

David the Innocent: David's Rise and Saul's Demise (Summer Bible Exposition 5)

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[0 : 00] Friends, it's good to be with you again. I wonder if we might pray and ask God to help us with this passage. Let's pray together. Lord God, we do thank you for your word. And we pray tonight that as we look at it together, that you would be at work among us.

That you would, one, give us insight and understanding. And two, give us hearts that are oriented towards responding to what we hear rightly.

And three, be at work in us by your spirit that our wills might be transformed to obey. Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, friends, I want to tell you about a story that I once heard. The story is of a person who was engaged in public Christian ministry. He was also a guy who liked a particular form. In fact, he loved this particular form of competitive sport.

However, he had given up this sport. And once a friend quizzed him as to why that might be. And eventually he told him why. His reason was that God's priorities in the world were seen in his activity in Christ.

[1 : 12] And God's priority was to bring people to know Jesus. It was to sum up all things together under Christ. God had redeemed him in Christ.

And he was of the view that his life was now to reflect God's priorities. He was to be concerned with what God was concerned with. Every part of his existence was to be shaped by God's concerns. And playing this sport could not be tied into God's concerns. And so, unless he could tie it in with God's concerns, this person would not play his favorite sport.

The only way in which he thought it could be justified is if he could link playing this sport with God's concerns. For example, if he was evangelizing a friend who liked playing this sport, then he could play it as well.

But otherwise, he could not. In this case, you see, if he did play it and they were interested in it, it could be linked to ministry. It could therefore be part of God's redeeming purposes for his world.

[2 : 20] Now, friends, I want to ask you tonight, what do you think about this man's argument?

What do you think about this man's argument? Is he right? Do you think he had a right approach to what the Bible says?

Do you think the theology of the Bible would endorse what he's doing and how he thinks? Can you think of Bible verses that might support what he's saying?

Now, what I want you to do now is to hold your conclusions, hoping you've made some, in your brain for the rest of this talk. Because we're going to come back to it right at the end.

So hold them in your brain and think about them, you know, and just put them there for a moment.

At the end of the talk, we're going to return to that question. And I'm going to tell you what I think the Bible says about it.

As from this passage, as it were. And I'm going to do so on the basis of observing what we see in the passage. So store it away there and come with me now in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 1.

[3 : 20] But before we do that, or as we do that, I need to tell you that we are just going to look at 2 Samuel 1 tonight. And I'm going to do it because it touches on some key themes of 1 Samuel verse chapter 16 all the way through to 2 Samuel chapter 4 or chapter 5.

So in order to get that perspective, I need to tell you what's going to happen in those chapters.

Okay, so we're going to take a lightning tour. So come with me in your Bibles and if you want to flip in your Bibles, you could.

But otherwise, I'm just going to tell you the story. What I want to do first is remind you that the breakup of the books of Samuel as we have it is not how they were originally. You see, the books of Samuel were originally one volume.

Perhaps they were one scroll or something like that. There were no verses, no chapters, no divisions between 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel chapter 1. Now, when the book was broken into two, they had to decide where are we going to put the division in?

And it seems to me that they made a sensible decision. They put it in at the death of Saul. So the death of Saul in chapter 31 represents an end of an era, doesn't it? However, the great danger with when you break the book at 1 Samuel chapter 31 is you don't get David's reaction to it, to the death of Saul.

[4 : 40] And that's what happens in 2 Samuel chapter 1. Nor do we take into account that God's rejection of Saul really has a fair way to go yet. It doesn't really finish until all of Saul's descendants no longer have a claim to the throne.

Therefore, it doesn't really finish until 2 Samuel chapter 4 or 2 Samuel chapter 5. So that's the first thing to say. Second thing to say, I want to remind you of the context. In 1 Samuel chapter 1, we were told of the birth of Samuel to Hannah.

Hannah introduced us to some of the key theological ideas that flow all the way through the books of Samuel. We then met, you might remember, the corrupt leadership priesthood of Eli and his family.

And then in chapters 3 to 7, we saw the Ark of the Covenant fallen into Philistine hands. But God fought for Israel and conquered the Philistines anyway. He humiliated the Philistines.

He gave his people victory. Those incidents showed us, so chapter 3 through to 1 Samuel chapter 3 through to chapter 7 showed us, Israel, you don't need a king.

[5 : 47] You don't need a king because God can fight your battles for you. However, chapter 8, what do they do? They turn around and ask God for a king, though they don't need one. And God allows their request, you might remember.

And then he warns them. We looked at that last week. He warns them that kingship will not be the blessing that they wanted it to be. And in 1 Samuel 9 to 15, we meet Saul.

Now Saul made a good start. And God's spirit came on him. And he conquered the enemies of the people of God. But he didn't obey God's prophet. And he didn't submit his rule to God's rule and God's word.

And so in chapter 13 and 15, God said, look, you're going to lose kingship. And I found a better person than you. And we, of course, know that that is David.

And in chapter 16, we meet that replacement David. And in the second half of chapter 16 and chapter 17, we're told that he's a God-fearing warrior as well as being a young lad.

[6 : 44] Now, in chapter 17, David fights Saul's battles for him in the incident with Goliath. He wins the heart of God's people.

And he wins the heart of Saul's family. You know what happens? It's an incredible thing here in the books of Samuel. Because Saul's son, Jonathan, looks upon David and takes to him.

They become firm friends and allies, the best of mates. And then not only that, but Saul's daughter, Michal, looks upon David and falls in love with him.

And they marry. And God endorses David with his spirit, but then withdraws the spirit from Saul. So it's an incredible thing, isn't it?

Saul, in the period of a few chapters, has seen God appoint David, has seen the spirit come upon David and withdraw from him, has seen his son, Jonathan, next in line for the throne, effectively become best friends with David, and seen his daughter, Michal, married to this man.

[7 : 59] Everything is leaving him. Everyone is leaving him. And Saul, as the chapters progress, becomes increasingly isolated and depressed. And he starts to reach out.

And he tries to kill David two times at least. David does not retaliate. Rather, he withdraws from Saul's company, flees into the wilderness. And he shows himself, though, to be a greater leader and a greater king than Saul.

And the stories from chapter 18 through to chapter 30 of 1 Samuel are wonderful stories, full of amazing people and incredible encounters. If you've never read them, we don't have time to look at them tonight.

Please do read them. They are wonderful stories, clearly designed to tell you that David is king to all but Saul. And even Saul knows he will eventually become king.

Finally, in chapter 30, Saul loses a significant war against the Philistines. Jonathan fights with his father and dies. Saul is wounded. Even in death, though, he appears to be concerned for his image. [9 : 05] But eventually, he's forced to suicide to avoid being brutalized and dishonored by the Philistines. And after his death, there's civil war between David and the remnants of his family and their supporters, finally resolved into Samuel chapter 5.

There's an overview of these chapters. There's our second point. Third point, before we look at this chapter tonight, is what happens in these chapters. Third point brings me to tonight's passage. Third point is to ask, why on earth are these chapters here? Why does it take 15 chapters for Saul to die? And another five chapters for David to become king over all Israel?

What is going on? And why does the author tell you the story? Why doesn't he just say, David conquered Goliath, the spirit left Saul, and eventually, you know, after a few incidents, David became king over all Israel?

Why? Why doesn't he do that? Well, I think the purpose is evident. It is to reveal Saul not being of worth to have the throne.

[10 : 13] But there's more. The purpose is clearly to contrast David and Saul. It is to show that David is indeed what God said he was, a better candidate than Saul.

It's also showing that David is innocent of grabbing the kingdom. He did not steal the kingdom of Saul. It was given to him by God, and David waited until God handed it over to him.

He did not take his hand, stretch out his hand like Adam in the garden and seek after rule. No, he let God give it to him.

And finally, these passages are to lay the groundwork for the network of relationships that David will use in his kingship. So, we finally got to 2 Samuel 1.

I needed to do that to fill you in on where we were. Please open your Bibles. 2 Samuel 1 is divided into two sections. You might have noticed that as we read through it. First section, 1 to 16, contains a war report.

[11 : 17] Second section, verses 17 to 27, contains a lament by David. The lament by David is one of the great poems of the Old Testament. Let's just take a quick look at the sections.

Verse 1 opens with a reference to the death of Saul. And we want to know, how is David going to handle this? Both David and Saul have been off doing what Israel wanted kings for.

They've been waging war, one against the Amalekites, and the other had been defending Israel from the Philistines. David is fully aware of the scale of the Philistine operation. After all, he'd been invited by the Philistines to participate in it himself.

But he doesn't know what we know. You see, we have read chapter 30, haven't we? Sorry, you haven't, but imagine you have. We have read chapter 30. David does not know that Israel has been defeated.

He does not know that Saul is dead. And he does not know that Jonathan is dead. And he does not know how they died. In verse 2, the story opens up for us.

[12 : 21] On the third day, after arriving home in Ziklag, a messenger arrives. His clothes are torn. He has dirt on his head. He bears all the signs of a long and arduous journey and of mourning.

And he prostrates himself before David. And David questions him about the war with the Philistines. And the news comes thick and fast. And within it is a report about Saul and Jonathan.

Saul and Jonathan, we are told, are dead. David's not satisfied. So he presses the man for evidence as to the death of Saul and Jonathan. And the messenger relates the story as it is in verses 6 to 10.

And there I was. I happened to be on Mount Gilboa. And there was Saul, leaning on his spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him.

When he looked behind him, he saw me and he called to me. And I answered, here I am. And he said to me, who are you? I answered, I'm an Amalekite. And he said, come, stand over me and kill me, for convulsions have seized me.

[13 : 23] And yet my life still lingers. So I stood over him and killed him, for I knew he could not live after he'd fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm.

And I brought them here to my Lord. Now, we have already heard the story of Saul's suicide from the narrator in the previous chapter.

We know what really happened. And we know that this man is an opportunist, don't we? We know that he's telling lies.

We know he's embellishing the story because he wants some sort of reward. And we suspect he's been looting after the battle. That's how he's got the crown and the armlet.

Or perhaps he simply observed Saul's death from a distance. And we know he's taken advantage of the situation for his own gain. He has travelled 80 kilometres in good time in search of benefit.

[14:26] We also know something the Amalekite doesn't know. This is a marvellous piece of storytelling. We know that David views Saul as God's anointed king.

We know that David, because we've been reading 1 Samuel 18 through to 30, we know that David has an exalted view of kingship.

And we have seen him scrupulously himself avoiding to harm God's king himself. And so we wonder, if you have this liar confronted by this king who respects kingship, what is going to happen here?

And the narrator just holds us back for a moment. And we're told of David's first reaction. It is one of personal and public grief. God's king has died.

Jonathan has died. The army of the Lord has been defeated. Many in the house of Israel have died.

And then in verse 13, the conversation resumes with the messenger. And David quizzes him and says, you know, who are you exactly?

[15:33] And we're told something that's very interesting. We're told he's an Amalekite. The son, and this is the important thing to notice, the son of a resident alien. Now, in other words, he is familiar with Israelite culture.

Therefore, he's familiar with Israelite views of kingship. And David makes this very point to him. He says in verse 14, look at it. He says, were you not afraid to lift your hand and destroy the Lord's anointed?

You see, when David had cut off the corner of the robe of Saul in a cave, you know what happened to him? He nearly had a heart attack. The text says his heart quivered.

He had heart palpitations because of what he was about to do. And he says, you mean to say you knew and you killed the Lord's anointed?

Weren't you afraid to do this? The sin is so evident. And the punishment is carried out quickly. This man came with dust on his head in mourning.

[16:37] He came with lies on his lips seeking reward. And he leaves with his own blood on his own head for what he did. Death is the reward for killing the Lord's anointed.

And then with verse 17, we move into David's lament. Or a dirge over Saul and Jonathan. As only Middle Easterners can do, I think. My own view is that this is a genuine poem of David.

And it's been taken from a collection of poems or songs. That's called the Book of Jashar. Which literally means the Book of the Upright. And it seems to say this might have been a book of heroic war songs.

You know, the sorts of things you collected from people who'd engaged in war and who were godly people. And you put it into this song book. And you often sang it. Perhaps it's a way of celebrating victory.

My own view is that although the song is genuinely about Saul and Jonathan, the focus is really on Jonathan. And I think that for a number of reasons. First, the poem is called Song of the Bow.

[17:36] And the bow was Jonathan's weapon of choice. He was a man of the bow. He loved the bow. Second, because of the way the song ends with Jonathan.

And third, because of the way that it begins. Now I want to show you something here that you couldn't know because you don't know the original languages. But most of our English translations translate it the way the NRSV does.

Can you see the word there? It says, there's a word translated glory. It's probably better translated gazelle. That's how it's translated a very chapter later. The same words translated as gazelle.

Do you remember what the major victory of Jonathan was? I've never seen this anywhere in a commentary. But I'm sure this is what's going on. Do you remember what the major victory of Jonathan was? Do you remember when he saw some Philistines up on a hill?

And do you remember that he and his servant clambered up? I wonder myself. And this is just a wondering, a speculating, whether he earned a nickname.

[18 : 38] That's the result. You know what the nickname was? Gazelle. For clambering on all fours. The text said he clambered on all fours. I wonder whether, you know, as army men do, he earned a nickname because of this exploit.

And was called the gazelle. And so we could translate it. This is how I think it should be translated. The gazelle of Israel lays slain on your high places. How the mighty have fallen.

And so we ask, who is this majestic buck, this gazelle who lays slain on home territory? Who is this? And verse 25 answers.

How the mighty have fallen in the midst of battle. Jonathan lays slain on your high places. I think this is a song primarily about Jonathan.

But it is also lament for Saul. And it's not just a gushy outpouring of emotion. No, it's a well thought out, well structured rehearsal of the things that matter and that should be remembered about this man and his son, Jonathan.

[19 : 39] And in verse 20, David wishes the impossible. He wishes there would be a media blackout in Israel. He doesn't want you see the news to travel back to the Philistine cities.

He knows they will ascribe victory to their gods and to their superior army. And he knows this is a terrible, terrible insult and a public shame on Israel. And in verse 21, he utters a curse on Gilboa. For this was the source of the scene of the shame and dishonor. In verse 22 and 23, he hones it in on Saul and Jonathan. And these, he says, they were warriors of renown.

Jonathan with his bow. Saul with his sword. But they were also people of character. Our version of the Bible calls them beloved and lovely.

The language of lovely often reflects appearance. But the original refers to character. It means gracious or charming or pleasant. And then David notes that they were not divided in life and death.

[20 : 38] Now friends, that's particularly poignant. After all, we know that Saul and Jonathan argued fiercely. We know Jonathan loved David.

And we also know that Jonathan made a choice. He chose to stay with his dad. He chose to die with his father.

He chose to do what a godly man would do. And we know Jonathan to be that. He chose to honor his father and die with him rather than with his friend.

And in the second half of verse 23, David returns to imagery from nature. He says, these two, these two men, they were grand. They were swifter than eagles.

They were stronger than lions. And in verse 25, he balances out the earlier reference to Philistine women rejoicing. And he urges the women of Israel to weep over Saul, who brought the benefits of kingship to the people.

[21 : 39] And then in verses 25 and 26, the focus shifts to Jonathan. And David at this point becomes deeply distressed. He and Jonathan were related because David had married his sister.

Therefore, it's appropriate in one sense to call Jonathan his brother. But he was bound to Jonathan in covenant. And therefore, it's appropriate to call him brother for another reason.

They had a contract with each other. A contract of everlasting faithfulness to each other. Therefore, they were brothers in another way. Saul might have brought riches to the daughters of Israel.

Therefore, they might rightly weep for him. But Jonathan brought more to David. He gave him a love that was wonderful. A love, he says, surpassing that of women.

Now, friends, there's the story of the chapter. Now, before I explain why I think it's here and how we might bring it in and appropriate it for ourselves, I wonder if I can make two observations. I want to reflect on the irony in the first 16 verses, on a very deep irony.

[22 : 47] I wonder if you've spotted it. Have you heard about the Amalekites before? Okay. The Amalekites have appeared a number of times before this in the books of Samuel. One of the most memorable you might remember.

1 Samuel chapter 15. Do you remember Saul is told to utterly destroy the Amalekites in holy war? He doesn't follow. Saul doesn't follow God's command.

And he allows the Amalekite king to live. As a result, God does what? He says, I'm taking the kingship from you because you did not obey me. And the Amalekites live on.

They grow in power. And David makes war on them in 1 Samuel 28 and 30. And he succeeds where Saul had failed. And now we meet an Amalekite again. And in 1 Samuel 15, Saul claimed to have destroyed the Amalekites but preserved the life of an Amalekite king.

And Samuel promptly kills the Amalekite king. And now here in 2 Samuel chapter 1, who is it that claims to have put to death the Israelite king? Can you hear the irony?

[23 : 54] Saul was meant to kill the king of the Amalekites. And instead an Amalekite has killed an Israelite king. You see, David kills this Amalekite opportunist.

David kills this Amalekite opportunist. And in recalling this into play, the author is doing two things. First, he's engaging in the irony I've told you about. Second, the author is subtly reminding us why Saul failed and why David will succeed.

For David did what Saul did not do. Now, here's something else to talk about, which I need to talk about. It has to do with the language that David uses in relation to Jonathan.

See, it won't surprise you that a number of commentators have taken the language as a hint of homosexual relationship between the two men.

And it's been going. People have thought about this for a long time. However, I don't think this is what's going on for a number of reasons. And I need to raise it because it sort of seems to creep out of the text, doesn't it?

[24 : 56] First, I think it misunderstands ancient culture. You see, in ancient culture, the relationship of a man and a woman wasn't primarily one of friendship.

Okay? Marriages were largely arranged marriages in the ancient world. They were often arranged for political or tribal or family reasons. They were also about producing children.

And that doesn't mean that ancient relationships were not close. Please, don't misunderstand me about that. Nor does it mean that they were not about companionship and friendship. Genesis 2 tells us that they were. So, it just means that they may have at times had a bit more of a functional aspect than a more romantic modern view.

Now, second, when you look at the passage, there's no hint, is there, that there's any sexuality on view. The love is not that of sexuality. You see, the language is that of covenant.

You can see that in the reference to Jonathan as a brother. Love was often used in covenant language. And it's used to convey the idea of faithfulness. The narrative of one Samuel has told us that Jonathan was willing to hand over the hereditary right of kingship to David.

[26 : 04] He was willing to give up his own rights for the sake of his friend. This is true friendship. And we Australians have such portraits of friendship etched into our history, don't we? We know what friendship between men can be like.

We know that men can be friends without sexual connotations. And we know that women can be friends like this without there being sexual connotations. My father-in-law, as long as he can, will journey every now and then to England to visit the folk, the men that he went to war with. They are friends for life. And there is a very deep-seated friendship between them. Now, we in Australia even have a term for it, don't we? A term of, you know, forged by the bonds between men during war.

It is the term mateship. And it's not saying that it's preferable to the love between a man and a woman. It's just saying it's of a different sort and it is very deep and very profound.

Now, having made those two observations, I want you to notice two more things about the passage and we're on the last stretch now. First thing I want you to notice, that it has an apologetic purpose.

[27 : 23] Let me explain what I mean. You see, I think that the primary purpose of this passage is to show us that David is innocent of self-promotion. The theme has been present in the text since the day David was anointed king.

You see, the writer has been at pains to point out that David is innocent in relation to the shifting of the crown. He did not manipulate anything to gain the crown.

He had absolutely nothing to do with the crown coming to him. And though he might possess the crown at this point, someone else brought it. In our text, it's highlighted by a number of things.

First, the crown comes from the hands of an Amalekite. It wasn't taken off the head of Saul by David. In fact, he avenged Saul for having it removed.

Second, the text says David's attitude or it shows us David's attitude with the Amalekite. It compares and contrasts him. He's not like the Amalekite. David doesn't take advantage of the situation.

[28 : 25] David is God. David knows Saul is God's anointed. Now, please understand what I'm saying. The text of 1 and 2 Samuel was said earlier on in the service. It doesn't present David as a spotless man.

David is a godly man. He is not a perfect man. Nor is he a man without hints of opportunism. However, David is primarily concerned with godliness. He does care about God and he does care about God's glory and he does want to be God's person. And in this sense, David is a model for you and me. He's a model of a godly person for whom God matters.

Second thing I want you to notice arises out of the lament. Do you know what strikes me about the lament? The first thing that strikes me is there is no mention of God.

He is totally absent from this poem. The second thing that strikes me is the deepness of human grief in it. The third thing that strikes me is the depth of rejoicing about human love.

[29 : 33] Three things. The absence of God, of mention of God, the deepness of human grief, and the depth of rejoicing about human love.

All three are present in this poem. Now let me just, if I can, just draw this out a bit. You see, in this chapter, we are witnessing one of the great turning points in Israel's history, in God's history.

We are watching the shift from Saul to David. And we are watching God inexorably moving toward the appointment of Jesus as king.

This is a great moment in history. But where is the weight of this chapter? The weight of this chapter is on pathos. On grief.

It's on humans as created human beings. These humans are concerned to be godly. They are also being so very, very human.

[30 : 34] They are celebrating what is good. They are grieving over loss. They are being human. Now friends, I am an evangelical Christian.

That is, I'm a Bible-believing Christian. And I'm passionately concerned with evangelism. I'm concerned with biblical truth. I am a redeemed person. I'm serious about God's redemptive purposes for his world.

These things are very, very dear to me. And they are very dear because I think they are things that are dear to the heart of God. But I believe also that God created me human.

And I believe being human is very important. I believe God wants me to be human. He wants me to rejoice in this world that he has given me.

To rejoice in music and art. To rejoice in human relationships. To mourn over death. To enjoy an erotic relationship with my spouse.

[31 : 41] To revel in just sitting around the evening playing cards with my family. To enjoy a glass of wine while soaking up a sunset over the sea. You see, because these things come from the hand of God.

They come from the hand of God the creator. I'm not just a redeemed human. I am a created human. Both things come from the hand of a benevolent God.

And you know what? I think sometimes we forget this. I think sometimes we get the doctrines of creation and redemption out of balance. And tonight I want to urge you. Please, please don't do that.

To overemphasize one doctrine is to do so to the detriment of the other. You see, an overdeveloped doctrine of redemption, like my friend at the beginning, will cause you to not be genuinely human.

You won't be able to grieve like David. You won't be able to love like Jonathan and David. You won't be able to enjoy the creation like the writer of Ecclesiastes. You won't be able to take pleasure in sex like the writer of Song of Solomons.

[32 : 48] You won't be able to sing and dance like the psalmist does. Your life will be stunted and not fully human. God created you human. He wants you to enjoy life as a human being on the other side of the coin.

An overdeveloped doctrine of creation will cause you not to be concerned with being godly. You'll find fulfillment in work and not in growing like Christ.

You'll find pleasure in sport, but not in relating to God. You'll spend your money and your time on yourself or on wasteful things rather than on the things that last for eternity.

Friends, our God wants us to live as both. As created beings and as redeemed beings. So friends, will you do this?

Will you find joy and pleasure in being human? And will you find joy and pleasure in being the redeemed child of God?

[33 : 51] God wants you to have both. To rejoice in both. To be both. For he made you to be like this.

And he redeemed you to be like this. So let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this wonderful little snippet in the life of David.

We thank you that though he's so concerned with being your redeemed person. He is so human as well. He's able to stop in the midst of life and grieve the death of a friend and of a king.

Thank you that he's able to rejoice in the love he shared. And in the respect that he had. Thank you that he's a model in so many ways of what it means to be human.

Father, thank you that you made us human. You made us created beings. You set us in a wonderful created world.

[34 : 56] And you told us that this place was a good place to be. And a good place for you to work out your purposes. Thank you that because of Jesus you've created us redeemed beings as well.

That in Christ you have brought us to yourself. Through his death. Thank you. That you've transformed therefore the way we look at this world.

Father, please help us to get the balance right in life. Please help us in this. We pray in Jesus name and for his glory. Amen.