

The Life of David (5): Saul's spiritual self-destruction & God's saving power

NOTE: • Sean to lead • Dan to preach

PHIL & BAND TO PLAY

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION • We are back online after last week • Guest/visitors/Sunday club
• Housekeeping • Crafts at the front & space for wee ones to move

CALL TO WORSHIP: With our life of David sermon series, each week we are sharing in song or in verse something that David wrote in the Psalms. This helps us to get to know David *and* God better.

Psalm 119:105 **Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.**

SONG 1: Your word is a lamp unto my feet

ALL-AGE: something from SU camp

NOTICES 1: • Rachel's summer programme - encouraging people to share it online, take fliers, invite their neighbours. Highlighting the summer games night on 25 July 5-7pm (there will be a slide) and asking for people to help with games and someone to take a lead as BBQ chef.

• In order to help us with our Bible reading and understanding, each Sunday morning during the summer, we will be watching a short video from the Bible Project. The videos form the *How to read the Bible* series. This series can be found on <https://bibleproject.com/videos/collections/how-to-read-the-bible/>. If you have questions about the how we got the Bible and why it can be trusted – good and join the club! Questions are good - Jesus encourages them. As well as recommending the Alpha Course, Dan/we are recommending: *Why Trust the Bible – Answers to 10 Tough Questions* by Amy Orr-Ewing and *Scribes & Scripture – the Amazing story of how we got the Bible* by John Meade and Peter Gurry. Copies are down here at the front if you want a look. The main reason for reading the Bible is because it points to and helps us to meet with Jesus.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE (1): *What is the Bible?* by the Bible project <https://bibleproject.com/videos/what-is-bible/>

SONG 2: We want to see Jesus lifted High **MP**

Sunday Club lead by the Peaches

SONG 3: Grace **Citylight**

SONG 4: When I survey the wondrous Cross **CH4**

NOTICES 2: • Monday Club this Mon in the STCafe • Alan Campbell coming to preach next Sun Morn

**PRAYER OF ADORATION, CONFESSION, THANKSGIVING & SUPPLICATION
& THE LORD'S PRAYER**

SONG 5: I to the hills (Psalm 121) **CH4**

BIBLE READING: 1 Samuel 18:6-16; 19:10-11 & 18-24

SERMON: Life of David (5): Saul's spiritual self-destruction

SONG 6: At the name of Jesus

PRAYER, BENEDICTION, OFFER OF PRAYER MINISTRY & QUIZ OVER TEA & COFFEE

PHIL & BAND TO PLAY

SERMON INTRO: The Life of David (5)
Saul's spiritual self-destruction & God's saving grace

Today, we continue our Life of David sermon series taken from the Old Testament Books of 1st and 2nd Samuel. Here's some scene setting and a short summary of where we're up to!...

God chose Israel and loved them. In Deuteronomy chapter 7 verse 7 we are told that this is not because Abraham or Israel was particularly great or faithful but because God was and is. God called Israel to...

...be distinctively His (holy)

...reflect His goodness, love, ways, truth and life to the other nations

...be a blessing to the world and

...to live in a way that pointed all people to Him.

By the time we meet David, dysfunctional, tribal Israel, has looked at neighbouring nations and decided that they want...a king just like the other nations, so they could be a nation - just like the others!

And the Prophet Samuel is gutted. In 1st Samuel Chapter 8 we read this...

⁷ And the Lord told Samuel: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

¹⁰ Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. And Samuel tells them that a king will demand: their sons to serve in the army and to farm, their daughters to attend to him. Samuel tells the people that a King will take and use and tax and enslave.

¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

²¹ When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. ²² The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king."

The tribes/Israel were more interested in looking the part (as a nation) and a king who looked the part (tall and strong) than looking at their motives and trusting in God. Saul was an ungodly man who made an un-kingly king but he did look the part!

God in His wisdom and sovereignty says...*OK I'm going to give you what you want.* What we see here, is that God respects us humans (the ones he makes in His image) enough to give us real choice. God respects our choice making and allows us to see how that goes. Is getting what you want a good thing? Is getting everything that you want a good thing?

This is something that C.S. Lewis in his Chronicles of Narnia book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* explores. In the book, he describes an island where people who discover it get their hearts' desires. The sailors have heard rumour of this magical island and imagine it to be filled with all kinds of wonderful delights that will satisfy their deepest desires! On their voyage, those sailing on the Dawn Treader, amazingly find this island! And the island turns out to be...not heaven but the worst kind of hellish-nightmare to be escaped from. Because (and this is the point C.S. Lewis is trying to make) the desires of the human heart are fickle and flawed. We do not always want what is right or good or true or beautiful. In fact we are drawn to the opposite. In the story and in reality, human desires are revealed to be unreliable, unhealthy, self-centred and tend towards rejecting God as king and making ourselves the King of the Castle. Which as the nursery rhyme sagely recognises exalts us and makes everyone else (God included) dirty wee rascals.

The Christian world view, I think, is the most realistic of all world views, religions and philosophies and makes best sense of the beauty and brokenness of the world and humanity.

For example, the Christian world view recognises and takes seriously:

...the beauty of creation and that it is **good** (Genesis 1)

...the beauty, value, uniqueness, **very goodness** of humans who are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:31) And our capacity for incredible creativity and kindness.

The Christian world view also recognises, makes best sense of and takes seriously:

...that all is not well in the world

...that evil exists not just out there in *them* or in *those* structures but in every human heart including mine.

...that all of us choose to act on selfish impulses and desires, choose to set ourselves up in competition with each other and rebel against God. The natural prayer of the human heart/our heart is not '*Hallowed by Your name, Your*

Kingdom come, You will be done on earth as it is in heaven' it is 'Hallowed be my name, my kingdom come, my will on earth be done.'

In the Life of David story, it's not just Israel that rejects God, it is King Saul. King Saul stands head and shoulders above everyone and looks the part but over and over and over he rejects God and goes his own way not God's. In Saul's heart of hearts, he believes more and more... *'I'm the King of the Castle and you're the dirty wee rascal.'*

In Chapter 15 verse 11 we read God saying this to Prophet Samuel...¹¹ **"I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."**

In Chapter 16 we read that God rejects Saul as king, chooses David and his descendants to rule, and prophet Samuel anoints David. Had Saul yielded to God's word on this and God's ways things would have been so different. But Saul is not willing to submit to God, he is not willing to give up his kingship and the privileges and the identity in which he gets his value, standing and worth. In the story this sits in stark contrast to his son Jonathan.

Jonathan's response to David killing Goliath and David himself was...

- ...to see David as God's chosen king
- ...to lay down his 'rights' as the prince and king in waiting
- ...giving him his royal robes and the prince's sword
- ...to love and honour and serve David
- ...to commit/covenant himself to David.
- ...to go with the Spirit of God and the word of God that David was to be king and through him and his descendants deliverance would come.

Saul's response to David killing Goliath and to David himself was...

- ...to think of David as a threat and a curse rather than a blessing
- ...to see David as an enemy not a friend
- ...to be envious
- ...to go against the Spirit of God and the word of God and to hold onto what he felt entitled to.

Saul says 'No' to God and 'Me and my ways not you and yours' over and over and over again. And eventually God says *ok I will withdraw from you as you wish* and God withdraws his presence and Spirit. Let me suggest, that saying 'no' to the source of love and light and life *'depart from me'* is not a good idea.

Let's think about this for a moment. Walking away from...

...love leads you to...hate!

...light leads you into....darkness.

...life leads you to...death!

Walking away from the One who brings order and peace leads you into chaos and conflict. Think about that trajectory into eternity!

Saying 'no' to God's Holy Spirit invites all kinds of other unholy ones. I think this is a helpful way to read the parts that say that God sends an injurious/harmful/evil spirit on Saul. It's a natural consequence. In the story we read that God eventually says *'Ok Saul I'll respect your repeated request, I'll withdraw my presence and my Spirit - let's see how that goes.'*

BIBLE: 1 Samuel 18:6-16; 19:10-11 & 18-24

18⁶ When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lyres. ⁷ As they danced, they sang: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.'

⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?' ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a close eye [Lit. fault finding/envious eye] on David.

¹⁰ The next day an evil [injurious] spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹ and he hurled it, saying to himself, 'I'll pin David to the wall.' But David eluded him twice.

¹² Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had departed from Saul. ¹³ So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. ¹⁴ In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns...

[again]... **19¹⁰ Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape.**

¹¹ Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But

Michal, David's wife, warned him, 'If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed.'

¹⁸ When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. ¹⁹ Word came to Saul: 'David is in Naioth at Ramah'; ²⁰ so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came on Saul's men, and they also prophesied. ²¹ Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. ²² Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Seku. And he asked, 'Where are Samuel and David?'

'Over in Naioth at Ramah,' they said.

²³ So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. ²⁴ He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'

Here, I'd like to credit the late Tim Keller for his insight into this passage. Keller helpfully points out that Saul's downward spiral into spiritual self-destruction has three stages.

Stage 1: Envy

Stage 2: Slavery

Stage 3: Blasphemy

Stage 1: Envy

We are told...⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?' ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David. Literally he put on a jealous eye/holds an envious eye on David!

Jealousy/envy isn't that bad, is it?

It can be easy to dismiss but at the same time recognition of its destructive power is widespread. Shakespear certainly onto something when he coined the phrase *the green-eyed monster* in his play Othello.

What does Scripture say about envy?

In Isaiah chapter 26 we are told that it was Satan's envy/jealousy that got him kicked out of heaven.

In James (in the New Testament) chapter 3 we are told this...

¹⁴ But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

This is what we read in the NT from 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 4...

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Envy distorts our perception and it turns out is like cancer to love and wisdom. Love and wisdom are heavenly.

Envy is the doorway to all kinds of hellish awfulness.

Envy was rooted in Saul's sense of entitlement and self-pity, and it is rooted in ours.

Have you heard the verse from Romans 12:15? It goes like this...**rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.** Tim Keller explains that envy is the opposite of that. Envy causes you to rejoice when people weep and causes you to weep when others rejoice because envy makes everything about you! The thinking and feeling goes something like this...

They are rejoicing because of that good thing. That makes me want to weep because that good thing should have happened to me, that should be me rejoicing...I deserve that...they don't!

They are weeping because of that sad or difficult thing. Well, that makes me feel better because I've had to endure this thing and that thing. They are much more deserving of that comeuppance, consequence, difficulty, trial, loss and pain than me. I deserve to be spared but they shouldn't. Them going down into the depths

and being humbled/put in their place/getting a taste of what it's really like, lifts my spirits and makes me feel better about myself.

I wonder if you recognise this green-eyed monster rearing its ugly head in you?

I know I do. I like to pretend I don't, but I do. You see, Keller explains...

Envy makes what happens to others all about you - their promotion, their success, their joy, them being chosen, their new house or car becomes about you. For Saul, whatever happens to David is really about what happens to Saul!

In the story, in the passage Saul's envy of David grows and grows. I wonder if you have a David or a family or a dynasty that you are jealous/envious of?

God help me! God help us!

So, how does God help? What is the antidote to this kind of poison?

The answer isn't Saul. He doesn't have it in him to save himself.

The answer, it turns out, isn't King David. He wasn't able to 'save' Israel or himself.

The answer is...Jesus and that is good news literally the Gospel!

Jesus, the most worthy, titled and legitimately entitled person because he is God, the King of Kings and the only one who lived the perfect life, lays this down by becoming one of us.

Jesus the only begotten Son of God, the one true rightful heir, doesn't grasp his privileged status as the only child of God. Jesus wants us to share in being a beloved child of God.

Jesus who lived the life we cannot live, dies the death that we deserve on cross so that we can be forgiven and befriended and brought home to God.

Jesus deserves everything. We deserve nothing, yet Jesus on the cross gives us his all!

Jesus rejoices in us not getting what we deserve – punishment for our self-centred, destructive, *'I'm the king of the castle you're the dirty wee rascal'* ways.

Jesus rejoices in giving us what we don't deserve and cannot – that is the love and forgiveness and friendship of God and eternal life with him.

Jesus rejoices in us becoming co-heirs and brothers and sister, beloved blood bought sons and daughters of the Most High God when we've done nothing to deserve it.

Romans chapter 6 verse 3 **For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Jesus lays down his rights and his life to take our punishment and place - all who die with Christ rise with him. This is mercy and grace!

If we know that we are loved, saved, forgiven, befriended, brought into the family because of Jesus' goodness and saving work, it works against any sense of superiority and entitlement and gives both barrels to the green-eyed monster. Lord Jesus save us from jealousy and envy – Lord dig it out and keep digging that poisonous root we pray.

Stage 1: Envy

Stage 2: Slavery

In 1st Samuel chapters 18 and 19, Saul begins by trying to bring David down in secret, in private, in the darkness of his thinking and desires.

18⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?' ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

Saul then goes from internally longing to destroy David to trying externally. He does in his own four walls by hurling a spear at David! You might be thinking *well, I've never done that, I'd never do that*. Maybe, but here's a follow up question - Do I ever throw a verbal spear out of envy, hoping to inflict pain on someone I'm jealous of? Do I do this in my thought life or in the four walls of my house?

Saul goes from internal plotting to external plotting to involving others in his plot. This is first of all done subtly, in secret, under the radar, but the hope is for public humiliation and the person's downfall. Saul sends David out on harder and harder military missions hoping that David would be killed but he's not.

Then Saul goes public about his intention to kill David. Firstly he tells Jonathan and then his attendants. (19:1) Then Saul then enlists men to watch for David at his house and kill him in the morning. But he escapes. Again, maybe like me you're thinking – *We'll I've never been involved in an assassination!* Maybe not. But here's another question worth reflecting on...have you ever, have I ever sought to assassinate someone's character or been recruited by anyone for character assassination? In person? Online?

The message of the passage, the Bible and from God is, "Beware!" There is a destructive and downward spiral when it comes to envy.

In the passage Saul ends up sending a team to David's home to kill him and he is willing to do it in front of his daughter who is married to David. Any sense of

pretence is well and truly gone - Saul's heart is revealed. What we find is that Saul is now enslaved by his envy. In the beginning Saul was in control of his envy but now he is mastered by it, and it is rooted in his idol.

The thing we are jealous of or jealous for has a way of taking God's place. Whatever this thing/this Idol is, it will not/cannot give us what we deep down are looking for and need. It will crumble under the weight of our emotional demands, or they will withdraw because the emotional demands are too much to bear. Not only can this idol not save us, it will end up destroying us.

Tim Keller puts it like this... *Jonathan gave up the kingship because God said so. He bowed before God and because he gave up the kingdom, he became more and more noble, kingly and heroic. Saul refused to give up the Kingship and because he refused to give up the kingship, because he put kingship before God he became [less and less kingly and] more and more cowardly, envious, spiteful and a laughingstock.*

We go from **Stage 1: Envy** to **Stage 2: Slavery** to

Stage 3: Blasphemy

Again, thank you Tim Keller.

Do you, do I allow the word of God to contradict me/us?

Are we prepared to submit to the parts we don't want to hear?

Are we prepared to say *Lord, I am not the king of the castle but you are?*

Saul wouldn't submit to the word of God.

In the passage Saul is confronted by the word of God spoken through the Prophets. And he blasphemes – that is he sets himself up in direct opposition to God. The word of God spoken is “*David is king.*” Saul defies God and his word and sends his soldiers to Naioth at Ramah to kill David. However, the soldiers come across the prophets and Prophet Samuel prophesying – the word of God.

¹⁹ ...But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came on Saul's men, and they also prophesied. This happens to the first group of soldiers that Saul sends and the second and the third. The first set, second set and third set are floored by the word of God and the Spirit of God coming together. They cannot stand against the word of God. They end up acknowledging it and prophesying it.

What does Saul do when he hears this? He goes himself to kill David. And what happens? Saul who is dead set against David and God is felled and humbled by the word and Spirit of God. **²³ So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to**

Naioth. ²⁴ He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'

Saul cannot stand against the word of God. He is laid bare before the Lord God Almighty as we are and will be.

We read this in Isaiah Chapter 40

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out."

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,

and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,

because the breath of the Lord blows on them.

Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,

but the word of our God endures forever."

Are you, am I willing to be contradicted by the word of God?

Are you, am I willing to repent from our *I'm the king of the castle-ness*?

Are you, am I willing to lay down our sense of entitlement?

Are we willing to yield before our maker and saviour and call him Lord?

When our time comes to meet our Maker and Saviour will we bow as a friend in love and adoration of God like Jonathan? Or we will bow as an enemy, felled by God's holiness like Saul.

Because at the name of Jesus every knee will bow.

I pray that it is as a friend.

Do you know that God wants you as a friend?

That's why the source of love and life and light came.

Do you know that he is as kind and compassionate as he is beautiful and glorious, as he is gracious and merciful, as he is holy, righteous, perfect and pure.

This King came to live the life Saul and David and you and I cannot live.

This King came to die for us and comes to save us.

This King Jesus delights in extending grace and mercy.

He rejoices in mercy and grace and all who would come to him into his family.

Jesus can be trusted and in giving our life to him we will not lose it but gain it.

SONG 6: At the name of Jesus

PRAYER, BENEDICTION, OFFER OF PRAYER MINISTRY & QUIZ OVER TEA & COFFEE

PHIL & BAND TO PLAY