

Love, High Esteem, and Fearful Awe
1 Samuel 18
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Introduction

Have you ever sent a message to the wrong person? I was texting with a couple from church about something church-related one time. It was during a Steelers game and I was also texting with my brother and my dad about the game. Sure enough, I sent the wrong text to the couple - "they really have to score here, can't settle for a field goal," which bewildered them for a minute as they tried to decipher how that could possibly relate to the church situation we were discussing. I've been on the other end of those as well. One time a guy in the church who was still relatively new thought that he was texting a different Dave D and used some crude language, and then was mortified when he realized his mistake. Another time, one of the single women on our music team had just started dating a guy and sent me a message, "Honey, we need to get there early so we can walk in together." I wrote back and asked, "You sure you have the right person?" All she wrote back was, "Awkward!"

It's easy to send a message to someone you did not intend to receive it. In our sermon text today, there was a message that all of Israel was chanting in the streets that went to the wrong person. The crowds were celebrating after David's victory over Goliath, wanting to praise him and honor his military skill, so their women composed a song: "*Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.*" It was an honest celebration of that victorious moment, but the king heard a very different message in it than just wanting to honor Israel's new warrior. Jealousy reared its ugly head, convincing Saul to turn against David. Even as the nation as a whole and Saul's own family loved Jesse's youngest son, Saul chose anger and hatred. As we work through this chapter, we'll see the strengthening of David's family ties to the royal family, even as Saul plotted to kill him.

Some of you know that my twin brother's name is Jonathan, but you may not know that my parents named us David and Jonathan in the hopes that we would be best friends like the Biblical men were. Our first five verses see the beginning of this strong relationship:

I. Jonathan's Friendship (vv. 1-5)

¹As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ²And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. ³Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

We read six times in this chapter that someone or some group loved David, and the first time is the king's own son, Jonathan, who, verse 1 says, loved David "*as his own soul.*" Jonathan could have felt threatened and been jealous of David's military success like his dad was. In fact, he had been Israel's deliverer a few chapters before, and it would have been easy to resent David being the new hero. He could have been looking to at least discredit David, if not kill him, so that his future throne would be secure. But he chose to become very close friends with the young shepherd warrior. And even though we'll see that David was hugely popular in Israel, he was about to enter into a season of trials where he would need a close friend to help him through. Jonathan made a covenant with David, strengthening their friendship in a formal way, looking to reassure David that he really was

for him, no matter what, that David could count on this alliance. A covenant was more than just a verbal agreement or a vague promise, it was a formal ceremony that carried blessings and curses if one party betrayed the other. It involved cutting an animal into two halves, with both parties walking between the halves (see Genesis 15). This was to say, “may I be slain in two if I break this covenant.” Then Jonathan giving David his robe, armor, sword, bow, and belt were part of sealing the covenant. It wasn’t just a thoughtful gift – this was a visual renouncing of Jonathan’s own right to succession to the crown and giving David his royal blessing.¹

There has been much modern-day speculation that the author of 1 Samuel was implying that Jonathan and David had a sexual relationship, which seems to me to be completely unwarranted. Jonathan and David decided to be very close friends; they would both be married to women, there is just no reason to force that on this text, even when David would say after Jonathan’s death “*your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women.*” We call that anachronism – forcing modern views into history. Not that homosexuality didn’t exist back then, but it’s assuming that two men who loved one another could only express that in a sexual way. Which completely misses the point and the plot of David’s life and defiles the beautiful gift of friendship that Jonathan offered. Eugene Peterson comments that,

“Friendship is a much underestimated aspect of spirituality... friendship takes what’s common in human experience and turns it into something holy. Friendship with David complicated Jonathan’s life enormously. He risked losing his father’s favor and willingly sacrificed his own royal future. But neither the risk nor the loss deterred him... Jonathan’s friendship entered David’s soul in a way that Saul’s hatred never did.”²

Our men’s retreat two years ago talked about the theme of men having strong relationships, and this is a reminder that both men and women should pursue very deep same gender friendships for the purpose of building one other up, cheering each other on, confiding in one another, protecting each other, challenging and keeping one another accountable when appropriate. Life is so much richer when we have deep friendships, but so much of our modern world works against our putting ourselves out there and risking true friendships. The Beatles had a line in the song “Eleanor Rigby”: “All the lonely people, where do they all come from?” back in the 1960s. That was way before there were personal computers, gaming, smart phones, home theaters, and virtual reality - if they only had known how much lonelier and isolating our world would become. We may have hundreds or thousands of online “friends,” but actually spending time together and being vulnerable is difficult. Let’s use Jonathan and David’s friendship as a challenge to build our own, because God designed us for relationships – first with Him and then with each other. Proverbs 17:17 – “*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*” As we’ll see in the following chapters, Jonathan was a gift from God for David in the midst of adversity.

Let’s turn now to the king’s rollercoaster of emotions:

II. Saul’s Anger (vv. 6-16)

⁶As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. ⁷And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, “Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” ⁸And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?” ⁹And Saul eyed David from that day on.

¹ Dale Ralph David, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (England: Christian Focus, 2000), pp. 155-6.

² Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), p. 53.

¹⁰ The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. ¹¹ And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice. ¹² Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul. ¹³ So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people. ¹⁴ And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him. ¹⁵ And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

The women at the victory parade exaggerated both men's military might chanting "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." They got carried away honoring David. It sounds like they were honoring King Saul, but in using the parallelism, they certainly elevated David much higher. So whatever their intentions were, Saul certainly took offense to it. But think about who they have also slighted in this song: God Himself. David had informed everyone that the Lord would hand him victory, but there was no thanks to God for delivering Israel from the Philistines.

Jealousy is a hunger that you can never satisfy, it's like a scab that you keep picking at until you get an infection.³ Getting to the root of our jealousy can reveal our idols and our deepest loves, usually our own need to feel important and admired. Fear, jealousy, anger, politics, and madness all combined in Saul's head, and in a fit of rage, he tried to kill young David. David was back playing his lyre, his 10-stringed harp, to calm Saul down, when the king realized he could take out his rival with a spear. David got away, but this was only the beginning of a long series of attempts on his life by the king. Two chapters ago, we were told that Saul loved David, but that love was long gone.

David should have been the one who was afraid, right? But verses 12 and 15 say that it was Saul who was afraid because of the Lord's presence and help in David's life. Saul's real problem was not with David, but with God. He was angry at God for abandoning him and lifting up another to take his place. I wonder if we'd find a similar anger at God if we traced the envy and jealousy in our own hearts. Perhaps we're envious of other people's marriages or families because we are mad that God hasn't given us a spouse or a family yet. Or we resent successful or beautiful people because we feel discontent with the average life and looks that God gave us, forgetting that life itself is an amazing gift and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Jealousy is never grateful for God's blessings, it's always resentful of what we don't have. Do you remember the old movie, *Amadeus*? If you haven't seen it, it's about Mozart, but it's framed around another composer, Antonio Salieri. Salieri prays that God would make him a great composer, but when he meets Mozart and hears his music, he realizes that he will never be that great. And not only does he see his limitations, but he becomes obsessively jealous and angry, and feels that God has wasted talent on a vulgar, immoral man, so he abandons his faith in God and sets events in motion to cause Mozart's death. Like Saul, the green-eyed monster of envy can wreck our lives and leave us angry and bitter.

F.B. Meyer and G. Campbell Morgan are two names of famous preachers that you might have heard if you studied British church history. They both pastored prominent churches in London back in the day, but Campbell Morgan's church was overflowing with people, and he was the better known and praised preacher. F. B. Meyer began to realize that he resented his fellow pastor and sometimes minimized Morgan's gifts and pointed out his mistakes and flaws to other people to make himself feel better. Recognizing this sin in his heart, he decided that instead he would begin to praise Morgan to others and would pray for him in secret. Not only did Meyer feel better about

³ Heath Thomas and J.D. Greear, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel* (Nashville: Holman, 2016), p. 137.

his attitude and truly cherish his fellow-pastor's ministry, but Morgan's church overflowed with people so much that many of them ended up coming to Meyer's church because they couldn't get into Morgan's church.⁴ May we recognize the ugliness in our own hearts toward others, and channel it in a constructive way so that we discover love and gratitude for God's blessings.

The final relationship in David's life that we're introduced to is a wife from among Saul's daughters:
III. Michal's Love (vv. 17-30) (the Hebrew is pronounced MEE – kahl)

17 Then Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him." 18 And David said to Saul, "Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" 19 But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife. 20 Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. 21 Saul thought, "Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." 22 And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law.'" 23 And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?" 24 And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak." 25 Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.'" Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. 26 And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, 27 David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. 28 But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, 29 Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually. 30 Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

Anybody have difficult relationships with your in-laws? (Don't answer that out loud.) I've always loved my in-laws, but that can be a strained relationship. But I doubt many of your in-laws are so bad that they tried to use your marriage to get you killed. Saul's giving his daughter to David was part of his plotting and scheming against his rival. Since throwing his spear hadn't worked and he probably realized that it would not be wise for him to kill the people's champion, the king decided that the Philistines killing David would be the best outcome for him. So Saul tried with two different daughters to snare David in this trap. The first one didn't work out, verse 18 makes David sound humble in not thinking he's important enough to marry into the royal family; but I think that David was onto Saul's game. But then a different daughter, Michal, who was in love with David, was offered, and the servants were sent to whisper encouragements to David, so the marriage was set up. Just one request from the king: kill a hundred Philistines and bring back proof. It wasn't enough that David had just killed the Philistines' giant champion and saved the nation, now he needed to go hunt down a hundred more of their enemy, with Saul rooting for him to die in the process. Think about what Saul was doing, how manipulative that was: he was going to give his daughter in marriage to a man that he hoped would die. Who cares whether his daughter was heartbroken? He tried to use her as a pawn to get what he wanted. He was secretly planning a funeral not a wedding.

⁴ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), p. 320.

But David and his men easily killed twice that many Philistines. The Lord was with David and gave him success in battle, and Saul knew it. And it drove him even more crazy and angry because he had turned his heart against God and those whom God favored. David was joined in marriage to his daughter and joined by covenant to his son. He had worked his way into the royal family, but Saul was afraid and positioned himself as David's enemy. The chapter ominously ends with David rising higher and Saul sinking deeper; come back next week to see how things develop.

Conclusion

I've given you some practical application of finding strong friendships and avoiding jealousy. Another thing we need to see with this chapter is that no matter how well life is going and no matter how popular you are and how well you've performed or behaved, there's always someone who will hate you and who will come after you. Don't let that surprise you or derail you; keep on living your life and striving to fulfill God's calling for you no matter who is throwing spears at you. Whether it's someone close to you or people on the periphery of your life, rise above, take the high road. Don't be a doormat, as David was wise to Saul's schemes, but don't strike out in retaliation.

Thinking of the main theme of this text: every single human being has the choice before them that Saul and his family had: do you love God's anointed One or do you want to kill Him? For us, the anointed One is not David, but his great descendant, Jesus. Most of the world would resent the way my question is worded: do you love Him or do you want to kill Him? Most unbelievers would say that they need a third option, that they don't either love Him or hate Him; they may respect Him from a distance or ignore Him or not believe that He ever existed. But remember that Jesus said there is no neutrality when it comes to Him: Matthew 12:30 – *"Whoever is not with me is against me."* Jesus is not a historical figure that we can be neutral towards. He is the King of the Universe who demands that if we follow Him, that He sit on the throne of our lives. So, like Saul, we feel threatened by Him, and we don't want Him to take over our throne. We want to be in charge, to decide our own path in life, and not bow to anyone else. The idea of a God above us who demands our allegiance and obedience, and has a sovereign plan for our lives goes against our natural selfish desires and autonomy. So, the Scriptures tell us, we position ourselves as God's enemies, and what did Jesus' enemies do when He came in the flesh? They killed Him. So would we given the chance.

But Romans 5 says that *"while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son"* (v. 10), that *"while we were still weak... Christ died for the ungodly"* (v. 6), and that *"God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (v. 8). God breaks through our resistance and our hatred towards Him by changing our hearts and by the death of His Son atoning for us. This chapter tells us what we must embrace if we are to be in a saving relationship with God: a covenant and a marriage. The new covenant in Jesus' blood gives us salvation and forgiveness of our sins, granting us eternal life because Jesus died in our place. And then, like David with Michal, He takes us as His bride! Every believer in every age makes up the invisible church, and together are the bride of Christ united with Him for eternity.

Jesus is the greater David who stands before us forcing us to either reject and oppose Him, or be part of His covenant people, placing him on His rightful throne. All those who choose His love, His covenant, and His kingly rule said, "Amen."

Benediction - 1 Peter 5:10-11 – *"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen."*