

11. The Man fit to be King

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[0 : 00] Now, our Bible reading is to be found on page 252. We're going to read the last chapter of 1 Samuel, and then on into the first chapter of 2 Samuel.

And once again, since it's a long passage, we're going to divide the reading in two and have a hymn partway through. The Philistine armies have massed themselves against God's people, hoping to finish them off.

And this is where we start reading in chapter 31 of 1 Samuel. Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons. And the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers.

Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest those uncircumcised come and thrust me through and mistreat me. But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly.

[1 : 15] Therefore, Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him.

Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men on the same day together. And when the men of Israel were on the other side of the valley, and those beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled.

And the Philistines came and lived in them. The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.

So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to the houses of their idols and to their people.

They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and buried them and burned them there.

[2 : 38] And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days. Continuing on into chapter 1 of 2 Samuel, just over the page.

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've 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 Jonathan are also dead.

And David said to the young man who told him, How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead? The young man who told him said, By chance I happen to be on Mount Gilboa. And there was Saul leaning on his spear.

[3 : 46] And behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. When he looked behind him, he saw me and he called to me. And I answered, Here I am. He said to me, Who are you?

I answered him, I am an Amalekite. And he said to me, Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me. And yet my life still lingers. So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen.

And I took the crown that was on his head and the arm that was on his arm. And I 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.

David said to the young man who told him, Where do you come from? He answered, I am the son of a sojourner and Amalekite. David said to him, How is it you are not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?

[4 : 58] 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 this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son. And he said it should be taught to the people of Judah. Behold, it is written in the book of Jeshur.

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 Eshcolom. Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice. Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no Jew 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.

[6 : 07] 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? Your love to me was extraordinary.

Surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen. And the weapons of war perished.

[7 : 12] Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now, we have our Bibles open, please. At 1 Samuel 31. And let's have a moment of prayer. Father, we believe you have things to say to us.

Things of eternal significance. Handed down in your word throughout the centuries. But remaining fresh and remaining true. To this very day, indeed to all eternity.

Help us now as we open your word. Help us to listen to it with all our hearts and our minds. And we pray as it work upon our will. So that day by day we will become more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

In whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. In an old graveyard in a small village on the east coast of Scotland, where I come from, there is one particular very old grave, which is a very poignant and a very pointed inscription.

It simply says this. Oh, Adam, what have you done? Oh, Adam, what have you done? And looking around at that scene of death and of desolation and of decay, we realize that this is representing the whole great canyon of human anguish that flowed from the sin of Adam and brought death into the world.

[8 : 52] By one man, sin entered into the world and death by sin. And the passages we have read are dominated by death. Because it's not just the death of the long dead individual who is buried underneath that gravestone.

It's the whole of human death. The fact that death stands at the end of all our hopes, all our aspirations. It impresses on us our vulnerability and makes us feel insecure.

Strangers and afraid in a world we never made, as a contemporary poet has it. It is a dark chapter. We have, first of all, the sad end of Saul, predicted in chapter 28.

But even greater pathos of the death of Jonathan, the Philistines, verse 2 of 31, overtook Saul and his sons and the Philistines struck down Jonathan, that wonderful, self-unselfish man, David's great friend, the Philistines struck him down.

It's a grim fulfilling of the word of God. The word of God spoken through Samuel back in chapter 28, where the prophet Samuel says to Saul, Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.

[10 : 10] And notice once again, as we've seen all through the story, the Philistines are challenging Israel's God. You would have thought they have learned by now, but they obviously don't. Verse 10,

they put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, temple of one of their gods.

In order to show they had defeated not only Israel, but Israel's God, because that was the thought in the ancient world. If you defeated a people, you defeated their gods as well.

But there's a beautiful little touch at the end of the chapter. The people of Jabesh Gilead. Now, if you go back to 1 Samuel chapter 11, we won't look it up just now, but you'll find that in his younger and better days, Saul had rescued these people from a dreadful fate.

When the Ammonites came against them, Saul had rescued them, and they hadn't forgotten this. So they took the bones, and they gave them a decent burial. So the sad end of Saul.

Indeed, the sad end to 1 Samuel. 1 Samuel has been a book with one disappointment after another. First of all, the priest Eli, and his ineptitude at the beginning of the book.

[11:21] Then Saul, beginning with promise and ending with tragedy. And then, of course, the call of David. But there's been little sign that David is the true king.

But what's happening here, I think, in this chapter, as we've read, is that David is emerging as the man fit to be king. That's our subject tonight.

The man fit to be king. The man who truly points to the greater one. Hail to the Lord's anointed. Great David's greater son.

And that's why I wanted to read this chapter, just to carry on the story. But you look now at chapter 1 of 2 Samuel. Because there is a problem here.

In 1 Samuel 31, we are told that Saul fell on his sword, and his armor bearer did so as well. And here now, we have this Amalekite, who comes to David's camp, and said, Oh, actually, I killed Saul.

[12:26] I killed him, and I took the crown, verse 10, that was on his head, the armlet on his arm, and I brought them here to my Lord. How are we going to reconcile these two?

Now, I want to suggest to you that this Amalekite, among other things, is a liar. Because his story just does not ring true. Verse 6, The young man, By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him.

Now, if Amalekite had been there, almost certainly, he would have been killed as well. You see what he's doing? He is trying to ingratiate himself with David.

King is dead. Long live the king. That's his view. He's trying to ingratiate himself with David by saying, I killed the Lord's anointed. How does David react?

This is one of the ways that shows that David is the man fit to be king. The man, the true Lord's anointed. Because David himself had had many opportunities to kill Saul, and he refused to kill Saul.

[13:36] He refused to kill him because he is the Lord's anointed. We'll come back to that in a little bit. But this man here is horrified that, as he says in verse 14, how is it that you are not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?

Don't come ingratiating yourself with me, says David. You have done a truly dreadful thing, and you'll be judged for it. So that's the kind of background here to this great poem, this tremendous poem, this song that David writes.

Now this is reflective grief. This pours out of his heart, and no doubt at a later stage he composed it into this poem. These are tears of real sorrow.

There is real pain here. Human pain. Now it's not a seminar on grief. David isn't telling us what to do in grief.

There are things to learn, but David is doing something far more important. David here, the sweet psalmist of Israel, the Lord's anointed, is showing us his heart.

[14:45] This is the kind of man that the Lord has called to the throne. So let's look at this great poem then, verses 17 to 27.

The Old Testament is continually breaking into song. Not just, of course, the 150 Psalms, but the over and over again. There are songs, as does the New Testament as well.

Continually breaking into song, putting praise and worship into language that can help others. The first thing I want to say is this. David is showing us how to interpret these events.

How to interpret what has happened. You notice it's not simply a song to express his own feelings, although it does that. David lamented with this lamentation.

Somewhat clumsy phrase in English, but what it means is this is a powerful lamentation that comes right from the depths of David's heart.

[15 : 44] These are not crocodile tears. David is grieving and grieving deeply. But it was also to be taught, he said it should be taught, to the people of Judah.

However, this is not only praise, it's also instruction and interpretation. That's why what we sing is so important, because so many people get their theology from hymns and songs.

And it's so important that what we sing is good and worthy stuff of all ages. It's not something that's confined to one generation of the church.

There are great hymns from all generations, and there's also a lot of rubbish from all generations as well. It would have to be said. But if you study the hymns of Charles Wesley, for example, you'll discover just how much deep and profound teaching there is in them.

And this pointing forward to a later song, which we'll come to at the end of David's story, in 2 Samuel 23, the last words of David when he talks about his kingship, when he talks about what it means to rule over people justly.

[16 : 54] Instruction and interpretation. Interpreting the events and drawing lessons from them. And it is also an echo of an earlier song, Deuteronomy 31, 19.

The Lord tells Moses, now therefore, write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. There it is a recall to priorities.

Moses says, Moses is setting before the people life and death and urging them to choose life. Urging them to choose blessing and not cursing. And here, David wants these moments to be preserved.

He wants them to be part of, if you like, the hymnody of ancient Israel. Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places.

The glory here is probably the faithful Jonathan who had surrendered his position in order to make way for David.

[17 : 57] And this phrase, how the mighty are fallen, you notice how this is repeated three times. Ultimately, the kingdom is not going to come by war and fighting. How the mighty are fallen.

Tell it not in Gath. Now, David, of course, realizes there will be gloating in Gath. Probably in Gath they're already singing, glory be to Dagon and Ashtaroth and so on.

Not knowing what's waiting for them in the next few chapters. Indeed, the very landscape, the mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings.

You see, what's happening here? David is saying this is all tied up with the big story of God's people. This is not just a minor defeat.

God is still in charge. Grief needs a voice. Give grief a voice because if we don't give grief a voice, we'll simply bottle it up and it will explode at some time.

[19 : 03] It's not just a border raid. It concerns the Lord and his people. Big questions raised here, like in the Lament Psalms, why, O Lord?

How long, O Lord? Some of these Lament Psalms coming from times of defeat, times of depression. So, David is writing this to instruct the people, not just to express his feelings, which he does powerfully and beautifully.

A sweet psalmist of Israel, the great poet here, written in the book of Jasher, the book of the upright. We don't know what this book was. It's obviously perished long ago, but it was possibly a collection of poems like this, perhaps even the Song of Moses, not the one I mentioned, but the one at the victory over the Red Sea, the Lord is a warrior.

So, that's the first thing. This is a poem that is written to give grief a voice. This is a poem written to give people instruction. And it's written in this form, which people could memorize, which people could sing and therefore learn and become part of their whole worship.

Secondly, David is showing integrity as he writes this poem. Remember the general theme, the man who is fit to be king.

[20 : 24] The man who is fit to be king interprets the events for the people whom he's about to become king over. He also shows integrity. integrity. Now, it's always a rather embarrassing thing when somebody dies and somebody whom we know not to have been fond of them, not to have any respect for them, praises them extravagantly.

Over-exaggerated tributes to people whom we know the person giving the tribute did not admire or love. Now, of course, we don't speak evil of the dead, but it's important to see what David is doing here.

Saul had harried and hindered David. Saul had done everything he could to prevent him getting to the throne. It would have been dreadful if David had said how Saul had been so kind to him, how Saul had been so helpful to him, how Saul had tried to smooth his path to the throne.

That would have been a total lack of integrity. The point is, Saul is not just an individual here. Saul is the Lord's anointed.

The Lord's anointed, tragically fallen, tragically fallen away from the promise. He's dead. And that's something you need to grieve over. He's not gloating over an enemy.

[21 : 54] This is grieving. It's an old army saying, praise the uniform, not the wearer. If you like, David is praising the uniform here.

He's praising the Lord's anointed, not the particular individual, because there are going to be many, many lords anointed, as the story goes on, who are anything but a credit to that.

Also, of course, he is the father of Jonathan. We'll come back to Jonathan. Father of his great friend. There's no cringe factor here. David is honest and forgiving.

He doesn't blacken Saul. He doesn't denigrate Saul. He doesn't do him down. Nor does he extravagantly overpraise him. This is a wonderful example of how to interpret events with integrity, if you like.

Saul, the Lord's anointed, has gone. That is dreadful. That is not something to celebrate. That is something to mourn. The mighty have fallen. And of course, his deep and intense sorrow for Jonathan.

[23 : 07] Verse 26, I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. Very pleasant have you been to me. Your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women.

Now, note, I have to say this, although it's hardly necessary to say it, there is absolutely nothing here of homosexuality.

When he says your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. Now, it's a total misunderstanding of the passage. The point has nothing to do with sex, it's to do with faithfulness.

Jonathan had stood down from the kingdom. His loyalty was totally staggering. In fact, the friendship of David and Jonathan is one of the bright threads that run through this story.

would that there were more friendships like that. Friendships that make no demands. Friendship in which there's no pretense. Friendship in which people value each other and don't do them down, don't try to take advantage of them.

[24 : 17] It was Jonathan, remember, those of you who were here this morning, who strengthened David's hand in the Lord. It was Jonathan who had kept David going many times and David's faith was wavering.

That's why David is so distressed. I am distressed. Very, very strong word, stronger in Hebrew than in English. David is, I'm heartbroken for you, Jonathan.

I've never known loyalty like you have shown to me. I've never known such unselfish love. Jonathan was a man certainly who laid down his life for his friend.

And that's a great, I think, lesson and challenge to us. So, David's, this great poem shows integrity. It's a poem of instruction, a poem that helps us to grieve and teaches us the meaning of the events. It's a poem written with great integrity and deep feeling. But thirdly, in this poem, David insists on the Lord's honour. Now, many commentators say there is no theology in the song.

[25 : 27] Now, there's no overt theology, there's no doctrine, so to speak, that lies at the surface. We've so often seen in the David story that if you look just below the surface, it's not just a story of a man grieving for his friend, there is the undercurrent, an intense undercurrent, of David's concern for the Lord's honour.

And we need to see this in the context of David's whole story. David is at a turning point. One point, one stage in his life is ending.

The stage of rejection, the stage of the wilderness wanderings, the stage of persecution by Saul, that's gone. And something else is about to begin. I want you to notice one or two things.

Verse 20, go back to verse 20, tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Eshcolon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

Now, so often in narrative, you get those little details that shed light on what's actually happening.

This word uncircumcised is a covenant word. This is a word about God and his commitment to his people.

[26 : 43] Back at the beginning of the story of David's rise to power in 1736, David says this, who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he defies the armies of the living God?

You see the point that's being made? The covenant people of God are under threat. The covenant people of God are being derided. Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?

And who are the daughters of the uncircumcised to exult like this? They don't know what they're doing. They're laughing and jesting. What has actually happened is the Lord's anointed has been killed.

Christ's name has been deeply dishonoured. His people have been mocked. There's a real principle here. When Paul visited Athens, we are told that his spirit was deeply moved to see the whole city given over to idolatry.

No doubt many of the statues of Athena and the other Greek gods and goddesses were beautiful. But all that Paul could see there was the dishonour to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 00] That's why he preaches to them Jesus and the resurrection. The unknown God, he says, that you worship. I know his name. And he is going to be the judge. There's something of that here.

And I felt something of this a week or two ago when I visited the Metropolitan Museum in New York and went round the Egyptian rooms. These massive, impressive, impressive statues and reconstructions of tombs.

The great pharaohs, Remezes and others, their sarcophagi. And I'll tell you two names that were not mentioned there. Joseph and Moses.

The two names that really matter. It wasn't just Pharaoh who forgot Joseph. The Metropolitan Museum had forgotten him as well. And they had forgotten Moses. We all dishonour to the name of the Lord.

The same thing, sadly, has happened in the British Museum with the Assyrian rooms, the displays being changed and so on to remove all the biblical references as far as possible.

[29 : 03] Now, these are simply examples, but the name of Christ so deeply dishonoured and, of course, in our own church. When the name of Christ is so deeply dishonoured, when what he calls sinful is called holy, when he commands in his word is simply set aside because we know better, there's a deep, deep concern for the honour of the Lord.

Restore, O Lord, the honour of your name. So, that's one thing. The other thing is this. As David grieves, as David speaks these inspired words, we can hear the echo, or we can hear the anticipation of another grief.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem as he, how often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens, but you would not. Hear the Lord's own grief, the grief at the dishonour to his name. Just as Jesus wept over the grave of Lazarus. And once again, not only I believe weeping for the death of Lazarus, but weeping for the whole tragedy of human death, that black ogre that stalks human history.

O Adam, what have you done? David is no unconcerned bystander, because his greater son is no unconcerned bystander.

[30 : 32] The grief here is the tears, the grief of the Lord as his heart breaks. How often would I have gathered you, but you would not.

This is no gloating over a fallen enemy. This is a passionate desire for the honour of the Lord's name and for the preservation of his people.

So you see, David is not simply self-indulgently writing this beautiful poem. It is a beautiful poem. The imagery is magnificent. The language is vivid.

Nobody learns the Bible off by heart nowadays, unfortunately. It would be any harm learning this off by heart. But more than the beautiful language and the poignant imagery, there is the fact this is instruction.

God is teaching us how to handle grief. The king has gone. The king is dead. He's been rejected. But the new king is emerging.

[31 : 37] David's integrity, particularly in his refusal to blacken Saul, but in his passionate and moving tribute to Jonathan.

And above all, his concern for the Lord's honour. A new era is about to dawn, although as we'll see, there are still enemies and still problems that are to meet David on his journey to the throne.

The Lord of the years, of whom we'll sing in a few moments, is working out his purpose. And all is ready now for David to be crowned as the Lord's anointed and point to that greater one who is to

