Farewell to King Saul

Courage to Lead Series

2 Samuel 1:1-27

Pastor Bryan Clark

A few weeks ago Patti and I were cruising the Black Hills of South Dakota on the back of a Harley Davidson. It's a great place to ride; we had a great time, and trust me, we were *really* rowdy. *(laughter)* One of my favorite towns there is Deadwood because Deadwood is filled with Wild West history, and that happens to be something that really interests me. So, for example, that was the place where Wild Bill Hickok was shot and killed in Saloon Number 10 by Jack McCall—and that saloon is still there, which is also quite interesting. Wild Bill Hickok was famous for the saying, "In the end, the house always wins." He meant that two ways: One is, he was a gambler, and no matter how many times you had a lucky streak, at the end of the day, the house always wins. It's just the way it works, but also for him, it was metaphoric. He understood that as a gunslinger, eventually his luck could run out and he would take a bullet, and that is how he died in Deadwood.

If you read the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, there is one clear message that reoccurs again and again and again: *In the end, God always wins*. Part of the definition of being God, is God doesn't lose; God always wins. Really starting with Cain—which is where this message really intensifies—and then all the way through the Bible, there is this common problem occurring in people made in the image of God that think, "Somehow I can fight God and win," yet the reoccurring theme is, "You can't." At the end of the day, God always wins. That's what we want to talk about this morning as we take our final look at King Saul.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Samuel, Chapter 1. If you're new with us, even in the last few months, we spent most of last year working our way through the book of 1 Samuel. It's helpful to realize that the break between 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel is purely artificial, just done by an editor in order to shorten up the books to make them more manageable. But originally it was one long book and one running story, so that's the best way to understand it. In order to understand 2 Samuel and especially these first couple of chapters, it's helpful to go back and review just the highlights of 1 Samuel.

We determined that Samuel is primarily a book about leadership, and we defined leadership as "Anyone who wants to be a serious Christ-follower and influence others." We generalized leadership at that level so the book has an application pretty much to everyone. There are four primary leaders in Samuel. It goes from Eli to Samuel to Saul to David. Eli was the priest; he and his sons were responsible for the activities at the tabernacle, but Eli's sons were evil, wicked, offensive men, and they did all kinds of evil, offensive things to people when they brought their offerings to God at the tabernacle. Eli, for whatever reason, chose not to deal with it so God judged him because he had honored his sons over God. The judgment was that Eli and his sons would all die on the same day—and that's what happens. The Philistines attack; they steal the ark of the covenant, and Eli and his sons all die that day. This is really a horrific moment in the history of the Hebrew people because the precious ark of the covenant was taken and was in the hands of the Philistines. But what follows is a really remarkable story—that God, without a single soldier, without an army, without a king, without one Israelite, defeated the Philistines, and they gave the ark back.

There is this reminder in the book of Samuel, God doesn't need anyone to win. God doesn't need a king; God doesn't need generals; God doesn't need armies; God doesn't need soldiers. God by Himself is a majority. This reminds us what God needs most from us is not our talent; it's not our skill; it's not our training; it's not our abilities—what God wants is our heart. God doesn't need us; God has invited us to be part of something that will matter forever. It goes then to the next leader, who is Samuel.

Samuel is a godly leader, leads the nation well. It is years of prosperity but as Samuel is aging, his sons are more like Eli's sons. They are wicked and evil, and the nation of Israel is fearful that when Samuel dies, his sons will take over and they don't want that, so they request a human king. Now God is very clear: What they're actually doing is rejecting God as king. They want a human king, and God encourages them to rethink their decision, but they insist that's what they want. They want to be like the pagan nations around them—they want a human king. Sometimes, in order for God to discipline us or to teach us a lesson, God gives us what we ask for, and that's what He did to the nation of Israel. He gave them their human king in order that they might learn. The king that was chosen was Saul, the third leader in 1 Samuel.

Saul was tall, dark and handsome, externally looked like the perfect choice, but Saul internally was fearful; he was insecure, and he simply did not have a heart for God. I don't believe that Saul was set up to fail. As a matter of fact, God tells Saul through Samuel, "If you'll just trust Me, I'll give you everything you need to succeed. I'll give you My Spirit; I'll change you; I'll empower you in order to be the king of Israel." But Saul simply wouldn't listen. Saul was determined to be his own god, to go his own way, to not be obedient to God, and ultimately God determined to remove him as king. There are these moments in the story when you get glimpses of what could have been. First Samuel 11 is the best glimpse. I called it Saul's finest hour. There was just this glimpse of what was possible if Saul had been willing to obey—but he wasn't. He disobeys God, and God tells Saul because of that, your family line will not continue as king—Saul is out; a new king in. David was just basically minding his own business, out with the sheep one day. Samuel shows up and tells him that he will be anointed as the next king of Israel. The reason isn't because he was so skillful or talented or handsome; it was because he was a man after God's own heart, clearly indicating that was the problem with Saul, and this is what would make David different. David had a passionate heart for God.

The difference between David and Saul then was seen in one of the most familiar stories of the Old Testament—the story of David and Goliath, which is actually the story of David and Saul. Goliath is the giant that shows up on the scene and taunts and mocks the armies of the living God. Saul and his army are paralyzed with fear, and day after day they do nothing. David's just a shepherd boy that shows up at the battlefront in order to deliver some food to his brothers, but he hears the Philistine Big Mouth, and he is deeply offended that this Philistine would be allowed to say such things about God, and no one was stopping him. So he determined he would stop him. He was so jealous for the glory and reputation of God, he couldn't take it. So David, armed with a slingshot, drops the giant. It's a great moment in the David story. The nation falls in love with him. The ladies make up a song about him, "Saul has killed his thousands; David his ten thousands." It's really one of these great moments in the David story! However David's success is so threatening to Saul that Saul determines David is trying to take the throne and declares him to be public enemy number one and determines to kill him.

It's really important to understand—David, as a result of his obedience and his courageous victory over Goliath, the reward of that was his life became a nightmare, and for over a decade David would live as a fugitive in the wilderness as Saul was seeking to kill him. Now there's just no way

this could have made any sense to David. He was hurt; he was confused; he was frustrated; he was disillusioned. He was trying to be obedient, to do the right thing, and the result of that was his life was miserable, not for a month, not for a year, not for a few years, but for well over a decade as God would take him through the *Wilderness School of Leadership* to prepare him to become the greatest king in the history of Israel. In the midst of the confusion and the pain and the struggle, David had this courageous faith, and in the midst of all that, he continued to pursue God and trust God and obey God, as God continued to prepare him.

First Samuel ends with two battles with the two leaders: One is David and this band of soldiers he had put together as they battled the Amalekites. They won a total victory; they had no losses; they rescued the women and children, and David acted very kingly. About 80-100 miles away, on what seems like the very same day, King Saul was engaged with the Philistines in a battle where Saul and his three sons die. Israel is slaughtered and the nation appears lost. That's where we left the story at the end of 1 Samuel, and we pick it up there in 2 Samuel, chapter one:

> **Now it came about after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, that David remained two days in Ziklag. On the third day, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul, with his clothes torn and dust on his head. And it came about when he came to David that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself. Then David said to him, "From where do you come?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." David said to him, "How did things go? Please tell me." And he said, "The people have fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also." So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" The young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and behold, Saul was leaning on his spear. And behold, the chariots and the horsemen pursued him closely. When he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I said, 'Here I am.' He said to me, 'Who are you?' And I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' Then he said to me, 'Please stand beside me and kill me, for agony has seized me because my life still lingers in me.' So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown which *was* on his head and the bracelet which *was* on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord."** (*NASB, 2 Samuel 1:1-10)

So David is back in Ziklag. Remember Ziklag was the city that the Amalekites burned; they took the women and children, and that was the background of David's battle. He and his men are back. A messenger comes from the battlefront. (Remember David was with the Philistines en route to do battle against Saul and Israel in 1 Samuel. It would have been absolutely disastrous if David had been with the Philistines when they killed Saul. How could the nation of Israel have ever accepted David as their next king if David was fighting with the Philistines against them and their king? God sovereignly superintends, gets David out of that mess, ends up David goes to Ziklag, so he's engaged in a battle against the Amalekites, totally separate from the Philistine battle with Israel.) So David would know that battle took place, but he would not know the outcome. So the messenger shows up, and he has the traditional appearance of mourning—clothes are torn, dust on his head. David asks him where he's come from, what was the result of the battle—and the news was terrible! Israel was defeated; the people were slaughtered, and Saul and Jonathan were dead. You remember David and Jonathan had made this covenant that when David became king, Jonathan would be right there with him by his side. This has to be the first emotional realization where David knows Jonathan will not be with him in the kingdom, and it had to have been absolutely devastating to him. He asked the messenger, "How do you know that's the case?" Maybe a little bit

of doubt or wishful thinking, but the messenger says, "Well, here's the way the story went," and he describes the story.

Now if you compare the messenger's story with the story of chapter 31 of 1 Samuel, there are similarities, but there are some obvious differences. In chapter 31, Saul is wounded; he asks his armor-bearer to kill him. His armor-bearer won't do it because he's *the Lord's anointed*, so Saul falls on his sword and kills himself. That's very different from the version of the Amalekite.

This is one of those classic passages where a skeptic might say, "I can't trust the Bible; the Bible's filled with errors. For example, two different versions of Saul's death—they can't both be true." I would suggest to you that is a silly argument. That might have some merit if you're talking about a separate book by a separate author, but this is one chapter after another. You remove the artificial break and this is literally the narrator telling one version of the story followed immediately with the second version of the story. Obviously he knows they don't line up; that means the second version must not be true. Chapter 31 is the narrator's accurate historical version of what happened.

Chapter one of 2 Samuel is the Amalekite's version of what happened, and he's clearly up to something. He is a mercenary. He's manufacturing the story in order to get on David's good side, in order to be rewarded. There's so much in his story that just doesn't really make sense. For example, his story is he just happened to be strolling across Mount Gilboa and came across Saul about to die. Oh, by the way, there was a war going on, and there were Philistine horses and chariots bearing down on Saul. If there is a war going on and the Philistines are bearing down on the spot on which you are standing, you don't go out for a casual stroll across the meadow. You run! But he claims he came across Saul; Saul was wounded; Saul didn't want to fall into the hands of the Philistines; Saul asked him to finish him off, so he finished him off. He then took the crown and the kingly bracelet and delivered them to David. Now imagine what he's thinking: Saul has declared David public enemy number one, so David must consider Saul an enemy. So he comes across Saul; he's dead; he sees an opportunity: I will take the crown; I will take the bracelet, and I will tell David I finished him off. "He's dead; here's your crown; you're ready to be king," and certainly David will reward him.

In chapter 31 we were told it wasn't until the next day that the Philistines started to go out to the battlefield. They were surprised to find that they had killed King Saul. They took his armor and they cut off his head. They didn't take his crown; they didn't take his bracelet; obviously they weren't there, which would indicate something happened in the meantime. In the ancient world it was very common that there were these scroungers, these scavengers, who would go out at night into the battlefield and they would look on the bodies of those who had perished and gather anything that had value. Clearly that's what the Amalekite was doing. He came across Saul; he took the crown; he took the bracelet; he made up a story, shows up, tells the story to David in hopes that he will receive great reward.

The other thing that's worth noting is if you go back to 1 Samuel and you read that story and you read the story of the day that Eli and his sons died—remember Eli and Saul would be the two highly ineffective leaders in the story—what you find is the Hebrew description of the messenger and the message of that messenger for the Eli story and here related to the Saul story are almost identical, so much so that there's no question that the narrator, the writer, is inviting a comparison. There are two leaders in the book of Samuel that disobeyed God, that fought against God, and both of them died sad, tragic deaths. There is this subtle reminder: *you can't fight God and win.* I'm sure that the Amalekite messenger did not expect David to respond as he did.

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did the men who were with him. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. David said to the young man who told him, "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite." Then David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, cut him down." So he struck him and he died. David said to him, "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'" (Vs.11-16)

David and his men mourned the passing of King Saul, the first king of Israel, the passing of Jonathan, the slaughter of the army and the people, and the devastation to the nation. He then goes back to the messenger and wants to know, "Why is it that you weren't afraid to kill *the Lord's anointed*?" In chapter 31 when Saul asked his armor-bearer to kill him, the armor-bearer refused. He simply wouldn't kill *the Lord's anointed*. David wants to know what gave this Amalekite the authority to do that. (You remember this goes back to 1 Samuel. It's a critical lesson David learned. You remember the cave story, then the Nabal-Abigail story, and then the cave story, and the theme through those three stories was David had learned that even though Saul has declared David as his enemy, David would not declare Saul as enemy. He was the Lord's anointed king and he would honor and respect the king. He would not kill him himself; he would leave that to God. And that was a huge learning for David—that ultimately he would trust God with that; he would honor the king, and God would have to ultimately make the transition.) So that comes back now. Why would anyone feel like they have the authority to kill *God's anointed king*? So the Amalekite, based on his own testimony, is put to death.

It moves then into the final section, which is a lament. David wrote many of these songs—these laments in the book of Psalms—he's very well-known for this. It would be absolutely true that one of the ways David dealt with his grief and his heartache and his struggle is he wrote poetry; he wrote lyrics; he wrote music, and so that's what he does here. He wants to pay a final tribute to Saul, the first king of Israel. He wants to pay tribute to his dear friend Jonathan who is lost in the battle. He wants it recorded in a book; he wants Saul and Jonathan remembered. I really don't want to analyze and dissect this lament and kill it. It's just kind of this beautiful, emotional lament. So, rather, in just a moment, we're going to present it to you, so you get a sense of the beauty and the emotion and the tribute—the lament that's beautifully done here. I just want to make a couple of comments so it makes sense to you.

In verse 20, what David is saying is he doesn't want the women in the Philistine cities celebrating the death of Saul and his dear friend Jonathan the way the Israelites celebrated when David toppled their champion Goliath. In verse 21, he basically wants a curse on Mount Gilboa. He doesn't want the mount to flourish—almost in judgment as the place where Saul and Jonathan died.

The other one is verse 26, and to be honest with you, it's very frustrating to have to do this, but because this verse is so misused by people in our culture, I do feel I need to make a couple of comments. Verse 26:

"I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
You have been very pleasant to me.
Your love to me was more wonderful
Than the love of women.

There have been those in our culture who seek to turn the relationship between Jonathan and David into a homosexual relationship, and this is the verse they point to. And what's frustrating is: that is just not the case. That's so much more a commentary on where we're at as a culture then it is what the text actually says. One of my great frustrations is, we as a culture have become so sexualized, we no longer know how to process deep, intimate friendship between two men without sexualizing it. You just go back a hundred years ago in our country and you find letters that men wrote to other men who were not homosexual relationships, and they were filled with deep, affectionate terminology. We've completely lost the capacity to understand that in our culture.

The term that's used as the love of David for Jonathan is a covenant love. It's the same term that's used in 1 Samuel when they agreed together on their covenant. It has this covenant, political overtone to it. It's not a sexual term. The Hebrew word "*yada*" is the word that's typically used for sexual relations; it's never used for the relationship between David and Jonathan. As a matter of fact there's evidence that in the ancient world, other nations, when expressing this deep affection, man to man, used the phrase "deeper than the affection felt from a woman", especially when it was two warriors. David is probably using an expression that was familiar in that time period to communicate a deep, committed relationship between two men, especially two warriors.

The other part of this is to remember Saul had denied David the affection of two of his daughters. The agreement was when David toppled Goliath, that David was supposed to get the girl, but Saul was unwilling to fulfill that promise. So Merab, Saul's daughter was given to someone else. Then Michal falls in love with him, another daughter, so Saul says, "You can have her for a hundred Philistine foreskins," believing that in the process of battle, David would die. But David delivers the goods; he gets Michal but then Saul declares David public enemy number one. David flees; Saul gives Michal to someone else. So he had virtually denied David the affection of two of his daughters, but he simply could not deny David the affection, the friendship, the covenant bond of his son and David who entered into a covenant together, and that's really what David's referring to. One can only imagine how absolutely devastating this must have been when David realized Jonathan would not be with him in the kingdom to come. So he laments that; his heart is broken.

So what do we do with this chapter; I mean, what's the point? It's really important to understand what you see in this story is the sovereignty of God preparing the way for David to be the next king. If David had fought with the Philistines against Israel when Saul died, it's hard to imagine how he could have ever become king. How could they have ever trusted and believed in him? But God sovereignly superintends: He sends David back home; He makes it so that even though you have the Amalekites making decisions, the Philistines making decisions, Saul and Israel making decisions, David making decisions—you have all these human decisions that are being made—God is still sovereign and superintending in such a way that David is engaged in a battle with the Amalekites a hundred miles away from Saul who is engaged in a battle against the Philistines on the very same day. It was virtually impossible to accuse David of having anything to do with the death of Saul and his sons. But just to nail that down a little bit more, the first readers would have gotten this version of the story when David heard of Saul's death—how he mourned, how he wept, how he even executed the one that ultimately claimed to kill Saul—it was again an affirmation that even though Saul declared David to be his enemy, David refused to declare Saul his enemy. He was the Lord's anointed; he was God's king, and David would honor that and respect that all the way to the death of Saul.

This then paves the way: David has been very kingly; he's been very honorable; he's been very respectful, and he mourns this horrific loss of the Hebrew people. All of that will pave the way for the people to listen, to respond and to respect David as king**.** But remember, this includes over a

decade of David's struggling and suffering in God's *Wilderness School of Leadership*. David could not have possibly understood what God was up to. He just had to have the courage to keep trusting God. God was sovereignly up to something that would prepare David and the nation so that David would become the greatest king ever in the history of Israel.

Sometimes life gets really confusing. Sometimes it gets really painful. Sometimes nothing seems to make sense. It's one thing if you have a bad day or a bad week or a bad month or a bad year, but we're talking a really hard, difficult, painful decade, and you wonder, "Where is God and why doesn't God care and why doesn't God do something?" and it stretches our faith to the limit. Just because we can't see or understand what God is doing doesn't mean God isn't up to something. God is sovereignly up to something, and in those difficult, dark, painful moments we have to have the courage to trust God—that God is up to something—and I will just trust Him day by day.

This is the final farewell to King Saul, and we can't help but wonder: What could have been if Saul would have just trusted God? But Saul was determined to do it his own way, to be his own god, and ultimately it's just a sad, disappointing story. There's nobody in the room that would say, "I want to be a Saul." So how do we make sure that doesn't happen? The difference between David and Saul wasn't David's talent; it wasn't his ability; it wasn't his training; it wasn't that David never sinned or never made mistakes or never messed up. The difference was that David had a passionate heart for God and Saul didn't. Saul never learned what it meant to listen and obey and follow God. Again we remind ourselves: *To be a spiritual leader, you have to learn to become a faithful follower.*

Our Father, we're saddened at this final look at King Saul. We get glimpses of what could have been. But we're saddened at what never was. God, nobody in this room wants to be a Saul. God, give us the heart and the courage to follow You in the best of times and in the hardest of times, and to have the faith to believe, even in our most difficult moments, You are God, and You are up to something that matters. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Recitation:

Your pride and joy, O Israel, lies dead on the hills!
Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen!
Don't announce the news in Gath,
don't proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon,
or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice
and the pagans will laugh in triumph.
O mountains of Gilboa,
let there be no dew or rain upon you,
nor fruitful fields producing offerings of grain.[a]
For there the shield of the mighty heroes was defiled;
the shield of Saul will no longer be anointed with oil.
The bow of Jonathan was powerful,
and the sword of Saul did its mighty work.
They shed the blood of their enemies
and pierced the bodies of mighty heroes.

How beloved and gracious were Saul and Jonathan!
They were together in life and in death.
They were swifter than eagles,
stronger than lions.
O women of Israel, weep for Saul,
for he dressed you in luxurious scarlet clothing,
in garments decorated with gold.
Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen in battle!
Jonathan lies dead on the hills.
How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan!
Oh, how much I loved you!
And your love for me was deep,
deeper than the love of women!
Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen!
Stripped of their weapons, they lie dead.
(*NLT, 2 Samuel 1:19-27)

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Farewell to King Saul

Courage to Lead

2 Samuel 1:1-27

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What do you think it means to "fight God?" What are some examples?

2. Why do you think almost all of us as Christians find ourselves at times fighting God when we know we can't fight God and win? Why do we do that?

Bible Study

1. Review the storyline of I Samuel. What were some of the lessons from I Samuel that impacted you? Review how I Samuel ends. Describe the final comparison between Saul and David. What did God do to prepare David for his role as King?

2. Read II Samuel 1:1-10. How does the Amalekite's version of Saul's death differ from I Samuel 31? If you take out the break between books (as they were originally written) and put I Samuel 31 side by side with II Samuel 1, what was the writer's intent? In other words, it's obviously not simply a contradiction since that would be blatantly obvious to the writer. Then what is he telling us in II Samuel 1?

3. Compare this account with I Samuel 4:12, 17. The Hebrew terms are almost exactly the same. This would be a Hebrew narrative technique to invite a comparison. The two primary characters in I Samuel who fight against God are Eli and Saul. How does the story end for both of them? What do we learn from that?

4. Read II Samuel 1:11-16. How might you have expected David to respond and how did he respond? How is David's response consistent with what David learned in the I Samuel 24-26 (Cave, Nabal, Cave) stories? Compare David's lesson with I Peter 5:6,7. What do we learn from this?

5. For David to be accepted as the next King of Israel it was very important that he not be the one who killed Saul or fought against Israel. How do the events described in the end

of I Samuel and II Samuel 1 help establish David as the next King of Israel? How do you see God's sovereign hand orchestrating events to prepare the way for David to be accepted as King? What might we learn from this for our own lives? Just because things in our lives don't make any sense, does that mean there is no sense in what happens? Isn't it possible God may be up to something that we may or may not every really understand?

6. Read II Samuel 1:17-27. Farewell to King Saul. What's the single most important lesson you learned as a leader from Saul?

Application

1. No one really wants to be a Saul. So what are some practical things you can do to prevent becoming Saul like?

2. Going through the wilderness does not necessarily make us better. For many it just makes them bitter. What choices do you have to make in the wilderness to learn and grow so God can use you greatly?

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