

## **Introduction**

"Going Public" is a phrase whose exact meaning depends on the context in which it is used. A company goes public when it shifts from private ownership to selling shares of stock to the public. With respect to the United States government, however, going public refers to the attempt of a president to promote his programs directly to the American populace. In our text this morning, we see King Saul taking his own program to the people of Israel. It is not a plan for economic growth or even to deal with an enemy nation. He wants to rid Israel of her biggest hero—someone he has grown to hate. Making his hatred public is a shameless move that betrays the nature of his heart.

[Read text and Pray]

What we saw in the previous chapter, we see again this morning. The sovereign and protective hand of God is in action to preserve his anointed king. But there are several additional layers of substance which accompany the testimony of God's protection in this text. I intend to bring before you in fact three layers that emerge here.

We will start with

### **I. The Progression of Sin. (1)**

There is a noticeable distinction between chapter 18 and chapter 19 in terms of Saul's approach to accomplish his objective to eliminate David as a threat to his throne. The emphasis in chapter 18 was on what was going on in the hidden recesses of Saul's thoughts. Saul secretly schemed to bring David down. He kept his motives and designs to himself.

The narrator really is emphatic about this point. If you look in chapter 18 at verse 11, you see that Saul hurled the javelin at David. Outwardly, it may have looked like Saul lost control while under the influence of the evil spirit. But on the inside, he was thinking. He was secretly intending to kill David. Verse 11 says, "And Saul hurled the spear, for he THOUGHT, 'I will pin David to the wall.'"

Next consider verse 17. Saul determined to offer to David the hand of his daughter Merab, but it was not because he was wanting to do David good. It was not because he remembered the offer he had made to the man who would go and fight Goliath. The narrator wants us to know the heart of Saul was at work in a secret scheme. Saul offered her to David saying, "'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.'"

We see it again in reference to Saul's offer to David of Michal. When Saul heard that Michal loved David, he was pleased. Verse 21 explains that "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." Then again we see the emphasis in verse 25. Here is where we find that Saul offered David what for him would be a doable bride-price. All he required was the deaths of a hundred Philistines with evidence to back it up. The narrator discloses the reason: "Saul THOUGHT to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines."

Here then in chapter 18, we have no less than four specific instances of Saul THINKING. Yet what he was thinking was hidden from public view. It is a noticeable adjustment in presentation then when in chapter 19 Saul no longer keeps his thinking to himself. He abandons seeking to bring

about the death of David as though by some intent other than his own. Starting with chapter 19:1 Saul goes public with his intent. Saul SPOKE to Jonathan his son and to all his servants that they should kill David. Then in verse 10 we are told that Saul SOUGHT to pin David to the wall as before. In verse 11, Saul SENT messengers to the home of David TO KILL him. Then he instructed his messengers to bring David to him in the bed SO THAT he might kill him. And finally when David went to Samuel in Ramah, Saul went after David to take him. No hidden thoughts here. Everyone now knows that Saul is after David to do him in.

The transition between chapter 18 and chapter 19 is an illustration of the progression of the domination of sin. In chapter 18 Saul was hoping for David's death to look like an accident or to be the unfortunate result of fighting in battles against the Philistines. Saul had evil motives, but he had a little bit of a conscience. He did not want David's death to be directly tied to him. He was sensitive to the shame he would bear if he did the killing. But in chapter 18, his disdain for David is no longer a secret. His desire for David's demise is no longer a private thought. He cares not that people are aware of his intent to kill David. No, he has reached such a level of depravity that he is emboldened and unashamed. His inner hostility has consumed him. It even surpasses the added shame of breaking a vow he publicly made NOT to seek the life of David.

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul puts before Timothy this striking contrast. He writes, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Here David is being persecuted and Saul is going from bad to worse.

It is a warning to us. If you are willing to tolerate and pamper sin in your mind, it will not remain in your thoughts only. You will go from bad to worse. The sin that you feed in your mind will eventually find its way out. You will go from shameful to shameless, from longings to fantasies to actions, from private to public. The example of Saul is an alarm bell to us to heed the Apostle Paul. He urges that "if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." John Owen famously said, "Be killing sin or sin will be killing you." If you harbor sin in your heart, you will find yourself going from bad to worse. Paul speaks aptly to this reality in Galatians 6. He writes, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Saul gives us occasion this morning to ask ourselves whether we are killing sin and where we are sowing. Are there areas in your life in which you are sowing to the flesh. Are you content with sinful and fleshly patterns of thinking in your mind? That is a critical place to beware. It is so important to guard our thoughts. Proverbs 4:23 urges us "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." And Paul urges us in the New Testament to take every thought captive to obey Christ and "whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, THINK about these things." It is imperative that by God's grace we guard our hearts and thoughts.

The second layer of instruction in this chapter I want you to see is a set of...

## **II. Portraits of Relation to God's Anointed.**

Three portraits stand out through the key characters in the chapter. Each has to do with a relation to God's anointed. It is key as we study that we see the point behind the events that are reported. God's anointed, remember, is David. He has been set apart for the office of king of Israel. He has also been given the Spirit to equip and empower him. Now in this chapter three specific individuals

are seen to relate to God's anointed in their own unique way. Together they represent three categories of response—three ways in which people typically respond to God's king. The portraits are set before us through Saul, Jonathan, and Michal.

A. The portrait of Saul is the portrait of a repudiator. We have already demonstrated how Saul's thoughts of murder have blossomed into full bloom of determined action. He was told by Samuel that the kingdom had been torn from him. It was as good as done; however, Saul is fully determined not to let that happen. He repudiates the will of God and the king whom God has destined to reign over his people. And so it is his mission to destroy David in order to preserve his own rule.

A repudiator is so bent on his own rule that he fails to take stock of the goodness of another. Jonathan stands up to Saul in this text and makes a case for why Saul should not be set on David's death. He rightly brings to his attention that David had not sinned against Saul. David was not maliciously seeking the downfall of Saul. Every service he had done under Saul was for his good. He even put his own life on the line when he went out to face the Philistine giant. Jonathan reminded Saul what a great salvation had been worked for the whole nation through David. Saul had been filled with joy when it happened. His current rage had eclipsed past joy and recognition of the goodness of David.

Then the repudiator, recognizing the sense that his son made, swore a vow that he would no longer seek the death of David. Isn't this the kind of thing sinners do regularly? In the light of good reason, they resolve to do good. It makes good sense to follow Christ, so people will choose in their own flesh to follow him. But eventually the repudiator will no longer be influenced by good sense. The hostility of his heart will overcome the light in his mind.

The goodness of God to people is not enough to permanently undo a person's bent towards sin. The heavens are telling the glory of God. The glory and majesty of God are made abundantly clear through all his kind works and provisions. God has done us good after good, but folks who love themselves can only hold back the enmity of their hearts for so long. And Saul broke his vow no sooner than there was again conflict with the Philistines. David went out again and struck them with a great blow so that they fled. That is all it took for the meanness of Saul to again be roused with more forcefulness than before. There was David, once again playing his lyre to comfort Saul and he did it again. He hurled the spear to pin David to the wall. When David fled, Saul sent messengers to his house to lay in wait. When that didn't work, he sent messengers into his house. And when that attempt did not work, he pursued him even to where he was taking refuge with the prophet of God, Samuel.

Saul is a repudiator of God's anointed king. There is a greater anointed king whose name is Jesus. He too was repudiated by his own. As John says, "He came to his own, but his own did not receive him." No, they refused to have him as their king. That rejection ended up putting Jesus on a cross. And yet the glory of his coming is this. While the masses do not receive him, to all who DO receive him, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

In this room this morning there are no doubt a few who repudiate Jesus. You do not believe in him. You will not have him as your king. The difference could not be more stark. If you repudiate Christ, you repudiate his great salvation. But if you will turn to him, if you will believe in him and receive him, you will become a child of God and enter into the sweetness of fellowship with him.

B. We turn next to the portrait of a true follower of God's anointed. We see a true follower in the person of Jonathan. We already know that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and he made a covenant with him. We see here in this text that Jonathan was faithful to his word. In verse 1, we are told that "Saul's son delighted much in David." The word goes forth from Saul to Jonathan and to all his servants that they should kill David. Jonathan, however, refuses. In fact he seeks to protect David. He speaks to his father about David. He praises David to Saul. What really stands out in this section is the repeated emphasis of something we already know. Jonathan is the son of Saul. In the first 4 verses of the chapter Saul is referred to as the father of Jonathan and Jonathan as the son of Saul 6 times combined. Clearly the narrator is presenting a tension of relationship. Saul is the king but even more fundamentally, Saul is Jonathan's father; Jonathan is the son of Saul. But Jonathan delights much in David; their souls are knit together. They have covenanted with one another in regard to David's kingship. The tension here is between father and anointed king. A choice must be made. Jonathan will have to choose between his father and his friend—and not an ordinary friend, the friend who is God's anointed king. To which one will Jonathan be faithful?

As a true and faithful follower of God's king, he is not disrespectful to his father, but when he must, he chooses to be allegiant to God's king, who is David. He refuses to kill David and he pleads the case for David to his parent. He risks his own standing with his father, with family, to follow, defend, and praise God's anointed. That's what true followers do. When the greater David came to earth in the flesh, he made it plain that a difficult choice would face his followers. To be a true follower of Jesus, they would sometimes have to choose between following him and pleasing family.

Jesus said, "Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother . . . and a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:34-38).

True followers of Jesus relinquish all to be devoted to Jesus. Whatever would pull you away from faithfully following Christ must be relinquished—our very lives themselves. For whoever finds his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Christ's sake will find it.

C. The third major character in this chapter presents to us the portrait of a fence-straddler in relation to God's anointed. The character is Michal. Now we learned in the previous chapter that Michal loved David. At that point we could not be sure about the nature of Michal's love. But now that they are married and David comes under threat of death, we have a better idea about her. She does love David. She does care that he not be caught and killed. So after the spear-throwing incident from which David escapes, Michal protects David. David made it safely to his house, but Michal learned about her father's plot to have David killed when he left the house the next morning. So she helped him escape through a window. She even bided time for him by putting an idol in his bed to claim that David was sick and unable to get up. When the third wave of messengers discovered her deceit, Saul wanted to know why. She lied for the second time now and told her dad that David threatened to kill her if she had done otherwise. She impugned David's character in order to save her own skin. This is a different portrait from that of Jonathan. It represents a follower of the king who will do so as long as it is convenient and as long as the hardship to oneself is not too great, and as long as one's life is not threatened.

Not a few are such ones who claim to follow or who would like to follow the greater David. Some come to Jesus because they want the hope of eternal life. They are impressed with his great

exploits. Many who followed Jesus because of his signs and his authority eventually wandered away. And not a few follow Jesus today, but leave him when the cost gets too high. It is inconvenient; another who claims to follow Jesus offended them; they love the world and the things in the world. Jesus made it clear you cannot straddle the fence when it comes to following him. He made it clear that there is a cost to ourselves. One would-be disciple pledged to Jesus he would follow him wherever he would go, but Jesus replied, "foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." When you follow Jesus, you put your hand to the plow and don't look back. You realize there will be persecution. You will have enemies in your own home. You will fall out of favor with the world. You can't serve Christ and wealth. In short, you cannot straddle the fence. With Jesus it is all or nothing. You take up your cross and follow. All the while remember this question, "for what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world but lose his own soul?"

This chapter in 1 Samuel is here in part to lead us to consider which of these three portraits portrays us. Are you a repudiator? A true follower? Or a fence-straddler? Receiving Christ, believing in him, means denying self and taking up your cross and following him.

Now quickly, we will consider layer number three . . .

### **III. Humiliation of the One who Rejects.**

The chapter closes with the curious incident at Ramah. David had fled to Samuel, the prophet of God. Where do you go when you are fleeing the enemy? You go to the word of God. You need hope. You need encouragement. You need direction. You need God's word. David went to the prophet of God for the word of God. Thankfully, all we have to do is open the book or refer to the word we have treasured up in our hearts.

But here is the most stunning part of the chapter. Saul sends three waves of men to apprehend David. And one-by-one they are neutralized. The Spirit of God comes upon them and they prophesy. Finally, if you are going to get something done, you do it yourself. Saul himself arrives at Ramah. The same thing happens to him. Only we learn that not only were these messengers prophesying, they were stripping and laying on the ground for a day and a night. That Saul is described as naked here mainly signifies that he has taken off his royal robe. This is utter humiliation. It shows that the Spirit of God can come upon people to force them to do what they never would do otherwise.

Followers of Christ depend upon the Spirit to produce the fruit of righteousness in our lives. We must keep in step with the Spirit so as not to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. But even enemies of God may be overpowered by God's Spirit despite themselves. What were all these prophesying? I think the key is in Saul's disrobing. Remember in the last chapter Jonathan gave David his robe? It was a sign that Jonathan was removing his claim to the throne. Now Saul himself is being forced to remove his royal robe to demonstrate that the kingship of Israel is no longer his. He will not be able to withstand the power of God in removing him from the kingship from which he has been rejected. God's power over him is now displayed in compelling him to own that he has been rejected and replaced by another who is better than him.

The lesson. There is no king who will reign but God's anointed king. Despite Saul's attempts to eliminate David, he will not be able to do so. God's anointed king is David, and he will take the throne. And yet there is a king that surpasses David himself—David's greater son, Jesus Christ. David wrote these words in Psalm 110. "The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I

make your enemies your footstool." The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies!"

Jesus is this great king. No one can threaten him though many shall desire to and attempt to. We ourselves are born attempting to rule our lives; we would have our own way. That is a repudiation of God's anointed. But it is just like Jonathan spoke of David, the Lord has never sinned against us. He is Lord and he makes it rain on the just and the unjust. He would rule with kindness and steadfast love. He has provided a great salvation. Why would we deny his rule? So we can gain the world? Gain the world our way? That's Saul's kind of world with misery and hostility! And gain the whole world but lose our own soul?

It is a no-brainer, really. But the thing is, of course, it takes more than a brain to follow Jesus. It takes a heart to love him and a will to bow to him. So my closing question for us today is this: What is your relation to Christ? Are you a repudiator? Are you a fence-straddler? Or are you a true and devoted subject to the king of kings?