

David, Part 5 10-31-21

The King of Envy

A few years back, Beth and I were on a walk with two of our grandchildren and their dog. After we had walked for ten minutes, the older child asks if she can hold the dog's leash and I say, "sure." But then her brother starts fussing that he wants to hold the leash. I tell him he may after his sister does it for a bit, but this does not satisfy. He wants the leash NOW and then he went into meltdown mode. I watched this with some fascination. The boy had no interest in holding the dog's leash until his sister got to do so and then it suddenly became essential to his happiness, maybe even his survival, or so it would appear. What was going on there? How do we describe the spiritual dynamic involved in that occurrence? In a sense, that little exchange is a great indicator of just how deep is our natural corruption, our inherited sin nature – and I remind you, that these are my grandchildren. Beth's too I would note. But, what was our grandson experiencing that led to his anguish? The word we normally use is *envy*. *Jealousy* is close to it, but I am going to go with *envy*. And our study for today in our look at the life of David, will actually focus more on King Saul than on David. King Saul, the first king of Israel, becomes the patron saint of the envious. Let's refresh the story.

Chapter 17 is where we read of how David came to the rescue of Israel's armies by nailing Goliath of Gath in the head with a slung stone. The sons of Israel then routed the Philistines and thus won a great victory, granting King Saul many days of peace and much appreciation from a grateful nation. So, that is the background. Saul needed a champion to step up. David risked his life to do so. David's victory becomes Saul's victory. So, now – what will the relationship be like between the young hero and his king? One would like to think that Saul showered David with honors, placed him in a position of influence and celebrated him before the people. But, no. I mean, part of that happens. I Samuel 18:5 (NLT) *Saul made him a commander over the men of war, an appointment that was welcomed by the people and Saul's officers alike.* But then a new song in Israel went straight to the top of the charts and that song messed with Saul's head in a major way. 6-9 (NLT) *When the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. ⁷This was their song: "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands!" ⁸This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" ⁹So from that time on Saul kept a*

jealous eye on David. Saul is the big guy with the jealous eye. The Earl of Envy. It all starts right here. The proud and insecure king has heard the dancing ladies exalting David over him. He is in the song, but is not the headliner. Pride gets a grip in his heart, gives birth to jealousy and the young man whose music had soothed his soul and whose courage and skill had delivered the nation, who had become his own son's best friend, is now the object of his envy and, soon, the object of his wrath. What was David's crime? His superiority. His offense was the blessing of God that rested upon him. Think about this with me.

Now, I am going to suggest and then demonstrate that envy is a major theme of the Bible – especially envy of those who abide under the favor of God. We need not look long in Scripture – the fourth chapter is all about two sons of Adam and Eve. Their names – Cain and Abel. Both brought an offering to the Lord, but only Abel's was accepted by God. How did Cain react? Did he seek to learn from his brother? No, he got angry. He could not stand it that Abel had favor with God he did not have and so he murdered his brother, Abel. Toward the end of Genesis, we read the Joseph story. He was one favored by his father; he was given a special cloak, he was granted dreams by God and his brothers hated him for all of that and sold him as a slave. Envy raises its ugly head again. In the Moses story we read of men who resented the leadership role the Lord gave to Moses and rebelled against him out of envy. It didn't go well for them.

When we come to the New Testament there were Jewish leaders who envied the popularity of John the Baptist. And was Jesus hated due to envy? Oh, my yes. He was envied by those living without God. The religious honchos were afraid of Jesus because he was morally superior, theologically superior, superior in every way. I think we have a theme here. And nowhere is it more clear than in our story of Saul and David. We read on in I Samuel 17:10-15 (NLT) *The very next day a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave in his house like a madman. David was playing the harp, as he did each day. But Saul had a spear in his hand, ¹¹and he suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David escaped him twice. ¹²Saul was then afraid of David, for the Lord was with David and had turned away from Saul. ¹³Finally, Saul sent him away and appointed him commander over 1,000 men, and David faithfully led his troops into battle. ¹⁴David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the Lord was with him. ¹⁵When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him.* This is all it takes for some people to hate you. If you are being blessed like David be alert to this. And if you are more in Saul's position, watch your heart. Beware of the

temptations to envy which is a sin that can gain control of you and dominate you and move you to do things both sinful and crazy. Crazy – yes. Saul was hearing voices – the voices of the women who sang of David killing his ten-thousands. Who was Saul? Oh – he was just the king. But even so, taking any kind of backseat to young David was more than he could stand. The problem of envy does not plague just the down and outers, it can afflict the up and inners, because there is always somebody who seems to be more and have more. Saul was esteemed above everyone in Israel except maybe David. But pride can always find someone to serve as the object of my envy. You see, in truth, no one makes you jealous. Jealous is something you are. In Galatians 5, when Paul lists the sins of the flesh he mentions jealousy and envy. The words are almost identical, but they both make the list because this sin is such an indicator of our natural depravity. It means that we are saddened by the well-being of others. Think about that. Even if I have plenty, your greater plenty stirs up my discontent. It is easy to see in kids isn't it? If one gets a \$30 toy and another gets a \$50 toy – trouble is a brewing. It was also pretty easy to see in teen culture for sure. At high-school, if Heather makes cheerleader and you don't – Heather goes on your bad list. If Tommy makes the team and you get cut, you inwardly root that Tommy loses or gets hurt. If the guy you like asks your friend to the dance, oh my – that becomes a major test of the friendship. Envy provokes us to do horrible things as Saul did. You may not have a spear to throw like Saul, but you have words to speak that are designed to tear someone down and pin him to the wall. Do we need to say how unbecoming such behavior is for a child of God?

What are we to be like? One of the more convicting things I ever read was by A.W. Tozer in an article about the marks of a spiritual man. He brought out seven marks of true spirituality and the sixth one is this: *The desire to see others advance at his expense....He wants to see other Christians above him and is happy when they are promoted and he is overlooked. There is no envy in his heart; when his brethren are honored he is pleased because such is the will of God and that will is his earthly heaven. If God is pleased, he is pleased for that reason, and if it pleases God to exalt another above him he is content to have it so.* Well, gulp. How are we covetous, envious sinners ever going to be like this? We must, by the Holy Spirit, put to death, extinguish, eradicate and remove the root of pride within. Pride is the soil which grows the tree of envy. And what kind of fruit does it produce? Bitter, bitter fruit. James 3:16 (NAS) *Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.* Exhibit A – Mad King Saul. He tries to kill David with

a spear, but that is only the beginning. 17 (NLT) *One day Saul said to David, “I am ready to give you my older daughter, Merab, as your wife. But first you must prove yourself to be a real warrior by fighting the Lord’s battles.” For Saul thought, “I’ll send him out against the Philistines and let them kill him rather than doing it myself.”* Now, this was not being generous. He owed David his daughter. He had promised her to Goliath’s killer, but now Saul sets a deadly condition. He challenges him to more bravery, hoping it will get him killed. Well, it doesn’t and David heaped coals of fire on Saul’s head by saying this in reply 18-19 *Who am I, and what is my family in Israel that I should be the king’s son-in-law?” David exclaimed. “My father’s family is nothing!”* ¹⁹*So when the time came for Saul to give his daughter Merab in marriage to David, he gave her instead to Adriel, a man from Meholah.* Saul backed away from his word

Then, 20-21 *In the meantime, Saul’s daughter Michal had fallen in love with David, and Saul was delighted when he heard about it.* ²¹*“Here’s another chance to see him killed by the Philistines!” Saul said to himself. But to David he said, “Today you have a second chance to become my son-in-law!”* Saul’s hostility to David would risk the grief of his own daughter. Then in verse 25 Saul conveys this message to David – 25 *“All I want for the bride price is 100 Philistine foreskins! Vengeance on my enemies is all I really want.”* But what Saul had in mind was that David would be killed in the fight. You see, these foreskins were attached to actual Philistines who normally would not part with them willingly and could even get aggressive if you tried to take such a thing without permission. Well, 27 *He and his men went out and killed 200 Philistines. Then David fulfilled the king’s requirement by presenting all their foreskins to him. So, Saul gave his daughter Michal to David to be his wife.* Now this raises all kinds of questions – like how Saul could validate that the foreskins belonged to Philistines and what kind of ceremony is appropriate for the presentation of foreskins, but this hardly ends the drama between Saul and David. These chapters in 2 Samuel start to read like an episode of Roadrunner cartoons which you younger types may not relate to at all. Ask your parents to enlighten you about Roadrunner cartoons. But the point is that Saul keeps setting traps for David only to have them backfire against him. 28-30 (NLT) *When Saul realized that the Lord was with David and how much his daughter Michal loved him,* ²⁹*Saul became even more afraid of him, and he remained David’s enemy for the rest of his life.* ³⁰*Every time the commanders of the Philistines attacked, David was more successful against them than all the rest of Saul’s officers. So, David’s name became very famous.* Then Saul reverted back to trying to kill him with his spear,

but he missed. Then he sent soldiers to take him at night, but Michal his wife, found out about it and David fled. In the next chapter, Saul assigns Jonathan his son to knock David off, but Jonathan tipped David off instead. In chapter 22 Saul kills the priests who had helped David, in chapter 23 he pursues, in chapter 24 he pursues, in chapter 26 he pursues. Killing David was the great passion of Saul's life. He was like Inigo Montoya looking for the six-fingered man, but motivated by an ungodly envy not just revenge. It is interesting though – the narrative tells us several times that Saul came to his senses and repented. Or, at least he expressed remorse and an intention to leave David alone. But, this demon-inspired envy kept returning.

So, Saul serves us as a bad example. He is someone not to imitate, but his sin can serve to make us more alert. Many are those, over the centuries, who have fallen prey to various sins and been consumed by them – by their lust, by their pride, by their envy. Saul is the patron saint of the envious.

What are the lessons for us? For one, when you see people engaging in destructive behaviors that don't seem to make any sense, you will often find a root of bitterness, an envious spirit behind it. These could be micro aggressions, such as lying about you to co-workers or family members. It could be macro-aggressions such as blowing up buildings in a far-away country that is much more advanced and prosperous than yours. Brothers and Sisters, America may be hated around the world for many things. We have our faults, but the hostility will often be rooted in a simple jealousy of our wealth and our freedom. Hatred of Christians can sometimes follow the same track. Some will envy the fruits of your righteousness. Some will hate you for the very things that lead to your prosperity. That is part of life in a fallen world. It happened to Jesus, it will happen to us. Don't be surprised.

Then, conversely, guard your heart against growing envious of others. Realize that some devils and some people (politicians, marketers) will feed your envy, will nurture it in order to use it as leverage to get you doing their will. They will point out that others have more than you. Oh no! They will tell you that they got their "more" unfairly. They will stir up resentment and plant the destructive seeds of envy in your heart. Watch out! Resist their propaganda, and then, when you can identify the seeds of envy starting to sprout, take time to slow down, to reflect on just how rich you are in Jesus, just how little you actually deserve, just how much you actually have and just how glorious is your inheritance. Worship and envy cannot exist together – so worship! So, celebrate the grace of Christ in your life. Perhaps you look at others who are more gifted than you, more popular than you, more attractive than you. Yes, there are a few. Not many, but a few. Admire

them if you like, but do not envy. Appreciate their excellence. See in them the glory of our king, that is fine, but do not despise the grace of Christ that is at work in you and for you, which is amazing and wonderful and mind-boggling. I mean seriously - Jeremy Taylor said of the professing Christian, *“he that hath so many causes of joy is very much in love with sorrow and peevishness if he forgets all these pleasures and chooses to sit down on his little handful of thorns.”* That is a great rebuke to me because I know I sometimes do exactly that. That is why I want to admonish myself often and you with me to never forget that the central, greatest, the most significant reality in our lives is the love of Jesus our King. Can you make that the foundation for your emotions and your choices? Pat Barrett’s great hymn says it well, *I will build my life upon your love, it is a firm foundation. And I will not be shaken.* Saul failed at this. David did better. Now how about you?