

2 Samuel 1:1-16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 August 2015

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 00] Well, good evening. Turn with me in your Bible, if you have one, to 2 Samuel chapter 1.

If you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, it is page 254. We are starting a new series tonight in the second half of the book of Samuel.

If you were here this past spring, we did the first half of the book of Samuel, called 1 Samuel. And now we're at 2 Samuel. Before we dig into the passage, let me introduce our passage by asking this question.

Have you ever had an enemy? Have you ever had an enemy who drove a wedge between you and your spouse or significant other, which resulted in them leaving you?

Have you ever had an enemy who tried to poison your relationship with your best friend and permanently isolate you from each other? Have you ever had an enemy who undermined your opportunities to get a stable job that you were well qualified for?

[1 : 09] Have you ever had an enemy who literally gathered an army to hunt you down, intimidated you into leaving your home country, chased you into the desert, and tried to kill you over and over again?

Well, that was King David's experience of Saul. Or David's experience, before he was king, of King Saul. No less than 16 times in 1 Samuel, Saul tried to kill David.

Besides that, Saul literally stole David's wife, Michal, from him, effectively isolated him from his closest friend, Jonathan, drove David into the forest, then into the wilderness, and finally into exile, living among the Philistines.

Now, maybe some of you can relate to having an enemy in one or two of those ways. But probably for most of us, maybe we have to deal with people who are annoying.

Maybe there's people who say mean things behind our back. Or occasionally get mad and yell at us. But most of us have never had to deal with an enemy at that level.

[2 : 16] Now, the good news for David is that his great enemy, Saul, is now dead. King Saul has been killed in battle.

That's the last chapter of 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel 31, along with his son Jonathan. For the people of Israel, it was a national crisis. It's sort of like if the president and the vice president got assassinated on the same day.

Right? It's never happened in American history. But for David, it was his golden opportunity to rise up and lead the people of Israel. To unify them and become their king.

The prophet Samuel had already anointed David back several years ago, 1 Samuel chapter 16.

Halfway through the book, he had anointed David to be the future king of Israel.

Now, this evening, what we're going to look at is David's response. And what we're going to read and what we're going to look at is David's response to the death of Saul, his enemy. And as we look at his response, we'll see David's character begin to emerge.

[3 : 20] Because one of the clearest ways that we can see someone's character is how they deal with enemies and people who oppose them. And cause trouble for them.

So let's read together 2 Samuel chapter 1. And after the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dirt on his head.

When he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. David said to him, Where do you come from? And he said to him, I have escaped from the camp of Israel. And David said to him, How did it go? Tell me. And he answered, The people fled from the battle.

And also many of the people have fallen and are dead. And Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead. Then David said to the young man who told him, How do you know that Saul and his son

Jonathan are dead? And the young man who told him said, By chance, I happen to be on Mount Gilboa.

And there was Saul, leaning on his spear. And behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, Here I am. And he said to me, Who are you? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite.

[4 : 25] And he said to me, Stand beside me and kill me. And for anguish had seized me. And yet my life still lingers. So I stood beside him and killed him. Because I was sure that he couldn't live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm.

And I have brought them here to my Lord. Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them. And so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son.

And for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel. Because they had fallen by the sword. And David said to the young man who told him, Where do you come from? And he answered, I am the son of a sojourner and Amalekite.

David said to him, How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? Then David called one of the young men and said, Go execute him. And he struck him down so that he died.

And David said to him, Your blood be on your head. For your own mouth has testified against you, saying, I have killed the Lord's anointed. And David lamented with his lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son.

[5 : 28] And he said, It should be taught to the people of Judah. Behold, it is written in the book of Jashar. He said, Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places. How the mighty have fallen. Tell it not in Gath.

Publish it not in the streets of Askelon. Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice. Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult. You mountains of the Golboa. Let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings.

For there the shield of the mighty was defiled. The shield of Saul not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back. And the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely, in life and in death, they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles. They were stronger than lions. You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle. Jonathan lies slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother, Jonathan. Very pleasant have you been to me.

[6 : 31] Your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished. So in tonight's passage, we see two responses to Saul's death.

We see first the Amalekite messenger. And second, we see David's response along with his men. So let's look at these two responses in turn, and what we can take from them.

First, the Amalekite's response to Saul's death. Now initially, this Amalekite appears to be a loyal and compassionate ally. Right? He arrives with his clothes torn, dust on his head, traditional expressions of grief.

He says, I've escaped from the Israelite camp. He traveled over 80 miles to Ziklag, where David was sort of hiding out, or where David was staying, just to bring him this message.

And he presents himself as a compassionate human being. Saul was in the middle of the battlefield, already wounded. No way he could survive. He put him out of his misery. He ended Saul's suffering.

[7 : 33] But when we look closer, it becomes clear that this Amalekite is actually not loyal and compassionate. Instead, we see that he was self-serving and deceptive.

Now turn back a page if you're looking in the Bible. 1 Samuel 31, verse 3 through 5, describes the death of Saul. Verse 3 says, So Saul's badly wounded.

He says to his armor bearer, please, don't let me be killed by one of these foreigners. Kill me yourself. And the armor bearer says no. And so Saul falls on his sword himself.

Now the Amalekite story is a little different. I saw Saul leaning on his spear, chariots and riders almost upon him. Saul asked me to end his suffering, and I did.

But you know, there's something a little fishy about the Amalekite story. All right, verse 6 of chapter 1. He says, By chance, I happen to be on Mount Gilboa.

[8 : 59] That's sort of like saying, By chance, I happen to be walking through Newhallville at 2.30 in the morning. And I got mugged. Just by chance. No, it probably wasn't by chance.

Right? And there was Saul, he says, all alone in the midst of the battlefield, leaning on his spear and people, the chariots and riders were upon him, but none of the Israelites were protecting him. Really? That would be very unlikely for the whole Israelite army to completely abandon the most important person, their commander-in-chief, their king, in the midst of the battle.

And if the Amalekite really wanted to honor Saul, he wouldn't just swipe Saul's crown and armband. He would have at least tried to give Saul a decent burial.

That was what the men of Jabesh Gilead did. Again, you can read it at the end of 1 Samuel chapter 31. They went and retrieved Saul's bones from the Philistine temple, where the Philistines had taken them the next day, and took them back home as an expression of honor to Saul.

[10 : 09] That he wouldn't be defaced and hanging on the wall of a Philistine temple, but rather given a decent burial as an Israelite. So what really happened? Well, most likely, this Amalekite was sort of scavenging, right?

The battle had ended. It was sunset. The Philistines didn't do their looting until the next day. And so he thought, hmm, maybe I can grab some things. And he comes upon Saul.

And he says, ooh, I know who this is. And ooh, I know that David and Saul have been rivals. And I bet if I bring the crown from Saul's head and bring the other royal insignia to David and present them to him, I will surely get a high place in David's kingdom.

And David will know that I'm loyal to him and not to Saul. You see, the Amalekite was trying to take advantage of a national, of what was really a national tragedy for his own personal advancement. And David wanted nothing to do with that. He saw through this guy's hypocrisy. Verse 13, he says, where do you come from?

[11 : 18] And he says, I'm the son of a sojourner. Now that word, sojourner, it basically means a resident alien in Israel. It means a foreigner from another nation who chose to settle and live within the borders of Israel.

So in other words, this guy has grown up in Israel. He knows what he's doing. He's not just sort of a random visitor passing through, doesn't really know what's going on, doesn't really know what he's doing.

He knows who Saul is. He knows who David is. He knows exactly what he's doing. And he wasn't afraid to, he was bold and shameless.

And David says, why were you not afraid? Why did you have no fear of God in you? That you put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed.

Or perhaps that he concocted this whole deceptive story that he actually had when he actually hadn't, but he was wanting to boast about it. And wanting to use it for his own personal gain.

[12 : 20] And David orders his men strike him down. Now that might seem like a very harsh response. But as David said in verse 16, your own mouth has testified against you.

You said, I killed the Lord's anointed. If you kill the Lord's anointed king, you deserve the death penalty. There was no such thing as life imprisonment back then. It wasn't even possible. We can debate about the death penalty. That's another topic for another day. But if you kill the king, what else?

And you see, David was on his way to becoming the king of Israel. But he wanted to make it very clear from the start. That my kingdom and God's kingdom will be marked by loyalty and truthfulness and the fear of God.

And so willful deception and shameless disobedience and rejoicing over an enemy's demise must not gain a foothold in my kingdom.

[13 : 21] That's the point that David was making. That he didn't take advantage of this event. He didn't think, finally, Saul, my enemy is dead.

He wept. Saul, the king. Has been killed. I think it would have been very tempting for David to simply rejoice over Saul's death.

Rejoice over his newfound freedom. Perhaps immediately proclaim himself king. Before anyone else could. Immediately exterminate anyone who is connected with Saul. That was the typical practice of kings back then.

You sort of clean house. And get rid of everyone else who is connected with the former kingdom. When you're replacing someone. But David didn't do that. David wept. And that's really the central emphasis of this chapter. If you look at the story in verse 1 through 16. It starts with the Amalekite arriving. And then David questions the Amalekite.

[14:28] And then in the middle of the conversation. When David realizes that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead. He stops the conversation. And he just weeps. And it says they wept. And they mourned.

They fasted until evening. And then later on David continues the conversation. And asks him a couple more questions. And then the Amalekite departs. Or he's struck down. Right? But right in the center of this narrative.

Is David weeping. And the author wants to draw our attention to that. That this whole conversation back and forth is interrupted. By David weeping. And then.

In the rest of the chapter we see David's lament. For Saul. And Jonathan. And this lament. Marks the midpoint of the book of Samuel.

The book of Samuel is really one book in two parts. First and second Samuel what we have. Probably just because it was too long to fit on one scroll. And so they divided it into two. For convenience. Because they couldn't fit it all in one scroll.

[15:28] But at the beginning of first Samuel. There's the song of Hannah. It's a song about God raising up the humble. And bringing down the proud. And at the end of second Samuel.

There's a psalm of David. About how God has exalted him. And how God is my rock. And God is my fortress. And he has raised David up to be the king.

And David's giving glory to God for that. And right in the middle. We have this poetic lament. And those are the three poems in the book. The rest of the book is just a long story. But this lament sort of marks the midpoint of the book.

And the key line is repeated three times. Verse 19, verse 25, verse 27. How the mighty have fallen. Now I think there's a few things that we can learn from this passage about grieving.

And about responding to loss and tragedies. So first, it's right to mourn the loss of a loyal friend.

[16:35] Who stood by you all the way to the end. This is what David does for Jonathan. David's, verse 18. There's a, verse 18 says, He said it should be taught to the people of Judah.

There's a note down at the bottom. If you're looking in the ESV. And it says, in Hebrew, it says the bow. He said the bow should be taught to the people of Judah. That's probably the name of the lament.

And Jonathan was particularly known for being an archer. A skilled archer. Verse 22 refers to that. And so he probably named this song sort of as a reference, as a remembrance of his friend Jonathan.

His loyal friend. In verse 25 and 26, he really expresses his grief for Jonathan. You know, if you remember, in the book of 1 Samuel, Jonathan stands by David when nobody else does.

Jonathan was Saul's son. So if the kingship is passed on hereditarily, Jonathan is next in line to be king. But Jonathan realizes that God has anointed David.

[17:42] And God has chosen David to succeed Saul rather than him. And instead of being jealous and envious, as Saul was, he sort of gives his total allegiance to David.

He makes a covenant with David, which basically means an oath of allegiance to, and he says, you're going to reign. I'll be second to you. So he gladly says, I'll gladly serve under your leadership. So Jonathan protected David from the irrational anger of Saul. He went to visit David when David was all alone in the wilderness. It said he helped him find strength in the Lord.

He stood up for David in ways that others were unwilling or simply unable to do. He was the most loyal friend that David ever had. And that's what David laments here.

He says, I'm distressed. He says, your love has been better than the love of women. David had many wives. It was one of his flaws that almost led to his downfall.

[18:47] We'll see that later on. And his wives supported him and comforted him. But none of his wives stood up for him in the way that Jonathan did. And none of his wives really could have, were in the position that Jonathan was to protect him from Saul, to really save his life, and to be loyal to him as a friend.

And so that's what Jonathan did. One person said, the more we love, the more we grieve. And David grieved for Jonathan as a loyal friend. But David didn't just grieve for Jonathan.

David also grieved for his enemy Saul. And, you know, this was the same Saul who, when David was playing the harp in his court, threw a spear and tried to kill him. The same Saul who gathered his men and pursued David into the remote parts of the wilderness. The same Saul who caused so much trouble for David that David had to basically go and live in enemy territory. Couldn't live his own, couldn't be safe in his own country anymore. And the same Saul whose frantic attempts to hold on to power had made Israel weak and helpless before her enemies. David wept over Saul's death.

[20 : 00] David didn't see Saul only through the lens of his own experiences of him as his enemy. David saw Saul as God saw him, as a man that God had created in his image, as a man who had been called to greatness, as the first king of Israel, as a man who had once been powerfully used by God to defeat Israel's enemies, as a man who had tragically fallen through his own willful rebellion.

David knew that one day God would judge Saul. But David also knew that it wasn't his responsibility to carry out God's judgment against Saul. When David was younger, when he was first brought into Saul's kingdom, he was Saul's armor bearer.

That means he was Saul's trusted assistant. And Saul ideally could have become his mentor, his teacher, and his guide, but instead Saul turned on him and became his enemy, his persecutor. And their relationship was never restored. At the very, at the best, at best, there were isolated instances when Saul recognized his folly and repented of his madness.

But it was never safe for David to remain close to Saul for very long. And yet David responded to the news of Saul's death with weeping. Not with rejoicing, not with indifference, but with weeping.

[21 : 32] It's right to mourn not only when a loyal friend who stood beside you all your life dies, but also when someone dies with whom you've had a broken relationship. Maybe you were married once to them and are now divorced.

Maybe you were once close, but had a falling out and were never reconciled. Maybe someone in authority abused you or treated you wrongly. Part of the right response to that is to grieve.

To bring the pain and the injustice of that before God Almighty. Lay it out before him.

It's also right to mourn when the leaders of God's people fail and when their failures are exposed. Saul was appointed as a leader over God's people, over Israel.

He had a high calling. He did not live up to it. Sometimes Christian leaders don't live up to their calling. Sometimes it tends to make the headlines when one pastor steps down because of an affair or another takes the church's money or another abuses his power, mistreats people.

[22 : 51] Sometimes our response can be to become cynical and withdraw. Sometimes our response if you're in the church and maybe if you're a leader in the church, sometimes our response can be that's them, that's not me.

You know, we're not like that. I think part of the right response is simply to weep and see that this is not how God has called us to live and this is not glorifying to the name of our Lord.

That's what David did here. He mourned over Saul. He mourned immediately. When we hear tragic news, sometimes it's helpful to, I mean, David seems to sort of stop everything he's doing and mourned and wept fasted until evening.

Sometimes it's helpful to stop what we're doing and let the news sink in if possible to gather with others and express sorrow. But David doesn't just grieve sort of reactively and immediately in the immediate aftermath of hearing bad news.

He also sits down and writes this lament. He put words to his grief. It wasn't just a stream of consciousness but an orderly expression of his grief.

[24 : 19] The song was taught to the people of Judah. It was actually handed down for generations to come, included in the Holy Scriptures. others. And I think this can also be a very helpful practice in the wake of loss or tragedy.

To express our grief which tends to be disorderly and chaotic and unpredictable by its very nature. To express our grief in some kind of orderly fashion.

Maybe it means write a poem or a song or draw a picture. Gather together a collection of photos. Compose a tribute. The song is has an order to it.

Has a refrain How the Mighty Have Fallen repeated three times. Has three distinct parts. Verse 20 and 21 are sort of negative warnings. Verse 22 and 23 describe Saul and Jonathan together.

Verse 24 through 26 calls are sort of invitations to weep for them individually. You know, I think I think grieving and mourning is something that we we don't naturally learn to do if you grow up in this culture.

[25 : 34] Right? Because most of the time we either try to avoid death and sickness and just push it away from us and stay far away from it as much as we can or simply fight against it and that's all we try to do but we don't often have these ways of mourning and grieving and walking forward together.

And so it's something we need to learn. And I think that this passage can teach us something about that. Notice also David doesn't immediately jump to words of comfort and peace and joy and assurance of God's presence.

The lament is focused on remembering Saul and Jonathan their greatness as warriors and the tragedy of their loss to the nation of Israel.

And you know there's a time to mourn and sometimes the way to get to a place of comfort and peace it means we have to pass through that dark valley of mourning.

So as a pastor I periodically have to officiate funerals and in a traditional Christian funeral or memorial service people gather to honor the memory of a dear friend to mourn in the face of death both realizing someone else's death but also that we're all going to die and sort of facing that reality and also to find hope and comfort in the promise of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the faithfulness of God.

[27 : 20] That's basically what a traditional Christian funeral does honor someone's memory expresses grief in the face of death and hope in the light of resurrection. But today something that's become more and more common is to have not just not a traditional funeral or memorial service but what's often called a celebration of life.

To remember and as much as possible try to relive and recreate someone's unique personality. To celebrate the activities they enjoyed doing and the foods that they loved.

Basically to have a party that they would have enjoyed being at. I remember going to one of these for a friend of my wife someone who was in college with her and had died in a tragic accident and that was sort of the goal to remember who he was as a mountain climber and to have a party but there wasn't there was only one moment in the whole ceremony where people were really given permission to grieve and you could hear some people just breaking into tears.

Now what to say about this? It's appropriate when someone dies to give thanks for their life and to honor their accomplishments. That's what David does for Saul and Jonathan here. But it's also actually important to really mourn and to face the reality of death and not to celebrate someone's life while pretending that death and mourning isn't a reality.

That can sometimes just be an expression of denial and reflecting sometimes the fact that we don't know how to deal with death. And one of the things that the Bible invites us into is to learn to mourn and to lament.

[29 : 13] David called that's what David does in verse 24 he calls upon the daughters of Israel to mourn for Saul he also mourns personally pours out his grief for Jonathan.

Ecclesiastes Ecclesiastes 7 verse 2 says this better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting because death is the destiny of every person and the living should take it to heart.

In other words the only way to genuine comfort and deep healing from God involves going through mourning and lamenting. Now this is hard.

I acknowledge this is you know I was thinking about this sermon I was like this is sort of the first sermon of the new school year and you know people are excited to be here and I'm like and I've got this text and I tried to frame it in other ways and I tried to think about it in other ways and I'm like this is really a lot of what this text is teaching us to do is to learn to lament and learn to mourn and Jesus said blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted and he doesn't just mean blessed are those who mourn when your friend dies that's part of it but also those who mourn over our own sin and our own fallenness and turn toward God and those who mourn over the tragedy that sin has wrecked in the world that our rebellion against God and all of its terrible consequences part of the right response to that is to mourn over that and to bring that before God and to call out

Jesus let your kingdom come Jesus let your will be done come we need you we long for you now this doesn't mean that we should remain paralyzed by grief David went on to do many things he went on to rule over Israel he went on to fight great battles and bless God's people and bring them together as united people he went on to reign as king so there's a time to stop everything and

mourn there's a time to get up and continue working even if you still feel the loss of a loved one very acutely and deeply so this is what we see in David's response to the death of Saul he responds not by pursuing his own self interest not by rejoicing that his enemy has fallen but by mourning over him and you know we see this in David's life but in the

[31 : 54] New Testament we see Jesus Christ the true and everlasting king and we see the same thing with Jesus many of us think about Jesus mourning for Lazarus his friend who got sick and died and Jesus went to his grave and he wept but Jesus also wept over Jerusalem he said this Luke 19 41 when Jesus drew near excuse me when Jesus drew near and saw the city of Jerusalem he wept over it saying would that you even you had known on this day the things that make for peace but now they are hidden from your eyes for the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground and they will not leave one stone upon another Jesus warned the people in Jerusalem that there was a coming destruction because of their rebellion against God and their rejection of his

Messiah but he wept over that city and he wept over those people he wasn't indifferent and cold to them he wept over them in the book of Revelation Jesus is described as a lion who will rule the nations a strong king but he's also described as a lamb who laid down his life in humble sacrifice you see more than David more than anyone else in the history of the world Jesus had enemies we think about the Pharisees who plotted against him and the Roman officials who were happy to have him crucified so it would cause less trouble for them but in some sense the whole story of the Bible is about God and how God will deal with his enemies because from the beginning

Satan and the angels rebelled against God Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden rebelled against God and all of us have followed in their footsteps and really the big question of the Bible is how will God deal with people who in all kinds of ways are trying to exclude him from our life and dishonor him and put ourselves in the center where he should be and glorify ourselves and get the glory and honor for us and for I mean we sort of want to be the king when he's the rightful king and the question is how will God deal with us and the good news is what Paul says in Romans chapter 5 God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners

Jesus Christ died for us if while we were God's enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life we'll go on to see more of David how he deals with his enemies how he deals with all kinds of other things but the the main message of the Bible is that though we were enemies of God that God has come and reconciled us to himself and he invites us to be reconciled to him let's pray Lord God we thank you for your scripture that speaks to us about many things that we might otherwise neglect or ignore Lord we thank you for how you call us to mourn over the fallenness and rebellion and brokenness of this world we thank you

Jesus for how you came in your compassion and laid down your life for us on the cross so that we might be reconciled to you so we might be at peace with you so that we might belong to you and be part of your kingdom forever Lord we pray that you would we pray that you would teach us how to mourn and how to hunger and thirst for your righteousness how to mourn not not because we have no hope but because we have hope in you that one day you will come and make all things new and for all who turn to you one day we will be part of your kingdom and we will be healed and we will rejoice and there will be no more mourning Lord we pray that you teach us to walk in the path of the cross

[37 : 21] Lord knowing that you have gone before us and pay the great price on our behalf we pray this in Jesus name amen