

David's Lament For Saul

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 01] It's a lovely thing on a baptism morning to have babies crying in church. It reminds me of one of the great paradoxes of my life, that babies, when they cry quite unintelligibly, demand attention and response.

And preachers, when they speak very intelligibly, as they like, puts people to sleep. So I hope that I can speak with the cry of a baby this morning.

And this happy summer Sunday morning with three lovely children in the congregation being baptized, and I am given as my subject for the sermon a lament from the book of Samuel.

And I would love to know, having been away all week, how all the Bible study groups in the parish got along with this lament from the book of Samuel. I can imagine them making very heavy weather of it indeed, as I spent most of the week making heavy weather of it.

But I'm glad to say that by Sunday morning I'm delighted with it, and look forward to sharing with you some of the things which have been really helpful to me, from 1 Samuel chapter 1 and verse 20 following, where you have the lament of David over the death of Saul.

[1 : 32] And I want to tell you this because Saul is a great man. When I think of him, I think of him sitting there on his throne, heavy with depression, burning with jealousy.

The spear beside his throne tempts him to pick it up and drive it through the heart of the young man who is there playing the harp to him to try and soothe his melancholy.

And I think to myself, how many depressed, jealous, angry old men or women there might be in this congregation this morning.

Because when you read the story of Saul in the first book of Samuel, you can't help but be aware that as you read about him, you learn about yourself.

Let me tell you some of the things about Saul. When he was appointed to be king, he was a young, handsome man, the son of a wealthy and important father.

[2 : 40] He stood head and shoulders above his fellows, and he was almost by every standard the natural selection of that man who was to be the first king of Israel.

That was his outward appearance. He had projected a wonderful image. And that image meant that he was bound for success and recognition simply because of his stature, his appearance, and his background.

And what a curse those things can be. And how many of God's great saints have been clothed with a bent, broken little body and with no comeliness that people are attracted to them, but whose burning devotion to God is there.

Did you see that little lady walk in last week, was it, to the Mother Teresa? Do I mean Mother Teresa?

Walk into the stadium in all her years, and yet with a deep sense of God's presence with her. Well, Saul's public appearance was tremendous, and yet I think of the burden of handsome men and beautiful women who are from their earliest days destined for great things and who live all their lives with the tragedy of never having achieved them because they were satisfied to have this outward appearance which had no inward component to go with it.

[4 : 27] So that was Saul's public appearance. Saul's estimate of himself might be gauged from the fact that when Samuel held a kind of drawing of lots to see who should be the first king of Israel and the lot fell on Saul, Saul was hiding among the baggage from the recognition which he wasn't able to face.

And how many people, like you and me, hide from God's call and have a deep sense of unworthiness that we can't battle.

Every outward appearance qualified him for the job. Every inward reality shrank from the job, and he hid himself. We don't want to be what God calls us to be.

We spend most of our lives hiding from God's calling. Why'd I say if you're hiding this morning, will you come out from your hiding?

Because God is able to fulfill his call in your life. And then there's Saul's experience of ecstasy. As Saul made his way from his anointing by Samuel back to his home, he met a band of prophets.

[5 : 47] And while he was among the band of prophets, he experienced a great ecstasy. And we're told that in that experience, God gave him another heart. And so Saul was required to live the whole of his life with the terrible frustration that came from that kind of ecstatic experience, that you see another reality which you can't express.

And that, of course, is the danger of ecstasy, that you see another reality and you lose any touch with the reality that is around you, and you find yourself incapable of giving expression to that reality.

And that's one of the curses of our humanity. And it's what makes artists go on and on and on and musicians and sculptors and painters and poets and writers.

And they go on and on and on trying to give expression to that reality which they have glimpsed, but which doesn't fit in our world. And somehow they can't adequately express it.

And they live with that frustration all their days because they know another reality. And so we sometimes hide from that other reality by avoiding the ecstasy of human experience, by the ecstasy of God's spirit at work in us, showing us another reality.

[7 : 14] We shrink from that, too, like Saul. And Saul had also placed upon his shoulders the agony of leadership. He was told by Samuel to do whatever God gives you to do, for God is with you.

And that's what leaders have to do. They cannot wait for the people to tell them what to do because the people cannot make up their mind what's needed. And so they have to take action.

And they have to take it on their own initiative. And they have no support for it. And Saul was a great leader. And the lovely, well, it may not, it's a bit gory, but it's a great story.

The men of Jabesh Gilead were surrounded by the enemy. The enemy gave them a week before they came in and demanded their submission.

And their submission was to be on these terms, that the right eye of every man in the community was to be clawed out as a sign of deference to their victory, to those who had taken victory over them.

[8 : 23] And so the men waited in peril for a week till the enemy was to close in on them. And word got to Saul. And Saul was out, as all kings should be, plowing his land with a yoke of oxen.

And he heard this threat against the people who were now his people. And he took his sword and he cut his oxen into pieces and sent the pieces out to every part of his kingdom and said, Be with me to do battle, or else the same will happen to your oxen.

And a great gathering of the men of Israel came together and they went to the relief of the men of Jabesh Gilead and lifted the siege that was on them. And a great victory was won.

And Saul was acknowledged to be the leader of his people because he had done what God put it on his heart to do. And that's really hard.

Our leaders want to hide behind the consent of those they lead. But those they lead very rarely have much vision as to where they're going. And so we founder, as our society seems to have founded at this time in our history.

[9 : 36] Our leaders looking to us and we looking to our leaders and each of us screaming at the other to do something. And then Saul was the victim of acute depression.

A sense of God forsakenness, for in fact that's what had happened to his kingdom. He was God forsaken. He had reason to be depressed.

And he was deeply, deeply depressed. And David's playing on his heart was the only thing that could relieve Saul's terrible depression.

And we have reason to be depressed in our world too. And I think there comes a time in our life when there are more reasons to be depressed than there are for anything else.

And we give way to depression. And that's what happened to Saul. And the tragic story of his life was the affliction of this depression.

[10 : 39] And in the midst of this depression, he had a terrible confusion about God. Because on the one hand, God was represented by Samuel.

And Samuel was a fierce prophet of God who saw in absolute terms the will of God, who insisted on the purposes of God, who laid down the law of God, and who insisted that it be done.

And many of us shudder from that impression of God and who he is. The absolute demands which we can never meet.

And you have the wonderful story of Saul with the Amalekites, where he was told to go in and destroy them and take no prisoners.

And Saul went in and he defeated them in battle. But he saw their cattle and he saw their goods and he saw their king, and he spared them out of the generosity of his heart.

[11:39] And Samuel came to him in a terrible fury and took his sword out and cut down Agag, the king of the Amalekites. And said to Saul, From now on the kingdom is taken from you.

Your family will no longer be that family which is established to be the kings of Israel. Because he disobeyed God.

He did a reasonable and kindly thing, and in that he disobeyed God. And most of us reasonable and kindly people, that we all are and all long to be, have no sense of the terrible reverence we should have for the demands of a just and holy God.

We shy away from the terrible vision and prophecy that Samuel brings to Saul. And the word of God brings to us.

While on the one hand he had Samuel, on the other hand he had David. And David was riding the wave of popular acclaim.

[12:52] The women in the streets sang, Saul has slain his thousands, because he was a great warrior, and David his ten thousands, for he was a far greater warrior.

And it was David that slew Goliath, even though Saul stayed at home and brooded. And he alone among his people stood head and shoulders above them, even as Goliath did.

David was the shepherd, and Saul was brought up hurting asses. And all this promise that Saul saw in the young warrior David, he was afflicted with a terrible jealousy.

And you old men who see your successors moving in fast upon you, and know that you're going to have to give in to them, and give up to them, and they're going to take over.

You will know what kind of jealousy that is, and how deeply ashamed you may be of it at one time, and yet how real it is, as it burns within your gut, as you see the recognition of God's purposes going beyond you, and falling as a mantle on others.

[14:24] And the jealousy is there, and this jealousy becomes addictive, and Saul the old man spends the rest of his time chasing David and seeking to kill him, and his armies are in disarray, and his country is disillusioned, and his people are disaffected, and all this happens because Saul is addicted to a terrible jealousy.

Then one day, as was read in the lesson this morning, Saul had been met by the Philistines, his longtime enemy, and his longtime enemy had triumphed, and the archers of the Philistines had caught with their arrows Saul, and he fell upon his own sword, rather than submitting to them putting him to death.

And the news of this comes to David. And with it, the king's crown, and it's presented to David by an Amalekite, and David suspects that the Amalekite is there to win some favor from him.

And in a terrible wrath and fury and indignation, he cuts the man down, and then he bows his head, and from him comes that lament, which was read for us this morning.

Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon the high places, because Saul was the glory of Israel, and he was slain upon the high places.

[16:00] He thought of the enemies of Israel, the Philistines, and David said, Tell it not in Gath, and publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult, because it would be wrong.

It would be a false kind of joy, and a failure to recognize the terrible tragedy that brought to an end the life of the tragic figure of Saul, the first king of Israel.

And to the land on which Saul died, David says, The shame of barrenness be visited upon you, that you no longer bring forth produce, because on you, the anointed king of Israel was slain.

And David goes on to talk about the terrible courage of the warriors, Saul and Jonathan, his son. Saul's sword and Jonathan's bow, and how they turned not back.

And he goes on to talk about the beautiful relationship that existed between Saul and Jonathan.

And he goes on to tell the women of Israel of the honored place that was given them in that society

while Saul was their king.

[17 : 28] And he talks as he speaks of his own relationship to Jonathan, as a love surpassing the love of women. And that was in his relationship to another man.

Then he closes by talking about the failure of the weapons of war to accomplish the purposes of God. How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war are perished.

And that's the tremendous lament that he makes. And in that lament, there is a special recognition of the place of women in our society.

That a society is measured, as David sees it, by the place it gives to women. And I would like to say, though I don't suppose this will be accepted, but I'll say it anyway, that women are taking over the place of men in order to give to women the place they should have in society.

And whether that will create great joy or great confusion has yet to be decided. And then there's the problem of a man's relationship to a man, which is the raging problem of our society with the problem of homosexuality.

[18 : 56] And David speaks of a far deeper relationship between people than just the enjoyment of erotic relationships.

There's something far deeper than that that needs to be explored in a relationship between people. And David speaks of the failure of weapons of war, that they don't justify the purposes of God among men and will not ultimately achieve the purposes of God.

And so these issues which are so current to us have their beginning in a sense, or have a beginning, in David's lament over Saul.

And from this, three things I would like you to think about. The story of the passions of Saul in his life, which seem to be so contradictory.

And on the other hand, the recognition by David that Saul was the glory of Israel. And in that, I want you to try and get some sense of how, in the agony and frustration of our human existence, somehow, in the purposes of God, things are being worked out by which his kingdom is being established.

[20 : 31] And we may experience addictive jealousy and depression and discouragement and pride and loneliness and alienation. And in all that, the sovereign purposes of God are being realized.

And you get this, these things that I want to leave with you. That our experience of life and God's understanding of life are two quite different things.

And that's why we're called to live by faith and not by introspection. We are a very introspective society.

And Saul, in his, the tragic figure of Saul speaks to us about that. We are to live not by that, but by faith in the God who is revealed to us in Christ.

And secondly, when we pray as we do as the new Israel of God, we pray, thy kingdom come. It's the kingdom that God began to hammer out under Saul that we are praying might come in all its fullness.

[21 : 46] It's the same kingdom. And so, in a sense, you see, being hammered out on the anvil of history, the reality of a kingdom which we are still seeking to find and which will be found when the whole earth, in a sense, joins in the hallelujah chorus and says, King of kings and Lord of lords.

This all began with the struggle of Saul to be God's king of God's people, finds its fulfillment in the eternal Son of God, even Jesus Christ.

victory doesn't belong to the warrior. We live in the kingdom of Canada and neglect our king.

People to the south live in the Republic of the USA and elect their king. But somehow, the relationship of our leaders and the ultimate responsibility they have under God is to try and give us some sense of an eternal kingdom in which Christ is Lord and king and we recognize and acknowledge him in our lives.

That's the battle that began with Samuel and Saul and David. And the last thing I want to give to you is that in the baptism this morning, none of the children were named Saul.

[23 : 26] Saul. And after you read his story, you might well guess why. Saul was not a name given to them.

But there was in history a child who was named Saul. And he became a very great warrior indeed. And he won all the battles that Saul, this Saul lost. And he explained the kingdom in its fullness that this Saul only saw in its rudimentary beginnings.

And that Saul, whose name we know as Paul, is the man who is, in a sense, the one who points to the kingdom from the heart of the New Testament.

And so when you see David caught up in the grip, as it were, of this battle, when you see Saul and Samuel being used in the sort of crucible of history, in the work of beginning to establish a kingdom, then you see the fulfillment of the kingdom in the promise that is made to us by Jesus Christ.

[24 : 53] And you see and recognize something of the profundity of the depth of David's lament over Saul. Now, looking to the past, David saw far into the future.

We talked of Saul as the glory of Israel. He knew far more than we know yet. and he promised in that a fulfillment.

In a world where women are given the place which belongs rightfully to them under God, in a world where men have a deep and profound relationship to one another, in a world where arms don't, and the arms of war don't, achieve the purposes of God.

All this begins with Saul. And David recognized that when he lamented him in this passage. Amen.

Our offertory hymn is 136. Amen. God's Him near.

[26 : 21] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[30 : 53] God of reconciliation and forgiveness, the saving work of Christ has made our peace with you. May that work grow toward its perfection in all we offer you this day.

We ask this in his name. Amen. Let us pray. Amen.

As we said in the psalm this morning, be still and know that I am God, says the Lord. So let us take a moment or so to put into our hearts that which we have heard with our ears this morning.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So we pray, mighty and merciful God, without whom all things hasten to destruction and fall into nothingness.

[32 : 33] And look upon your family of nations and people to which you have committed power in truth for their mutual health and comfort.

Save us and help us, O Lord, lest we abuse your gift and make it our misery and ruin.

Draw all people to yourself in your kingdom of righteousness and truth. Uproot our enmities.

Heal our divisions. Cast out our fears and renew our faith in your unchanging purpose of goodwill.

And of peace on earth. For the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. And as we go forth from this time of worship for a picnic.

[33 : 56] We pray, O Heavenly Father, who by your blessed Son taught us to ask for our daily bread.

Have compassion, Lord, on all the millions of our fellow human beings who live in poverty and hunger.

Relieve their distress. Make plain the way of help. And grant your grace to all of us that we may bear each other's burdens according to thy will.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We have gathered together as a family.

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose spirit the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified.

[35 : 05] Receive our supplications and prayers for all estates of people in your holy church. That every member of the church.

That every member of the same, in their vocation, their ministry, may truly and in godly manner serve thee. In the name of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Dearest Father, whose mercies are without number and without end.

Remember for good your church. All who in every place call on the name of the Lord, both theirs and ours.

And let your kingdom come into all the world. We ask you, Father, to look graciously upon our country.

[36 : 18] Upon this city. This parish. The neighborhoods in which we live. We ask that you give wisdom to those who exercise authority among us in church or in state.

In education or industry. That we may be led. And that they may be leaders. In the ways of justice and truth and freedom.

Let your blessing rest upon our families. Upon those we love.

We think this morning of Kendall Harmon, who is going to be ordained next Sunday.

And we pray that it will be a very special time. We ask your blessing also, Father, on Harry's preaching as he goes to South Carolina for this service of worship to you.

[37 : 33] We ask that you watch over the young.

And especially this morning we hold up to you, Laura Christine and Naomi Martha Michiko and Robert Edward. And that their parents and sponsors may, deep in their hearts, have truly answered those vows which they and we have made this morning.

Support the aged, Lord. Relieve those in pain or sickness.

We think of Michelle in hospital. We think of Michelle in hospital. We think of Michelle in hospital.

We think of Michelle in hospital.

Comfort the sorrowful, Lord. Succour the dying. And let your peace rest upon us all.

[38 : 54] In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. So blessing and honor. Thanksgiving and praise.

Jesus Christ. More than we can utter. More than we can conceive. Be to your glorious name, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

By all angels, all people, all creation. From everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

Please be seated for the announcements. A very warm welcome to everyone this morning on this beautiful day.

Obviously, you've all been praying hard, and we've got lovely weather for our picnic, and I hope most of you will be there. A special welcome, too, to the newly baptized and their parents, godparents, and friends and relations.

[40 : 06] I notice to all the church committee members, the last church committee meeting before the summer is this Tuesday. Not Wednesday, the normal day, but Tuesday. Please pick up your minutes and agenda, and there's also other information in that envelope that is important to read before church committee.

So would you pick it up at the information table today? Next Sunday is Food Bank Sunday, and I understand that the food bank is very low and in great need. And if you're anything like me, it's easy to go home with good resolutions today and then forget by next Sunday.

So perhaps we could make a mental note or even a written note to remind ourselves that we should each try to bring something for the food bank next week. And I'm sure you all know the kinds of things that they are most in need of.

And when you bring your food next week, that might also remind you that you're coming next week to say goodbye to someone. Bill and Norma D'Umbrell will be going back to Australia very soon, and we'll be saying goodbye to them next week.

So do please everyone come for that special time. June 27th, looking a little bit ahead, is the Sidesman's Dinner. And the details for that are in the bulletin, and you can probably also pick up tickets for that at the coffee hour.

[41 : 18] As you know, this is the family picnic, but I've been assured that there is coffee and tea. But you might say that it's a serve-yourself Sunday. Coffee and tea are at the north end of the lounge only, and if you would just go and help yourself to it.

And if you don't wish to stay on for the picnic, you can at least have coffee and tea and fellowship before you leave. Thank you.

Our recessional hymn, 85. You're welcome.

God be the glory, great things he has done, so lovely the world that he gave us his hand.

We yielded his life an atonement for sin, and upon the life gate that all they go in.

[43 : 10] Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice.

O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son, and give him the glory, great things he has done.

O perfect redemption, the purchase of God. O every believer, the promise of God.

O God be the glory, great things he has done. O God be the glory, great things he has done.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people hear his voice. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice.

[44 : 25] Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice. And give Him the glory, great things He has done.

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done. And great are rejoicing through Jesus the Son.