

David Laments the Deaths of Saul and Jonathan

Lesson Scope: [2 Samuel 1: 1-2:7](#)

Lesson Focus

Three days after David returned from pursuing the Amalekites, amid the rejoicing of that victory, David received news of Israel's defeat and the death of Saul and his sons. Knowing that Samuel had already anointed David to be king in Saul's place, most people would have expected him to rejoice that the time had finally come. David's reaction, however, was quite the opposite. He mourned the loss Israel suffered as a nation, and he mourned for Saul and for Jonathan. Despite Saul's mistreatment, David's actions reveal his heart concerning the king and the nation.

David also lost a loyal companion and friend in Jonathan. The two men shared many difficulties, and David would sorely miss Jonathan's insight and counsel. His future on the throne likely loomed large, and without Jonathan's aid, it loomed larger still. David rightfully took the time to mourn the loss of Saul and his house before claiming the throne given him by God. His attitude toward these deaths further earned the respect of the people.

The true test of integrity lies in the attitudes that we harbor in our hearts. These attitudes become apparent by our actions.

Death reminds us of the frailty of life and of the seriousness of the choices we make. The separation is keenly felt by those left behind, particularly if the relationship was close. How a person speaks of another after death reveals much about his attitudes and motivations. David mourned Jonathan, as would be expected, since they were close friends. However, he also mourned Saul, who by many measures would be counted an enemy. The content of David's song of lament was respectful and focused on the positive side of Saul's contribution to Israel. It is an example for us to follow to always see the positive in those around us.

Take the time to examine the elements of the grieving process depicted in this passage. Note how David received the news, how he lamented, and how he recognized the respect others gave Saul in arranging a

proper burial. Note also the elements of the burial. In these times, tradition helps to move those most closely touched through the grieving and helps to ensure a proper, respectful farewell to the loved one.

Lesson Aim: To glean truths from David's response to the deaths of Saul and Jonathan.

Theme Verse: [James 2:8](#). If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.

Lesson Text

"How Went the Matter?"

[2 Samuel 1:1-4](#) ¹ Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag; ² It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and *so* it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance. ³ And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. ⁴ And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also.

"How Wast Thou Not Afraid?"

[2 Samuel 1:11-14](#) ¹¹ Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that *were* with him: ¹² And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword. ¹³ And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence *art* thou? And he answered, I *am* the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. ¹⁴ And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?

"How Are the Mighty Fallen!"

[2 Samuel 1:17-27](#) ¹⁷ And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: ¹⁸ (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah *the use of* the bow: behold, *it is* written in the book of Jasher.) ¹⁹ The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty

fallen! ²⁰ Tell *it* not in Gath, publish *it* not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. ²¹ Ye mountains of Gilboa, *let there be* no dew, neither *let there be* rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, *as though he had not been* anointed with oil. ²² From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. ²³ Saul and Jonathan *were* lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. ²⁴ Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with *other* delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. ²⁵ How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, *thou wast* slain in thine high places. ²⁶ I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. ²⁷ How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

2 Samuel 2:5-6 ⁵ And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed *be* ye of the LORD, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, *even* unto Saul, and have buried him. ⁶ And now the LORD shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing.

Questions for Study

"How Went the Matter?"

1. What are the benefits of a surrendered life?
2. List practical ways we can maintain a healthy interest in the lives of our brethren.

"How Wast Thou Not Afraid?"

3. What errors did the Amalekite make?
4. How might we be called to stand for justice?

"How Are the Mighty Fallen!"

5. How could David say the things he said in verse 23?
6. How do we cultivate a love for all men?
7. Why are proper burial and remembrance appropriate?

Analyzing the Passage

First Samuel 31 indicates that, the day after the battle, the Philistines found Saul's and his sons' bodies and fastened them to the wall for public display. Their bodies were left to decay and be picked apart by scavenging animals for all passersby to see as a celebration of victory and a mockery of the enemies' defeat. The men of Jabesh-gilead heard of this and removed the bodies under cover of darkness and gave them a proper burial. The messenger to David came on the day after the Philistines had cleared the battlefield of the spoils and the trophy bodies of Saul and his sons.

The messenger identified himself as an Amalekite. David had just put down the Amalekites for what they had done in Ziklag. This man's story does not seem to match the account in I Samuel 31, which states that Saul fell on his own sword. This man's claim to have killed Saul may have been an attempt to win David's favor. It is unclear if David believed the story, but it cost the man his life.

David's lament in the second half of chapter I reveals the true attitude of his heart. He lamented the loss in battle, which was a reproach to the nation. He also lamented the loss of King Saul and his sons, particularly Jonathan. And he recognized that the Philistines would use this to denigrate God. He called on the nation to mourn with him before he claimed the throne that God had appointed him years before.

The text verses from chapter 2 further show David's true attitude toward Saul. Here he commends the men of Jabesh-gilead for reclaiming the bodies of Saul and his sons and giving them proper burial. They showed the honor and respect due to the king and his family.

Principles and Applications

"How Went the Matter?"

1. Surrender to God's will and providence gives proof of integrity (2 Samuel 1:1). Being overanxious about life's future responsibilities robs us of our present joy. God wants us to rest in the confidence that He will order our lives for good. Our surrender may be tested both when things seem to be going against us and when the way seems to be clear for us to surge ahead with our plans.

2. A keen interest in the welfare of God's people indicates a heart of integrity (2 Samuel 1:2-4). By nature we are self-centered. But a heart in

tune with God is keen to the hurts and disappointments of His people. A man of integrity is concerned about how the battle is going in the lives of his brethren. Their victories and losses become his as well.

"How Wast Thou Not Afraid?"

3. True sorrow confirms genuine love and forgiveness (2 Samuel 1:11, 12). Charity "[weeps] with them that weep" even when one's loss could actually be another's gain. To "rejoice not when thine enemy falleth" requires a heart under divine control and manifests a total absence of hatred and malice.

4. We should see failure as a reproach against God and His people (2 Samuel 1:12). Failure by even one person in the brotherhood gives occasion for the enemy to blaspheme. Failure discourages the group and encourages the enemy to continue buffeting the righteous. The failure of one can discourage others in their battles. A proper jealousy for God's kingdom will cause each of us to seek the spiritual good of our brethren.

5. The inconsistency of others must never be allowed to weaken our purpose to do right (2 Samuel 1:14). Others might do wrong and even boast of it. Some will mock the conscientious and declare themselves Christians even though they live by carnally adjusted ethics rather than by Biblical principles. At such times we must remember that we will answer to God, so we must live by His Word.

"How Are the Mighty Fallen!"

6. Death reminds us that even the mighty have an end (2 Samuel 1:19). We all must one day lay down our earthly work, no matter our position in life, our riches accumulated, or our standing with God. The Lord's work will be picked up and carried forward by the next generation for eternal gain; man's work will perish. We do well to work at tasks that support the Lord's work, for it is a lasting work. And while we work, let us remember that "the night cometh, when no man can work."

7. We must never exploit the failures of God's people (2 Samuel 1:20-21). We are all human, having the frailties that are inherent in humanity. Exploiting failure can take several forms. We can proclaim by word and action how we could do it better. We can mock and gossip. No matter the form, such actions reveal a proud heart and are a disgrace to a child of God and to God Himself. We should be grieved when the world learns of a brother's weakness or failure and be far from discussing such things with the unregenerate.

8. All mankind, though mortal, possess good points worthy of recognition (2 Samuel 1:23). David identified these positive points in his lament of Saul and Jonathan. By focusing on the positive, we can build up those around us and encourage them to better works. Saying that "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives" was a recognition of respect for the men, their position, and the work they were involved in. Such a response leaves a positive testimony.

9. Loyal friendships in life are keenly missed in death (2 Samuel 1:26). David lost a loyal friend, a good adviser, and a "brother." Reflecting on hallowed moments has a blessed influence in such times of loss. The memories we choose to cherish become a subconscious motivating force in our lives so that noble characters and worthy examples continue to refine us even after they are gone.

10. A proper burial shows respect for the dead (2 Samuel 2:5-6). Since we are made in God's image from the dust, a proper respect must be given the body when life is ended. A proper burial returns the dust to the earth and brings home the finality of death. For the living, such a time of mourning and burial is healthy emotionally, physically, and spiritually. It also allows for a final, respectful farewell to the departed one.

Important Teachings

1. Surrender to God's will and providence gives proof of integrity (2 Samuel 1:1).

2. A keen interest in the welfare of God's people indicates a heart of integrity (2 Samuel 1:2-4).

3. True sorrow confirms genuine love and forgiveness (2 Samuel 1:11-12).

4. We should see failure as a reproach against God and His people (2 Samuel 1:12).

5. The inconsistency of others must never be allowed to weaken our purpose to do right (2 Samuel 1:14).

6. Death reminds us that even the mighty have an end (2 Samuel 1:19).

7. We must never exploit the failures of God's people (2 Samuel 1:20, 21).

8. All mankind, though mortal, possess good points worthy of recognition (2 Samuel 1:23).

9. Loyal friendships in life are keenly missed in death (2 Samuel 1:26).
10. A proper burial shows respect for the dead (2 Samuel 2:5-6).

Answers to Questions

1. What are the benefits of a surrendered life?

Surrender opens us more fully to God's leading. We are better suited to serve our fellow men. Contentment and peace rule in our hearts. Surrender tempers emotions and limits rash responses. A surrendered life has fewer regrets because it is not lived selfishly.

2. List practical ways we can maintain a healthy interest in the lives of our brethren.

We should be attentive in conversation for needs that are identified. We should visit each other on a regular basis. Several brief informal visits may convey more interest than a single formal visit. We must be careful to ensure the accuracy of what we say and hear. Speak well of others and certainly do not gossip. Be discreet about those needs that are shared in confidence.

3. What errors did the Amalekite make?

He claimed to have killed the king. He took items from the king's body. He went to David with the story instead of to Abner (the logical man in charge on the battlefield once the king fell), showing a desire to be rewarded. He sought recognition for his deed. He did not show remorse or regret.

4. How might we be called to stand for justice?

We might need to give testimony in a dispute. It should be concise, complete, and clear. We must stand by truth. We may be called to lend support and counsel to an offender; such support must be righteous and edifying so the offender finds restoration. Justice is not vengeance, and once served should be left in the past.

5. How could David say the things he said in verse 23?

David was focusing on positive things in Saul's life, which proves he had good attitudes, including forgiveness for his enemy. Saul was, no doubt, a valiant warrior, not blinded by hatred, when he was at his best. David could see that.

6. How do we cultivate a love for all men?

Realize that we all share the same basic nature. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Focus on the strengths of others, and quietly assist in

weakness if appropriate. Consider the final destination of lost men. Recognize others' responsibilities in life and find the positive contributions they make toward fulfilling those responsibilities. A helping hand when needed also goes a long way.

7. Why are proper burial and remembrance appropriate?

We are made in God's image. The final disposition of the body should portray this fact and be respectful and honorable. Our bodies are dust, and they must return to dust. Remembrance is healthy for those who are still alive, as it reminds us of our own mortality. Remembering those who have died also provides us with examples from their lives that we may incorporate into our own experience as warning, admonition, or encouragement.

Summarizing the Lesson

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart" (Ecclesiastes 7:2). In the wisdom of God, life's difficult times and times of sober reflection provide the best opportunities for spiritual betterment. It is then that hearts are softened, wills are broken, and worthwhile relationships are most cherished.

Research Guide

1. Read other recorded instances of mourning in Scripture.
2. Ponder expressions of charity as given in 1 Corinthians 13 that David illustrated in this experience.