saul was threatening David's life, even at great risk to Jonathan's own life, he would protect and defend and care for David.

[24 : 53] When David was feeling low, Jonathan came and strengthened his arm in the Lord, encouraging him to trust God's word of promise. And so David had come to taste and experience the good gift of friendship.

That good gift, which as J.C. Ryle so helpfully puts it, is that gift which halves our sorrows and doubles our joy. And David has lost it.

And so he laments that loss. And we get this impression of a king who feels and who feels deeply. He doesn't live at a distance remote from others because he occupies a place of prominence.

He grieves. What about Jesus? The king of life. See him in John chapter 11.

Come to the grave of his friend Lazarus. Jesus knowing from the beginning that everything that was about to take place would demonstrate God's glory.

[26 : 10] Even knowing that he was the resurrection and the life and he was about to raise his friend Lazarus as he came to the grave. As he saw the effects of sin that leads to death.

As he saw the misery that death brings of separation and sorrow. We read that Jesus wept. But wonderfully, on that day, Jesus would display his glory.

The king of life. The king of love. Because after the weeping, comes the speaking. Lazarus, come out. And in that moment, as Lazarus comes, still wrapped in the grave clothes, here is a love that is stronger than death.

Here is a king who loves so much that he laments. Here is a king with such loving power that he defeats death. Anticipating what would happen there on the cross.

Jesus would go to war against the forces of spiritual darkness and he would conquer. By his perfect obedience.

[27 : 28] His life laid down as a sacrifice for sin. He too would be placed in a tomb. On Easter Sunday, he comes out in victory.

And trusting this king, we have a hope beyond death. We have comfort in the face of grief.

Grief that death brings. We have the promise of eternal life. So we turn to the New Testament. We're told that as believers in the Lord Jesus, yes, we grieve.

But we grieve with hope. We understand and we feel the reality that death hurts. But as we grieve the loss of those who love the Lord Jesus, we know that all our partings become eternal reunions.

Because of our king. Because of the heart of the king. He loves. He saves. He gives eternal life to those with faith.

[28 : 41] There's one last lesson. And it's this. That the king teaches us. It is a crime. It is a terrible thing.

To kill the Lord's anointed. The Amalekite came with this public confession. This proud statement. I killed the king for you, David.

Here's the crown. That boast brings his sentence of death. To kill the Lord's anointed king is to reject God.

To reject his will. If it's a serious crime to kill the Lord's anointed when he's the unrighteous Saul. How much more serious.

To kill Jesus, God's son, the righteous one. The eternal king. When we come to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, we encounter the worst conspiracy of evil in the history of this world.

[29 : 45] People conspiring in this great act of treason against a creator king. To say no to the Savior. A great sin of unbelief.

A deliberate rejection of God's salvation. God's savior king as he came. The apostles, the followers of Jesus, they understood this.

So when the Spirit comes upon them after the resurrection of Jesus, his return to glory as he sends the Spirit, they begin to preach. They will speak to the crowds that were there at the arrest, the betrayal, the death of Jesus.

They will say, you killed God's anointed one. You delivered a guilty verdict on the sinless Son of God. You turned away from God's Savior.

You turned away from God's son of God. You turned away from God's son of God. Helping them, helping us to understand that any rejection of Jesus as Lord and King, any refusal to give him the loyalty and love that he deserves is the sin of rebellion against the King.

[30 : 59] That's a serious thing. Not one of us, no one in this world, can say, I am innocent. I am innocent of that. And as we recognize that, that every sin that we commit is an act of treason and rebellion against God, we need the good news of the gospel.

We need to hear the preaching of the apostles. They could say that you killed Jesus. That was your verdict. He's worth nothing. But God raised him from the dead. You rejected him, wanted nothing to do with him, but by grace.

God has sent you a Redeemer, and there's salvation in him. If you turn and if you trust, you and I are guilty. But in Jesus, there is grace and forgiveness.

That Jesus went under the sword of God's judgment so that you and I don't have to. And the King's merciful voice still calls out, turn to me and be saved.

Turn to me and live. The scene that we have in Ziklag on that day is a vivid reminder that leadership matters.

[32 : 21] Character matters. Integrity matters. But it matters more than just who sits on the throne of government, or who's the ultimate boss in my company, or who's the head of a family.

We need to recognize the God who sits on the throne of the universe. To recognize today, King Jesus sits at the Father's right hand of glory.

And we need to be really clear about who sits on the throne in our hearts and in our lives. Whose rule, whose values govern our life?

Who sets the course and direction that we will take? King David helps us to see the heart of God's King.

To see the heart of King Jesus, the King we all need, that He is merciful, that He is loving, that He is gracious. He is the Lord's anointed, who was struck down and killed, but who lived again, so that His people might turn and be saved and live.

[33 : 34] Let's pray together. Amen. Amen.