

## “How the Mighty have Fallen”, 2 Samuel 1

Every week in the news headlines we read of the fall of some famous person. It may be a dictator brought down, a politician caught in corruption, an athlete convicted of charges, a businessman indicted for fraud, or a performer who's life falls apart for all the public to see. At times like that we're all inclined to feel superior and think, “It serves them right! Good riddance!”

We are studying the life of King David in the Old Testament and learning about how God shapes a heart after his own heart. Now David did many things poorly -- and these also serve as errors for us to avoid -- but many things are remarkable about him, and his attitude toward Saul is one of them. Toward Saul, David has a very remarkable mix of sorrow, compassion, and respect. David honors a man who tried repeatedly to kill him.

**Reading, 2 Samuel 1:11-27.**

There are two accounts of the death of Saul, one in 1 Samuel 31, and the other in this chapter, as reported by an Amalekite. If chapter 31 is the complete account, then the Amalekite came along after Saul's death and took the crown and armlet and then, to ingratiate himself to David, presents this story. Another possibility is that Saul did not die after he fell on his own sword, and so asks the Amalekite to finish the job. David asks him twice about the truth of his account, and the Amalekite sticks to his story.

David has this Amalekite soldier put to death. The King, which David is now, was the executive branch of Israel, and the Law made no room for so-called mercy deaths to humans, especially national leaders. The man is put to death as a traitor to the Crown of Israel by his own testimony. There is some irony in this, since all the Amalekite warriors should have been put to death by Saul many years previously (they were sworn enemies of Israel), but this one apparently was absorbed into Saul's army. David finishes the job that Saul should have done.

Meanwhile, David mourned, and wept, and fasted on behalf of Saul and his son Jonathan. Then he composes an elegy (1:19-27) to be circulated in Israel. Is David posturing at this time? Is he like a politician that speaks ill of his opponents then eulogizes the person publicly at his funeral?

I think not for two reasons: a) David didn't seem to be the kind of ruler who was interested in political appearance, in fact he was very transparent, and sometimes embarrassingly so (e.g. dancing before the Lord, 2 Samuel 6). He never comes across as a smooth, calculating, crowd-pleaser.

Secondly, b) David had had numerous opportunities when he could have fought Saul and put him to death, and did not. He baffled his own troops in showing deference to this dangerously unbalanced king. He never spoke in a harsh or disrespectful way of

Saul. He was not unfeeling about Saul's enmity toward him, but when David stated his case to Saul's face, he made only an appeal to God, (1 Samuel 24:12) *May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.*

So his mourning and his elegy are sincere and consistent with his previous attitude. He wept real tears.

Why? How could he respond this way? Especially, since Saul had been a violent opponent of David, so that David could not even serve under him. How could he honor someone who had repeatedly tried to kill him?

Let me observe some of those things that David recognizes about Saul:

1. He understands that Saul was one of his kinsmen, a fellow Israelite who, at least physically, was with himself under the covenant of the Lord. (1:12)
2. He recognizes that Saul was "the Lord's anointed" (1:14). The "anointed" referred to a national leader ordained by God to be a ruler or priest over the nation. In David's evaluation, Saul's performance and character flaws did not remove that status. God put him there; God would have to remove him. David had respect for the position if not the man.
3. He felt the loss of glory to a people which comes about by the fall of their leader (V. 19-21) He grieves the shame and humility that came about by defeat, both for the warriors who served under Saul and the rest of the nation. Three times he will say, "How the mighty have fallen!"
4. He remembered Saul and Jonathan for their accomplishments. (V. 22-24) He was not blinded by hatred for the man, nor did he demonize all his actions. He gave credit for their courage in battle, and for bringing unity and prosperity to the nation.
5. He mourns the loss of his close friend Jonathan, son of Saul. (V. 25-27) Perhaps Jonathan's own loyalty to his father was an example to David, who then found it difficult to hate a man that had such a great son. A love "surpassing the love of women" is not to be taken with any sexual connotation (see David Kingston's sermon from three weeks ago), but that their soul-kinship and covenantal loyalty surpassed that seen in many marriages. David grieved the loss of both the son and his father.

This explains how David could weep and mourn and eulogize a man who was so violently opposed to him. "How the mighty have fallen!"

Here is the biblical principle involved:

**In the Old Testament. Proverbs 24:17-18** "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the LORD see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him." *In other words, when you take the judgment of God upon others and make it your own occasion of*

*rejoicing over them, then you yourself become culpable. Those of us with more than one child know exactly what this is like: If you are correcting one child and the other is standing nearby taunting or laughing, we will justly correct both children. The point is that there is no reason for one sinful person to clap their hands over another sinful person's downfall.*

**In the teaching of Jesus. Matthew 5:43-48** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." *In this passage Jesus is not saying that final judgment will never come, but that we must show to others the same grace God has shown to us. The Lord -- with great patience -- extends his offer of reconciliation to all of us. And perhaps this is one reason that Saul was allowed to rule for several years beyond David's initial anointing.*

**And in the New Testament. Romans 12:14-21** "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." *This passage sums up so well how we should approach those who oppose us or do harm to us. We are to return blessing for their curses; we are to rejoice when God blesses them, and weep with their sorrows; we are not to be haughty or arrogant; we are not to repay evil for evil, but be honorable in our dealings; we are to let God be the Judge of all, and we are to have mercy even on the needs of our enemies. So often, we seek to win over evil people by becoming evil ourselves.*

Now I must address an apparent contradiction. For example, **Revelation 18:20** says... *"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"* Here the saints are told to "rejoice" over the fall of Babylon. Doesn't the Bible speak of the goodness of God's judgment of evil, of the destruction of the wicked, and that the godly will rise and walk on the ashes of the wicked?

There are several answers we might give to this. One is that of the timing. God is merciful and patient toward those who reject him, but his judgment will finally come and it is good that it does. In fact we can only forgive people and let God handle the judgment precisely because he *will* come in final judgment. This allows us to have mercy toward others in this life. The joy of his judgment is spoken of at the end of history.

Another point is the perspective: “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets,” is spoken from the perspective of heaven and a completed race, after God’s people have entered the kingdom and all evil people and evil itself will be banished. There will be joy that finally the City of Man with all its evil will finally fall. But this is done by those who have finished the race and have the ability to see the judgment clearly. Right now to rejoice over judgment of others is unsuitable because a) we ourselves are deserving of judgment, and b) we should be more concerned that others come to repentance in time.

And finally there is a sense in which we can rejoice that something takes place but not to whom it takes place. To not rejoice over the fall of others is not the only thing the Bible says about judgment. For example we are glad a violent criminal may be behind bars but we may mourn the fact of this person’s life and upbringing, the bad choices, the darkness of mind, the loss of opportunities, etc. God himself looks upon the sinful world in these two ways, both as rebellious and sinful, and as helpless, lost and in Satan’s grip. (E.g. Acts 26:18.. “under the power and dominion of Satan”) In Romans 5 we see within the space of a few verses that we sinners are both “helpless, weak” (v. 6) and the “enemies” of God (v. 10) So we are in a time when mercy is extended, and we ourselves are deserving of judgment, and we must wait God’s timing for final judgment on things. So the Lord can say,

“Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11 ESV)

I think one of the best passages to put this all together is Jesus entering Jerusalem the week he would be crucified. He would soon be the object of the hatred and violence of all his enemies.

**Luke 19:41-44** And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Jesus approaches the city and sees its future, the destruction that would come in AD 70, a few short decades later. And he says that what will happen will happen due to their rejection of him. But he does not say “just you wait” or clap his hands or taunt them. **He weeps.** He weeps, not because the judgment isn’t fair and deserved, but because it is, and there will be many Jews who will die or go away into captivity at that time. There will be countless deaths of human beings who were created in the image of God. Like his Father, he does not take delight in the death of the wicked. Here is the Son of David, who beholds his kinsmen, the people of the older Covenant, people who in other ways had done good things, people who did not take opportunity when God gave it. We might even place David’s words here: “*Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!*” (1:19)

Judgment and mercy come together at the death of Jesus upon the cross. He bears upon himself the judgment of God against all the evil we have done, and he offers himself to us in mercy as our Substitute. He dies because of us, and he dies for us. Have you in faith and repentance trusted Jesus Christ as your Judgment-bearer?

Now **some applications**, based upon the points observed earlier. How can we be like David and have compassion and sorrow for our enemies, especially when they have fallen? How should this affect our relationships?

- 1) How we relate to the world of humanity. The fall of our first parents also was a fall of “the mighty.” We bear kinship with all other human beings through this family. This is why we are called upon to care for and feed and give water to those who are in need, such as the people of Japan now. This is true of our care for co-workers and fellow students who are not Christians -- we are all descended from one human family, and we all share the frailty and guilt that comes from the fall. We “weep with those who weep”, regardless of whether they belong to our political or religious group or not. There are groups who applaud the deaths of their enemies and reward those who do the killing. We cannot be that way.
- 2) How we relate to our national leaders. Romans 13:1-7 says that governmental powers are ordained by God to do a job, and we must respect that. (When that was written Emperor Nero was upon the throne in Rome.) Especially, as Americans we can be so disrespectful of our leaders when we talk about them. It bothers me when Christians talk about “Obama” without the “President” before it. Or previously, when people talked about “Bush” the same way. It was then “President Bush” and now “President Obama.” We say this not because they are good or bad, but because God has ordained them to be in power at this or that time. When we become too hostile or angry toward them we must ask ourselves, *do we really believe in God’s sovereignty?* Few of our leaders are really that good or that bad that we should either idolize them or demonize them. They, like us, are sinful human beings, and God will use them for his own purposes.
- 3) How we relate to church leaders. I don’t think this is true here at this moment, but this certainly applies to those times in churches where the people

become frustrated with their pastors and elders in some way. We must show honor and respect and humility and gentleness in all our dealings with one another. Always.

- 4) How we relate to fellow Christians. When we judge another believer, or wish them harm, or delight in their fall... do we understand how that makes us guilty before God? Do we understand our own sin and pride? Do we understand how division and unresolved conflict robs the church of its glory as the people of God?
- 5) How we relate to our families. Especially, I think of marriages. How often I've seen in counseling that the couple will come to the place where they can see no good in the other. Their spouse almost becomes evil incarnate. Is there someone in your life about whom you cannot think of anything positive to say? If so, you yourself are blinded by your own hate and in the grip of sin! Even though Saul sought to kill David, David found good things to say about Saul both in public and private. Can you list good things about any person you dislike? Can you verbalize that to others, and to God in thankfulness?

**Finally, this leads us to prayer.** Jesus said (Matthew 5:44-45) *"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."* Pray regularly for those who oppose you and for God's blessing upon them. If you pray for a person daily, it will not be long before you view them in a more positive light. If they are doing evil they will face the wrath of God soon enough; pray that God would grant repentance and that they awaken to their judgment before the time. Pray that if you yourself are the cause of sin and conflict that God would convict you of your blindness.

**Pray through Romans 12:14-21** and ask God to enable you to "bless and not curse" and "to weep with those who weep" and to not "repay evil for evil" and "to overcome evil with good."