

1 Samuel 30

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[0:00] Walked around town, it's been a really refreshing stage of life. We do not have to lose our car that often. And so one of the places that we walk by pretty much every day is the Peabody Museum.

And sometimes we'll go in and my daughter's just beginning to enjoy seeing the dinosaurs and the other animals. And the Peabody Museum, in its name, is a testimony to George Peabody.

And you may not know who George Peabody is. You may know who he is, but probably most of you don't. And George Peabody was an English banker who made the bulk of his business in an international bond business in the 19th century.

And so he, along with other names you might be familiar with, the Carnegie's, the Duke's, the Stanford's, he really had a lasting impact donating to, I think, at least a dozen, maybe two dozen different museums up and down the northeast coast.

And one of the things that I learned this week that I didn't know is that the term generous is actually derived from a French word which means a noble birth.

[1:09] And so the reason I share that is because when we begin to think about generosity and how we're generous, one of the things that we do is we think about people who are more well-off than we are or have more power or have more money than we do.

That's what generous means. But one of the challenges, one of the things we're going to be looking at in 1 Samuel 3rd is how we are called generous, regardless of how much we have.

Ken Stern of The Atlantic puts it this way, quoting, if you scanned the press releases or drove past the many university buildings, which is particularly apropos here in New Haven, symphony halls, institutes, stadiums, named for their benefactors, or for that matter read the histories of grand giving by the Rockefellers, Carnegie's, Stanford's, and Duke's, you would be forgiven for thinking that the story of charity in this country, the story of charity in this country, is a story of epic generosity on the part of the American rich.

A story of epic generosity on the part of the American rich. It is not. One of the most surprising and perhaps confounding facts of charity in America is that people who can least afford to give are the ones who give the most, who donate the greatest percentage of their income.

In 2011, the wealthiest American, and for the purposes of what Ken Stern is talking about, who uses the wealthiest Americans as those that earn more than 20%, are in that top 20% income bracket, contributed on average 1.3% of their income to charity.

[2:50] 1.3%. By comparison, Americans at the base of the income pyramid, those in the bottom 20%, donated 3.2% of their income.

So top 20%, 1.3%. Lowest 20% donated 3.2% of their income. And that's the end of the quote, but what Stern goes on to conclude in this article isn't that charity is based on how much you earn.

What he finds is that it isn't. What charity is based on is the proximity to the need. So, if someone in the upper 20% lives in a neighborhood where the majority of the people earn in the lowest 20%, you would find that their income giving actually increases to those around them.

The long and the short of it is we have a generosity problem. And I don't mean just my wife and I. I don't mean just Trinity. I don't mean just Christians.

I don't mean just Westerners. I mean, we as human beings have a charity problem. And that's what we're going to be looking at in 1 Samuel 30 this evening.

[4:01] It's the problem and invitation to generosity. So you can turn to 1 Samuel 30. We've been working our way through a study in 1 Samuel. And so we come to chapter 30, which can be found on page 151, if you're using the Bible here.

Thank you, man.

And so 1 Samuel 30 is a chapter about what a good king looks like. We're going to be looking at what David is doing. This is kind of his final penultimate act before he receives his coronation.

And the long and the short of it is what does David do to be a worthy king? And what David does to be a worthy king is David is generous. But Samuel is also, and I've said this before, Samuel is also a book about who God chooses to use and what God wants his family to look like.

And so for us, it's also a challenge not just for a Carnegie, not just for a Peabody, but for us about what our lives should look like. And so this is an invitation to us to be generous.

[5:15] It's a long chapter. It's 31 verses. And so we're going to be splitting it into three sections. And so the first section, the first section is going to be about how we often feel tempted to think we don't have anything to give.

And that is we're just in survival mode. We're just trying to make it on our own. We don't have anything that we can give to anyone else. And so we're going to be looking at that tendency in verses 3 to 6. And second, we're going to be looking at how God breaks into that survivor mentality that we kind of get ourselves trapped into in verses 7 to 20.

And then in verses 21 to 32, we're going to look at how God's breaking into our world and breaking us out of just a survivor mentality should move us to generosity.

So first, reading from verse 3, and this is when David is coming home to a disaster. Verse 3 reads, And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters were taken captive.

David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive. And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.

[6:45] So to refresh your memory, if you're just coming in for the first week, last week Nick preached about this tricky situation that David found himself in. And the tricky situation that David found himself in was, he found himself living in his enemy's lands, he found himself living in Philistine lands, and so one of the things that he had to do to be able to live in those lands was he had to fight for the Philistines.

And so he finds himself across the battlefield from his own people, about to engage with the people he is supposedly supposed to be the king of. And so Nick looked at how God delivers him from this situation and this battlefield in the northernmost part of the nation of Israel.

And so in the intervening time, David has marched, he and his men, basically the entire length of the country, from the northernmost part to the southernmost part where he lives.

And so they're tired, they're expecting to come home, and they're expecting to be refreshed. But what do they find? Well, what we know as the readers, and we didn't read this in verses 1 and 2, but what we know is that the Amalekites, which are another people group living in the land, while David and his men were gone, raided and burned to the ground his home.

But David and his people don't know this, and this is one of the things that's valuable about splitting this. It's a long passage, but it's also helpful to split it up because it helps us to keep the narrative drama in place.

[8:09] David doesn't know who's done this. We know, but David doesn't know. And so David comes home, and he finds all of their families gone, taken captive.

He finds everything burned to the ground while they were out. And at this point in the story, we're not quite sure that the theme of the story is really generosity, right?

Because David is, David has come home to a burned home. He has come home when his entire family is gone, and so really David's just trying to survive.

He's trying to think about how can I save my family. Generosity should be the furthest from his mind. And I think we get stuck in this survival mode as well, as if we have nothing to give, and we're only trying to survive.

Now, I'm a big sports fan. If you name the sport, I like it. And one of the things I've noticed in strike after strike is a reporter will ask an athlete, you know, you make \$8 million a year, why are you going on strike?

[9:14] And the thing you hear over and over again, and this is a human response, not just a wealthy response, is that, well, you know, I've got to feed my family. And I always wanted to ask in a situation like that, like, what are you feeding your family that you need to have more money?

But I think we all get stuck in this. We get into this mentality of, I have to save for my kid's school, or I have to save for my retirement, or I have to save for a house, or I have to save for my kid's school, right?

Or I have to save for my kid to have enough money to start a business or start a job. It's this never-ending mentality. We never get out of it. You never really have enough.

We get stuck in a survival mode. In 2013, there were a number of films that came out that dealt with this basic human instinct of just surviving.

There was Captain Phillips, which was about a ship being kidnapped off the coast of Somalia, and Captain Phillips is stuck in this really drastic situation. And he's just really letting his instincts take over and trying to survive.

[10:24] That's all he's trying to do. Another one that came out that year was Gravity. And Gravity is a movie about, I don't remember the name of the character, so we'll go with Sandra Bullock. Sandra Bullock's floating around in space, and she's just trying to figure out how to get back to Earth, how to survive.

And the theme of these films, a common theme in the stories that we tell is that survival is the most basic human instinct.

Cormac McCarthy is a writer who has written many famous books. He's written No Country for Old Men, which was made into a film. He wrote The Road. And Cormac McCarthy has really explored this natural human instinct of survival, and how we really have this absolutely necessary urge just to survive, to keep ourselves alive, and how this often is really a tragic instinct.

But an interesting thing has happened in his thinking as he's written his books that you can track in the progression of the books, and that is that he's begun to ask the question, well, why survive?

And so in The Road, The Road is this post-apocalyptic book. It's this post-nuclear disaster sort of situation where the father and son are walking on a road, and it's a very minimalistic book.

[11:49] And they're just walking on a road and trying to survive. And so this father feels the pressure just to survive and to make sure that his son survives.

But what his son begins to realize as the story unfolds is his son begins to ask the question, well, again, why survive? And maybe it's worth, despite the risk, to try to reach out to these people that are on the periphery of their lives as potential threats.

And the son begins to realize, well, maybe it's worth the risk of not surviving to reach out to those around me. Survival cannot be the end game.

And so this is what we find in 1 Samuel 30, is that David still needs his men, and his men need him. And so in the second part of our story, as we come to it, God breaks in and intervenes in this nasty self-perpetuating cycle of just survival that we have as human beings.

God provides. Verse 8 and continuing. So David inquired of the Lord, shall I pursue after this band, that is the raiding party that has raided his family's home, and will I overtake them?

[13:05] God answered him, pursue, for you will overtake them, and shall surely rescue. So David sets out, and 600 men who were with him, and they come to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed.

David pursued, he and 400 men, but 200 stayed behind, the ones that were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor. And they found an Egyptian in the open country, and brought him to David, and they gave him bread, and he ate.

They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.

And David said to him, to whom do you belong, and where are you from? He said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago.

We made a raid against the Negev of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag, Ziklag is David's home, with fire. And David said to him, will you take me down to this band?

[14:14] And he said, swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down. And so skipping to the conclusion of this, in verse 18, David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives.

Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him.

Now that's a long section of text, but here's the most important thing. David asked God to help him, and so God does. But what God's provision looks like, and this is important because this is what God's provision looks like for in our lives, is a happenstance encounter with a foreigner in the wilderness.

Now 1 Samuel is a book filled with foreign places, and foreign people, and foreign names that we've never met. And so we can get into the tendency of beginning to feel like it's irrelevant, irrelevant, or too foreign, or abstract, or even unreal.

Our eyes can begin to glaze over as we read all these unknown details. But the point to take away here is that God is working in a real world, with real people, who have real needs like you and I.

[15:38] Now for a long time, many scholars thought that David was just a fabrication, that David was a fictional character made up in 1 and 2 Samuel. But in a dig in 1993 in Israel, archaeologists came across a small piece of pottery, and this was significant, but it may not seem significant to you.

They came across a small piece of pottery that said, from the house of Israel, from a king of Israel, from the house of David. And that's all that the inscription said, and the inscription has come to be called the Tell Dan inscription.

That's just where they found it. They found it in the city of Dan. And it was significant because what it was, was it was the first extra-biblical confirmation of 1 and 2 Samuel, that there was actually a real David.

And it was, there was a king of Israel that came from the house of David. And this was significant because it was from the family dynasty of David exactly when and where you would expect to find that piece of evidence if 1 Samuel was telling the truth about David.

That is, this story is a story about real people living in real life. And 1 Samuel is a story that is full of real facts, right?

[16:59] They find this Egyptian man, and they say what? They say that he was eating a cake of figs. They say he was eating two clusters of raisins. This was a real story.

And in this chance encounter with a real person, this is how God is providing for David. He provides him all the tactical information he needs to score a stunning victory.

And this is the way that God provides. God doesn't necessarily provide in our lives in a stunningly successful way like this. But how he does provide is he provides in concrete and human ways through relationships and people in specific places like at your home or your work or here at Trinity.

I have actually driven over the Wadi Basur, the Wadi Basur, and I say Wadi because Wadi is just a dry riverbed that fills up in the rain season.

And I have a map up here that you can look at. You probably won't be able to see it now. Now, the area that we're looking at today is here. And so you can come up after the service and look at this if you want.

[18:03] But I share this, not so you have a knowledge of where the particular things were happening, but just to show you that this is a satellite map from our time.

Okay? This is a map of our world. And these events that are talking about David are happening in real life in a place you can go to today. The other key thing we need to take away from this story about David's providential counter with the Egyptian is that God's people, us, are to be a people of charity.

Now, the Amalekites, when they stole from David, didn't kill his family, which might tempt us to think that, oh, these people are somewhat of a merciful people.

But we're disavowed of that tendency when we see David running into the Egyptian. This is an Egyptian who was a servant that was discarded. And so we learn that what the Amalekites want to do with the captives that they've taken, with David's family, is they want to use them as slaves.

And they want to use them as literally disposable commodities. But in the midst of David's desperate situation, right, in this desperate race to get his family to survive, they stop and they feed a stranger.

[19:26] Half the story is spent describing feeding a random Egyptian in the wilderness. They're generous. And because of that, God will bless them.

Now, I worked for six years with youth and I had a mentor there who had been on the job for 30 years. And so he taught me a lot. And he died suddenly from a heart attack in 2011.

But although I was several states away, I had to go to the funeral. I just had to go. I stopped doing what I was doing. I took days off work and I just went down to the funeral. And the thing that struck me about the funeral is that anyone I had ever seen working there was there.

There were people that came from much further away than me. People that came from California, Virginia, all over the country. And there were people that came from all aspects of the job.

There were ground crew and there were kitchen workers. There were temporary staff. There were full-time staff. Everyone came. There were several thousand people there. And they didn't come because he had a lot of money.

[20 : 43] They didn't come because, honestly, he was a visionary or particularly brilliant. They didn't come because he was the best man you had ever met. He could be impatient.

He could be gruff. He could be stubborn. But they came because he cared. He cared about everyone.

And at some point, he would always sit down with you and ask you, how are you doing? But he would do it in a way that he expected an answer. And he had space in his life for there to be an answer.

Which is to say he was generous. He shared the space of his life. And I don't know what that looks like for you.

Maybe it's committing to have someone over in the midst of your crazy week once a week for dinner and sharing the crazy space of your life with other people. Maybe it's going on a ride with Greg or participating in another one of the ministries here at Trinity that participates in the community.

[21 : 49] But put yourself in a place to be generous. And the first step towards that is knowing what the needs of the community are. You can't be generous before you know what your neighbor needs.

And my encouragement to you would be that being generous isn't an event. You don't go from being a not generous person to being a generous person. It takes a lifetime of small and faithful acts to be changed into the sort of person that has the character of generosity.

Back to our text. Another one of the questions we have to ask is so what about these Amalekites? Why does God seem to fixate so much on them?

This small group of people. We might be tempted to think that this is an ethnic thing. That God's for the Israelites but he's not for the Amalekites because they just happen to be a part of the wrong ethnic group.

But we know that can't be the case and we know that can't be the case because we find at the end of the chapter David inviting in many people who are not ethnic Israelites to be a part of the nation. You can look at that list at the end of the chapter which we won't be reading this evening.

[23 : 08] But David invites many different types of ethnic people to be part of the nation of Israel. So what's going on here? Why does Saul lose the kingdom over not finishing off the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15?

That's what happens. Saul is tasked with stopping the Amalekites from raiding Israel and he does. He defeats them in battle but instead of destroying their animals he takes them for himself.

And we can get the impression that God's being vindictive here. But here's where we have to look at the bigger story to understand what's going on. We first meet the Amalekites in Deuteronomy 25.

But rather than them being hospitable to pilgrims that are passing through that have need for food and water we find the Amalekites acting like lions.

That is they're waiting in the wings to pick off the weak and hungry in the tribe. And we find them doing the same thing over and over again in 1 Samuel to Saul and his people and so they've done the same thing to David and his home.

[24 : 22] And so this is what is so devastating about Saul's failure with the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15. Because Saul is as greedy as the Amalekites.

That is rather than affirming God's commitment to those who are weak and hungry and in most need of protection Saul looks out for himself. And so in defeating the Amalekites in this story in 1 Samuel 30 David is reaffirming God's commitment to the least of these.

Which is the same danger we find in our chapter. Verse 20 continues. David captured all the flocks and the herds and the people drove the livestock before him and said this is David's spoil.

This should be an uh-oh moment for us. Is David going to do what Saul did? Then David came to the 200 men who had been too exhausted to follow David into battle and had been left at the Brook Besor.

And they went out to meet David and to meet people who were with him. But when David came near to the people he greeted them. But all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone to battle with David said because they didn't go with us we will not give them anything that we earned in battle except give each man his wife and his children and let them leave.

[25 : 45] But David said you shall not do this my brothers with what the Lord has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us. Who would listen to you in this matter?

For as his share is who goes down into the battle so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They all share alike. And so David made a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.

And when David came to Ziklag he sent part of his spoil too to his friends. God gives to us so that we can give to others. When David and his men returned from the victory the ones who did the actual fighting say to those who were too tired after three days of marching they shouldn't get anything.

Give them their families but give them nothing else. Let them pack their bags and be on their way. Now we have to remember that these are the same men who wanted to stone David the day before.

But David does something really sad and he says no. No we're not going to do that. Because technically they all came out to the battlefield. Some were fighting but some were watching our gear.

[26 : 59] But they were all on the battlefield and so everyone shares equally. And so then also David from his own keep his own earnings which Saul before him was condemned for keeping.

David gives gifts to all the neighboring communities. And this is what that does. In giving to all the neighboring communities what David does is he allows safe passage for all of his men.

His men can come and go as they please without being harassed. This is the act of a good king. Of a person worth being a king. Now we do have to ask and I think it's fair to ask that David is a very savvy man.

And so we can ask is David doing this to maintain an army and expand his own influence and increase his own reputation? Absolutely. That is the motivation for all that he's doing in this chapter.

But what God's saying to us is that a good king is a generous king. As far back as chapter 8 Samuel had warned the people.

[28:06] The whole theme of 1 Samuel is about a king. And Samuel had warned the people. You're asking for a king. But when I give you a king this is what's going to happen. The king's going to get greedy.

And you're not going to be able to stop the king. And so the king's going to take whatever he wants from you. This is the fear we have of a king, isn't it? Can we trust someone who has power over us?

But here David is giving back. David is sacrificing for the sake of his people. Because in a damaged world people need a ruler who will sacrifice to knock us out of our orbit of only surviving to a place of being generous and caring for others.

Consider the jack pine tree. The jack pine tree is one of the most prolific trees in the world. It survives in exceedingly cold climates and in areas where other plant life can be decimated by forest fires.

Now the way it does that is its lowest branches fall down. So fires can't catch onto the lowest branches and eat up into the higher parts of the tree.

[29:16] And as its bark sheds the bark will burn so quickly that a fire can't build up enough heat and pace to make it into the higher limbs of a tree. But if a forest fire doesn't hit a jack pine area for a long period of time and so the bark falls and builds up and builds up and builds up at the base of the tree then when a forest fire comes the fire is hot enough to quickly leap up to the highest branches of the tree.

That is the tree will be burned and die. But an interesting thing happens when a forest fire actually does get a jack pine tree and that is that the pine cones of a jack pine will literally explode.

And they'll explode because the resin in a jack pine cone is highly flammable. And so the jack pine cone will explode when a forest fire finally gets a jack pine tree.

But inside that pine cone the cork keeps the jack pine seed safe up to 900 degrees Celsius. 900 degrees Celsius not Fahrenheit 900 degrees Celsius the cork will protect the seed after the cone explodes.

And so when the forest fire is done these seeds gently fall into the mineral rich wiped clean soil. What we learn from the jack pine tree is that in a world that burns the way to live fruitfully the way to live generously the way to give back for a head of grain or a jack pine cone or us is through sacrifice.

[31:02] And that's what we find in our king Christ doing for us. He comes into a burning world I'm sad to admit it but a burning world to a scared and defensive and angry people that's us.

And he exposes himself to our needs and pays the consequence the death that we the human race inflicted upon him. We stapled him to a tree.

We saw him gasp to his last breath and he endures all of that. He sacrifices for us because in a broken world sacrifice is the only thing that unlocks the seed of our generosity of moving us beyond this nasty cycle of just surviving in life.

We can give because God has given to us. And he's not given us his sloppy seconds. He's not given us what was left over from his plate. He's given us his very own son.

He's given us his very own life. Let's pray. Father God we have so much to be thankful for.

[32:11] We thank you for life. We thank you for the beauty of this world. we thank you for your sacrifice.

We thank you for your son. We thank you for your spirit. We thank you for faith. We thank you for hope. Most of all we thank you for love. All that we ask this evening is that you would continue to mold us small step by small step to people who are not afraid but people who are generous that to people who give out of a overflow of feeling full.

Father we're so thankful for all that you do for us. Mold us more into your image we pray. In the name of your son we pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.