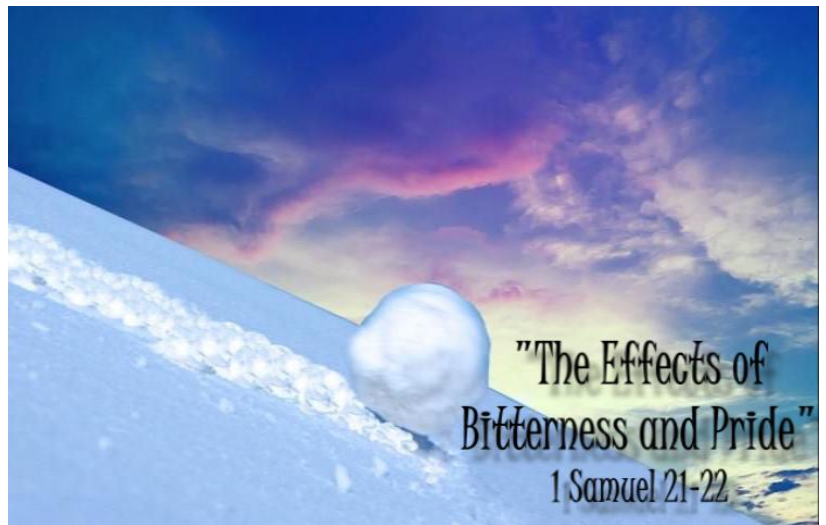


"The Effects of Bitterness and Pride"

1 Samuel 21-22

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on Wednesday, July 20th, 2016
at Menomonie, Wisconsin



David was now on the run. *"Why are you alone and no one is with you?"* asked

Ahimelech the priest. It seems there are these

times in life when one finds himself or herself so very alone and 'on the run.' Ironically, we are so surprised to find ourselves in such situations and more even surprised by *why* and *who* is playing a part in our state. Because certainly in hindsight David would acknowledge that such a development was hardly a revelation! I mean really!...there *were* signs, wasn't there? But few if any would have seen those things...few would have been witness...thus few would believe it all if they were told. It would be just here-say and fiction as David was now on the defense. Nobody would be there to back him up. He was alone.

What a crazy series of events to lead up to this. Two men who were once both called by God. Two men who used to love each other and literally play for the same team. Warriors. Servants of God. Psalms 55:12-14 speaks of such a scene... *"It is not an enemy who taunts me — I could bear that. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me — I could have hidden from them. Instead, it is you — my equal, my companion and close friend. What good fellowship we once enjoyed as we walked together to the house of God..."*

We have read of the faithfulness of David, and we will see as the chapters progress that David is loyal even in the midst of evil and deception. It is clear that David trusted God to intervene and God to deal with the situation. For it is always and forever God that has the clear view...the unadulterated understanding of what is happening, and never us.

For some time now, Saul had been escalating. Oh, there were lucid moments. Passing flashes of clarity and understanding...snatches of humility...periods of righteousness. But the "disease" of pride and bitterness were never dealt with completely, and thus the 'inevitable' was therefore only delayed...only waiting to appear again later. Like a booby-trapped bomb, Saul was sooner or later going to 'go off' and people were going to get hurt.

God was gracious with Saul as He is with all of us. Thankfully, God does not 'drop us in our tracks' at the moment of first sin. If He did, this church would be empty for sure! He is enduring and truthfully incredibly patient. He gives us time to see our sin...time to acknowledge our shortcoming...time to 'pull up.' But just as faithful, is the **end** of such! Just as sure, is the 'grand finale' of a life unbending...a heart disgruntled...a life malcontent. For bitterness is a cancer...jealousy a malignancy of the heart. One that will most surely kill us in the end. For some, it will be a violent physical death, and for others a train wreck of the soul.

Saul was marching undeterred toward that fateful appointment with an Amalakite soldier...a sad end...brought to shame and finale by a living embodiment...a physical manifest of the sin that broke his fellowship with God. A man who, if Saul had been obedient, would not have even been alive to do Saul harm in the end. It would be a very long and convoluted road, but Saul's beginning would be his eventual undoing and would effectively end what had in truth already been finished for years. By the time Saul finally dies, he will have wasted away *years* of his life on anger, and bitterness, and jealousy and want. Saul would not hear the counsel of those around him. He would not acquiesce to the will and plan of God concerning others and concerning himself and his world.

So he fought. Like Jacob before Him, Saul would wrestle with God to his own undoing.

Saul wanted more than anything to be King and to remain so. It wasn't that he particularly longed to serve His Creator and His people. Oh no...please don't think Saul was in anyway driven by love, unless it is a love for himself, and love for the power of position. No...Saul was driven by one thing: *LUST*. Oh no...not the classic definition. Not illicit sexual desire, but for *something else*. Because the definition of 'lust' encompasses the "*strong desire for something...*" A desire that consumes one. A want that overcomes all other senses and wisdom.

So David...once Saul's loyal friend, was now on the run. I remember once when Jesus asked those around Him "why are you trying to kill me?"(John 7:19) Of course the religious folks around him answered incredulously "*who is trying to kill you? Are you demon possessed or something?*" But yet it would not be long before they would become assassins. Murders of character. Killers of reputation. And ultimately they would take it all as far as they could. Consumed by their bitterness. Overwhelmed by their illicit desire. Running as fast as they could from their own guilt they would smother their righteous convictions through the fanning of the flames of anger and hatred.

David was down to basics. He was alone as the people around him were not to be found. He had nothing but the shirt on his back, and no friend who was willing to get their hands dirty and risk their lives and livelihood on his behalf.

Saul would now travel from loyal ruler, ...to unfaithful dignitary, ...to belligerent thug, ...to a murderer of God's chosen. I can only imagine being there that day when Saul would saddle up to a clearly *wicked* man to execute his own hatred. To give repose to his all consuming bitterness. The shock...the wonder! *What is this? What are you doing Saul?* One after another, God's chosen servants would die because Saul wanted satisfaction. More than anything else, he wanted revenge and satisfaction. He didn't have to kill them himself, just as we don't. We can do it with words, feeding into the hunger of spite and need found in the wicked soldiers of Satan that walk this earth.

Such soldiers will squeal with glee as the Saul's of today turn on God's people...his *own* people...bringing shame and reproach on His church in order to satisfy that grievous debt of all consuming bitterness against them. What joy such folks must bring to Satan! As the world looks on it sees the same scorned and rejected emotions, wants, and actions that are well sanctioned in *their* lives, lived out by those who claim the 'holiness of God' and scold others for the such behavior! It's all the fodder of a good laugh no doubt. And in doing so, it has the secondary damnable action of chasing souls away from God, salvation, and eternal life. All the while we still have our 'fish sticker' on the back of our car, go to church on Sundays, and even teach a side bible study in our living rooms. After all, we are kings right?

What happened here? What went wrong? Did David lie awake at night and run the scenario through his head over and over and over? Trying to make sense of it? Trying to figure out when and where the wrong turn was taken and the active presence of God slipped through their fingers? It certainly seemed likely as we read in verse 1 of the last chapter of 1 Samuel (Chapter 20), where David was already running...and dismayed he cried to Jonathan. *"What have I done?... What is my crime? How have I offended your father that he is so determined to kill me?"*

We too can stand aghast...incredulous as to the events that transpire before us. *Why is this happening? How did it come to this? What is so wrong to cause such spitting fire and hateful eyes?* One could certainly trace the steps back and see Saul that day with the Amalakites...not flagrantly disobedient, but rather weasely and fudging the directives given to him. Rarely are such cases actually the overt rejection of God's will, but rather a "cheating"...a "fudging"...a "90% obedience." No one would argue that if indeed it did not *start* there, it certainly was first *manifest* there. A heart of rebellion. A spirit that placed himself higher than God. Again, it wasn't an illicit surrender to an evening of cocaine and reprehensible sex! No, it was a "re-writing" of God's words...a 'revisionist' history telling...an unscrupulous translator of God's directives. Saul claimed he **did** obey God! But he meant he *mostly* obeyed God! He was rewriting what God said, as well as his actual response. He was lying about God...

Saul was where we all eventually find ourselves...a place where we feel that we want to tell others what God *really* meant when he said something or other. That what was said can *only* mean such because if God **literally** meant what he said, then that would mean...*well, ...that I wouldn't be king! And that's not possible right? Because I want to be king really bad...and I deserve to be king, and I'm as good of a king as any of those other guys...in fact, I don't want to brag, but I'm better!* So He must have meant "**this**"...and we go on to rewrite the words of God.

Yet it's amazing that in scripture, few things got God so riled up as mis-representing Him and what He said. Historically speaking, it's a dangerous thing for sure! But is this where the trouble really started? Was Saul "finished" that day when he disobeyed? Well, again...if disobedience puts us out of the race, we all would be sitting on the sidelines today right? Did his sin change the course of history? Yes, absolutely! Just as some sins...while forgiven, will indeed change our road for all the rest of our lives. Such a fact is undeniable. But that being said, God can and will still use us, and love us, and commune with us! But sometimes, we don't get to be king any more. But again...*is this where the road forked? Is this where it all 'went bad' for Saul?*

I would propose that if we retraced our steps, the turning point actually came some chapters after...chapter 16, verse 14- *"...the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him."* This would be the first of many such "distressing spirit" visits, (18:10, 19:9), thus one must see that Saul had to be open to such.

Now nowhere did it say that Saul was "possessed." The language is specific; that a "distressing spirit *from the Lord*" troubled him...came upon him, etc. It would be a mistake to equate the specifics of what was happening here in light of the New Testament baptism and possession of the Holy Spirit. But it would equally be a mistake to disregard the events as some archaic old testament account that has no bearing on us!

What can we glean from all of this then? Especially if this was indeed the 'turning point' for Saul? We can know...Old Testament and New, that the Spirit of God is real and active and is the hand of God on earth. God, it seemed, was in no hurry...He waited until He had someone else lined up to take Saul's place and then just moved him out. While the sin of disobedience....the sin of his pride and rebellion took him out of his roll as king, it was the *departure of Gods spirit* that finished him as a man. It was the absence of that Spirit of God that haunted him...that took away his 'mojo'...broke him of his brave heart against the enemies of Israel. It was that which haunted him when he threw a spear at David in 18:11, and in 19:10. Slowly Saul was becoming another man...one void of God and the desire to please him. He was becoming a troubled man who *wanted*. He *needed* the position and power. He needed the glory! He *wanted* what he *wanted*...

And while this is certainly far from all the crazy behavior we will see from Saul, this chapter 22 brings us to a wicked "coming out" day for Saul. He had ducked the paparazzi and had avoided the public scrutiny. But now he was "out." He was out for all to see. The killer of God's people...the mad ego gone amuck, the man proving just how far he would go to get and keep what he wanted. It didn't matter anymore what God wanted. Oh, he would still play the religious game, but it was all so hollow from therein. The presence of God was departed, and thus so was the power, the gifting, the joy, and the anointing.

At this point, in my experience, a person is beyond the point of return. Oh, *could* one return? Oh yes! But *DO* they? Not in my experience. Again, that doesn't mean it is impossible, it just means it is very very rare. The reason is, the only good we have in us is the good that the Spirit of God brings to us. So if He 'leaves the house', *well*...

While my experience is not the Holy Scripture, I have found that when that moment comes...when the masks are off and so are the gloves, that that person *becomes someone else*. It is one of the weirdest phenomena of my ministerial life. When I talked with them, it was literally like they were a different person. All reason and sense are gone. All that loved and was loved is conspicuously absent. They literally *look* different! I know...far from scientific and only personally experiential on my part! But that was my experience just the same. There were issues leading up to that day...struggles and problems...stumbles and error, but it was like a 'flipping of a switch' when it finally came. When that order came from them...to the shock of everyone: *I hate you all...kill them all*.

Saul was gone. David was on the run alone. It was ugly, and it looked real bad for everyone. But in the end...for those who know the story...God would have His way and would glorify Himself all along the way!

What's in here for us? More than a sad Hollywood flick or a source for gossip and whispers. There is a message for us...a warning...a realism that we can sin, reject his truth and council, and push away the spirit of God until we are left spiritual naked. But just like in the story, the king doesn't know it and the people won't say it. In "**The Emperor's New Clothes...**" a short story by Hans Christian Andersen, two weavers promise an emperor a new suit of clothes that is invisible to those who are unfit for their positions, stupid, or incompetent. When the Emperor parades before his subjects in his new clothes, no one dares to say that they don't see any suit of clothes until a child cries out, "But he isn't wearing anything at all!"

The activity and presence of the Spirit of God is with us upon our truthful invitation, and contingent upon our obedience and response to Him. It's an easy correlation: *reject His plan and will, and He simply leaves us, and leaves us to our own will, and all the ugly disaster that goes with such a state*. But do you just truthfully think today that your new suit of clothes is invisible? *It's there and it's great, ...it's just that none of you people can see it!* Or are you possibly ready today to acknowledge that in fact you "*aren't wearing anything at all...*?"