

“Aftermath of a Giant Killing”

Making our Way Through the Valley After the Giant Falls

June 27, 2010

1 Samuel 18-19

Psalm 23

Romans 8:31-39

**A Sermon preached by
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Okay! So when was the last time you thanked God for NOT showing you the future? I'm convinced that one of the best things God does for us is to keep us from knowing what will happen beyond today. Just THINK about all the stuff you DIDN'T have to worry about because you never knew it was coming your way!

For thousands and thousands of years, all the way back to the time of David and before, we Christians and our ancestors, the Jews, have affirmed that God, in his basic essence, does NOT change. *“The Lord is from everlasting to everlasting!”*...or so we say. But what may be the case with God is certainly NOT the case with us. We DO change. And the circumstances of our lives change as well. The places we live change...our jobs change...friends change...families change. Children are conceived unexpectedly. The love we thought would last forever dies. Marriages that are “made in heaven” fall by the wayside. Children break their parents hearts. Death takes a loved one. Our health changes. One day we're fine...or so we think...and the next day we are dealing with the shock and chaos of a diagnosis that turns our lives upside down and puts us into a state of constant turmoil.

And what about the “tests”...the challenges...that come our way in life? Think about what has happened to you in the past five or ten years. Aren't you glad God didn't tell you about it all five or ten YEARS ago? Aren't you glad God didn't lay it all out for you AHEAD of time? Instead, we take life one day at a time...or at least that's what we're ENCOURAGED us to do...because that's the way God dispenses life. GOD knows what will work together for good. But you and I DON'T! We sort of ricochet from one moment to the next, trying to put together what life is all about. But often, we don't have either the time or the wisdom to figure it all out.

So, to be sure, God is good NOT to show us tomorrow...which is PRECISELY what makes the Bible so RELEVANT for our lives TODAY...even though many THINK it is only about the ancient past. But what was true and relevant in the Bible when God's Word was being recorded is JUST as true and JUST as relevant TODAY when God's Word is being lived out. All of which brings us to the point of saying: How GOOD and how GRACIOUS of God to not show DAVID what the future held for HIM either!

Now, I've often wondered how many people think that David, after he killed the giant Goliath, within a matter of just a few short days took over the throne from Saul to become the youngest king in the history of Israel? Well, just in case you were one who THOUGHT that, you need to know that it just didn't happen that way. As a matter of fact, the aftermath of the giant-killing actually led David into one of the deepest, longest, darkest periods of his entire life...an experience out of which he was thought to have written the most familiar and beloved of all the Psalms:

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You, Lord, are with me!”*

This young man...a man after God's own heart...who had proved himself faithful among the sheep and on the battlefield, quickly went from the highest pinnacle of popularity and success, to

the lowest depths of being a hunted, hounded fugitive on the run...WANTED – Dead or Alive! Oh, to be sure, God was good NOT to tell David all that was coming his way.

Now, as we learned a couple of weeks ago, David had just accomplished an INCREDIBLE thing...a REMARKABLE achievement. A young man, not yet twenty years old, who had never worn the uniform of the Israeli army...never ONCE suited up for battle...never ONCE known what it was like to carry a sword...had run out on the battle field, faced a GIANT of a man almost ten feet tall, and had cut him down to size...killing him with one throw of his sling...all because he had faith and trust enough to BELIEVE that God was WITH him and with GOD at his side, he could do ANY thing.

Well, as a result of killing Goliath, David gained INSTANT FAME and POPULARITY! He became a NATIONAL HERO. The people sang his praises wherever he went. King Saul made good on his promise to enrich the man who killed Goliath. He gave David his daughter's hand in marriage, AND he made David a permanent part of the king's court. But not only that, he ALSO appointed David to be his FIRST LIEUTENANT...his RIGHT-HAND MAN...the King's own PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE when Saul couldn't be present. In other words, David became the CHAMPION of the Champions. And his fame spread far and wide.

But...BUT...as a result of that fame and popularity, the storm clouds began to gather over his head...NOT because of something DAVID did. Oh no! He CONTINUED to be a man after God's own heart. No, the storm clouds began to gather over David's head because of none other than King SAUL...the very one who PUT David in his position of prominence and fame to begin with. After all, David would have been JUST as content to return to his father sheep...and in fact WANTED to. HE wasn't looking for fame and fortune. But after David had slain Goliath, Saul knew he was TOO VALUABLE a commodity to loose...TOO POPULAR with the people NOT to have him by his side.

But then, it all began to BACKFIRE on Saul, you see! David became FAR more popular with the people than Saul was. And that's when Saul's JEALOUSY began to get the better of him and he began to see David NOT as a friend...NOT as an asset...but as an ENEMY...a THREAT to HIS position as king. Listen to the story as it comes to us from the 18th Chapter of 1st Samuel:

1 Samuel 18:6-16, 28-29

“And there was dancing in the streets of all the cities of Israel!

As the women danced, they sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands...but David has slain his TENS of thousands!”

And then we're told that *“Saul became VERY ANGRY.”* Now, the Hebrew word translated “angry” here is very vivid. *“CHARAH”* means to BURN WITHIN...to FUME...TO rage. David's popularity began to eat on Saul and the more he thought about what the women sang, the more it bothered him. He thought about it...and brooded about it...and stewed about it. His stomach began to turn and churn and before he knew it, he was tied up in knots. And then, as his fear and worry intensified, Saul became PARANOID.

“What more can he have but my KINGDOM? Saul cried out.

“The next thing you know they'll be making HIM, instead of me!”

So from that day on, Saul was JEALOUS and SUSPICIOUS of David and sought a way to get rid of him.

And get RID of him is PRECISELY what Saul tried to do. The next day, when a nasty fit of depression came upon Saul, David tried to sooth Saul's troubled spirit by playing his harp and singing for him...which had, after all, worked on numerous occasions before. But on this particular day, Saul seemed to have lost touch with reality all together...for as David played, jealousy RAGED within Saul. And suddenly, he took the spear which he was holding in his hand and he hurled it at

David, trying to pin him to the wall. And when the first spear missed its mark, Saul hurled ANOTHER one at David, who managed to dodge Saul's murderous attempt yet again.

Now, chances are you've never had anyone threaten your life...not SERIOUSLY anyway...let alone hurl a spear at you in hopes of killing you. But here's David, doing what he can to lighten the king's dark spirits, when all of a sudden – WOOSH – a sharp-pointed spear flies right past his head. And suddenly REALITY strikes. Not only is this guy NUTS...he's down right DANGEROUS as well.

And yet, the very next verse says that "*Saul was afraid of DAVID.*" Now, that's interesting, isn't it. The very people we are out to get us are often the ones who are afraid of us. WHY? Because we THREATEN them...not so much by what WE do as by who THEY are. They want to get RID of us so they can once again feel safe and secure in their insecurity!

Now, please remember that DAVID has done nothing wrong here. He had done NOTHING to deserve this kind of treatment. He has served God...defended Israel...AND gotten rid of Israel's worst nightmare when he killed Goliath. He's been nothing but loyal to his king, Saul. He hasn't tried to win the people favor away from Saul or remove Saul from the throne. In fact, he's been the very MODEL of humility, dependability and integrity. He he's done everything Saul asked him to do and succeeded wonderfully at it...EVEN when Saul's assignments INTENTIONALLY put David at risk for being killed. ALL of which only served to make Saul even MORE angry and MORE jealous.

No, David wasn't the problem. SAUL was! And the more Saul saw David succeed, the more jealous and suspicious he became...and the more his anger BURNED within him...PRECISELY BECAUSE Saul saw that God was now on David's side and he realized that he, himself, no longer had God's blessing. And the Prophet Samuel's words began to ring in Saul's ears:

*The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel FOREVER!
But now, your kingdom will not continue. The Lord himself has now
sought out a man after God's own heart, and the Lord has appointed
HIM ruler over Israel, because you have not done what the Lord commanded.*
(1 Sam. 13:13-14)

*And from that day forth, the Spirit of the Lord LEFT Saul and
came to rest upon David. (1 Sam. 16:13-14)*

Though he may not have wanted to admit it, Saul KNEW the score. He saw the handwriting on the wall. Samuel's predictions were coming true and he was angry...BURNING angry...CRAZY with anger. It was simply MORE than he could handle.

Now, the Bible is so practical, isn't it? Jealousy is a deadly, all-consuming sin. It consumed Saul – mind, body and soul. His fear and suspicion of David shackled Saul in his own prison of paranoia. And because he WAS so consumed with anger and jealousy, Saul's greatest goal in life became twisted and distorted. Instead of leading Israel on to bigger and better things, he focused on making David's life MISERABLE as he tried time and time again to kill him...pursuing him for years in an attempt to rid himself of what he perceived to be the greatest threat to his throne without ever realizing that he HIMSELF was his own worst enemy...NOT David. And yet DAVID was the focus of his rage. So the scriptures tell us that "*David fled and escaped into the night*" (19:19)...never to set foot in the King's court again until Saul himself was dead.

Okay, so mark those words "*David fled and escaped*" well, because as you read the next eleven chapters of 1st Samuel, you will hear them over and over and over again...all the way up until the time of Saul's death in chapter 31. It simply became a way of life for David...a means of survival. From the height of his popularity and fame, David is thrown into a life of escape and hiding. He becomes a FUGITIVE...hiding in the wilderness...living off the land...denied access to his family...his friends...his home. Gradually, David was losing his support system...everything he might have leaned on for comfort and security – his way of life as a shepherd of the sheep...his position in the king's court...his wife, Michal, whom David was kept from seeing because she was Saul's daughter...even his best friend, Jonathan, whom he ALSO had to avoid because Jonathan was Saul's son and Saul was using even his son's friendship with David to have David killed. And clearly, David's once calm, confident demeanor was definitely beginning to feel the squeeze. In one

of his encounters with Jonathan who snuck away from his father to come and warn David of yet ANOTHER plot Saul was hatching to have David killed, David cries out to his friend:

*“Why, Jonathan, why? Why is your father trying to kill me?
What SIN have I committed? Why WRONG have I done that
would make him hate me so? Why is he doing this, Jonathan?
I swear by the living God, I am only a step away from death!”*

(1 Sam. 20:1 & 3)

Boy! What a statement to make! Death was dogging his every step. Have YOU ever lived like that...a hair's breath away from death? Well, no doubt, some of us have – either a hair's breath away from our own death or the death of someone we love...a hair's breath away from our marriage going down the tubes...a hair's breath away from our children in trouble or out of control...a hair's breath away from some disastrous decision or asinine action that could adversely affect and change our lives forever. Surely such times are trying and debilitating...times when it seems for all the world that, like David, all our props...all our supports in life are being knocked out from under us and we are falling with no one and no thing to catch us.

Oh, don't tell ME the Bible isn't relevant to our lives. Yes, the PARTICULARS might change...the DETAILS may be different...but the ESSENTIALS remain the same. What happened to David long ago is as relevant as the lives we live today when WE TOO have to walk through what seem for all the world to be the “valleys of the shadow of death.”

So what LESSONS can we learn from looking at this “man after God's own heart”...this killer of giants who knew both the heights of success and fame...as well as the depths of walking through the valley as he was hunted and hounded as a fugitive on the run?

Well, I can't be sure, of course, but it seems to me that one of the lessons we can learn from this part of the David story is that FEW PEOPLE STAY ON TOP FOREVER. As the old saying goes, *“into every life some rain must fall.”* Or as Jesus himself put it, *“The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike.”*(Mt. 5:45) Even the most successful person...the one who slays the giants and wins the big victories...even the one who is “a person after God's own heart”...eventually falls or is knocked down off the pedestal and spends a season walking in the “valley of the shadow.” It happened to David...and it will eventually happen to us, as well...if it hasn't happened already. Maybe it will be because of our own actions...or maybe through no fault of our own. Maybe we're good people who “walk in the ways of the Lord” as David did and STILL the valleys of life come our way. Maybe because of someone ELSE'S actions or anger. Maybe because of someone ELSE'S jealousy or paranoia. Or maybe because sometimes things just HAPPEN over which we have no control...things which knock our lives off their steady course and send us crashing down into the deep valleys of life. So what do we DO about it?

Well, for one, BE PREPARED. Don't let us such times catch you off guard and take you by surprise. Every life I have ever known...even the BEST of lives...knows good times and bad times...highs and lows...ups and downs. The Bible is both HONEST and RELEVANT about that fact. So BE PREPARED. Know that those times WILL COME. And know that with faith and trust in God to see you THROUGH such times, even YOU can *“walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.”*

Secondly, TAKE ONE DAY AT A TIME. As we said earlier, THANKFULLY God didn't show David and doesn't show US what is going to happen in our lives tomorrow. It is, I'm convinced, one of the many BLESSINGS God gives us NOT to show us the future. But not knowing what will happen in the future forces us to take it “one day at a time!” Which is PRECISELY the way Jesus tells us we supposed to live.

*“Why do you worry about what you shall eat tomorrow or what
you shall drink or what you shall wear. Your father in heaven
KNOWS you need all these things! Seek FIRST God's will
and way in your life, and everything you TRULY need will be
given to you. The truth of the matter is this: Don't WORRY
about tomorrow! Each day has enough trouble of its own.
Instead, take it one day at a time!”* (Mt. 6:25-34 Paraphrased)

Finally, TRUST GOD – ALWAYS! because trouble DOES come into each and every life...because each day's troubles ARE enough for that day...we need to learn to ALWAYS trust and lean on the Lord to see us through...no matter WHAT may come our way. You see, no matter how quickly or how far David had fallen from the pinnacle of success and fame...no matter how much Saul pursued and hunted him...no matter how close he was to death as he “walked through the valley of the shadow”...David NEVER stopped trusting God. Oh, he certainly QUESTIONED what SAUL was doing. He certainly wondered why Saul HATED him so and was trying so hard to kill him. But he NEVER, EVER lost faith in God. He knew that no matter how far he had fallen...or how deep the valley through which he was walking...or how dark the shadows around him – GOD was still with him...watching over him...protecting him...guiding him...giving him the strength he needed to make his way THROUGH that valley in order to face life once again.

Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,

For YOU, Lord, are with me!

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me!

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies!

You anoint my head with oil!

My cup runs over!

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord, FOREVER! (Ps.23)

More than a thousand years later, another “man after God’s won heart,” who ALSO knew both the highs and lows...the joys and sorrows...the pinnacles and the valleys of life said much the SAME thing in his own words. Writing to the new and struggling church of Jesus Christ in Rome – a church that had known nothing BUT the struggle and hardship, the Apostle Paul spoke of his deep and abiding faith and trust in God’s presence with him...AND with THEM as well...a presence from which no amount of hardship or difficulty or pain and suffering could EVER separate them.

*For I am sure...convinced...POSITIVE...that neither death, nor life, nor angels,
nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor anything else in all of creation...
that nothing...NOTHING can EVER separate us from the love of God which is ours
in Christ Jesus, our Lord! (Rom. 8:31-39)*

Oh, the Bible is SUCH an honest and true to life book about the lives we live. May God, through the power of the Holy Spirit which abides WITH us and lives IN us, give us the ability to HEAR its wonderful Good News...and FROM it, to draw strength for the living of OUR days...that WE TOO may be able to say, with all faith and trust:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,

For YOU, Lord! You are with me, ALWAYS!”

Amen...and AMEN!

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