
The New King's Fame

1 Samuel 18¹⁷

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Fame, reputation...

Some people are famous for nothing. There is no real reason for the fame and following they have.

Some are famous for being famous. They haven't done anything except, well, be famous.

Some have a reputation that is entirely a sham, a pretense, a fake. They are famous and followed for what they are not.

Some are famous because of their exploits, because of what they have done. Some heroic deed goes viral in the public's imagination and they have fame.

Some are famous for their deeds and their character. They have a richly deserved reputation for great character and grand deeds.

This is what our story is about – how an unknown shepherd boy becomes loved and famous in his nation and much hated by his king.

A story may be simple and a story may be complex. Our text tonight is a simple story of growing jealousy, fear and anger. We begin to see the initial virus of sin in Saul that eventually spreads to infect his character and conduct.

And this story is very complex. In it are three relationships, a tre of people whose lives intersect and then travel together down the long road. We see God's providence using the wonderful victory of the newly anointed king to set in motion three relationships.

The troubled king Saul sees the growing popularity of David and seethes with jealousy and anger. He begins to plot his downfall.

The heir to throne of Saul, Jonathan, becomes a close friend of David. It is an amazing relationship begun here with knitted hearts and ends in dying virtue and valor.

The daughter of Saul is given to David. Michal plays an interesting role as his wife. She is a prize for a bloody price, never expected to be paid.

The structure of the story gives it shape. As we usually do in Hebrew narrative and poetry, we have a simple parallels that are its skeleton.

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David's Greatness Celebrated

(v. 1-9)

The text opens and closes with people loving and celebrating how great David was. For context - 1 Samuel 17:57-58

⁵⁷ And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

⁵⁸ And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

¹ As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ² And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. ³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵ And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

⁶ As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. ⁷ And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands."

⁸ And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?" ⁹ And Saul eyed David from that day on.

A Genuine Friendship

(v. 1-5)

Jonathan is Saul son. He is the prince-regent, the heir to the throne. His heart is knit to David and they love each other. This is the strong, true godly love between men. Jonathan gives David his royal cloak, armor and sword. They are fast friends.⁷

A Deserved Fame

(v. 6-7)

David is made a leader in Saul's army. This was a very popular move. And he is a successful leader and warrior. Upon returning from the battles, the women in the cities met the soldiers along the way and gave ticker-tape parades in his honor. His exploits were sung and shouted. They were celebrated as being so much greater than Saul's.

A Jealous Fear

(v. 8-9)

Jealousy and anger rise up in Saul's heart. Why is David celebrated so much? He is the king. What is going on here? Is he aspiring to the throne? Is this why he has wormed himself into Jonathan's friendship? Are people one day going to be more inclined to follow David than Saul? Will David one day take the throne and become king? And so he determines to start keeping eye on David.

Saul's Hand against David

(v. 10-11)

Jealousy and anger are themselves an impetus to attempted murder. But Saul is also afflicted by God.

¹⁰ The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. ¹¹ And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice.

An Afflicting Spirit

(v. 10)

God had sent this afflicting, troubling spirit. The Spirit of God had been withdrawn. This spirit had been assigned to Saul to afflict him. The older translations call it an "evil spirit" which implies a demon. The word doesn't necessarily have to mean that though that is its common use in the Hebrew. Modern translators are troubled by the evil spirit being sent by God. That is frankly, more of a theological problem than a translation problem. Given the Book of Job, I don't have any trouble with God sending an evil spirit to trouble Saul. This is the Old Covenant. Believers do not experience the continual indwelling of the Holy Spirit as New Covenant believers do. God is God. He is free to do anything and will only do what is in accord with His holiness. Afflicting Saul by means of an evil or troubling spirit is entirely within God's prerogatives. He is not accountable to us. We bow to Him and accept His ways and works. Saul had rejected the rule of God, God's Word and God's prophet; this is the consequence. It is horrible to contemplate. It was a dreadful affliction. But it brought the sweet singer of Israel into the court.

Saul was habitually raging around the household. Saul had moments that probably would have looked to us like insane rage. He would oscillate back and forth between deep darkness and depression and out of control rage. This becomes the back story as to what is really going on in the long, terrible decline that ends as it does.

David was there serving to try to calm the troubled soul. He no longer appears to be going back to his father's fields. He is now living in Saul's house. Just a reminder, don't be thinking, Jerusalem. Jerusalem does not become the capital city until a couple of years into David's reign. But David is leading the army in daytime raids against the Philistines and in the evenings sitting in the corner with his lyre singing songs about God and God's people. There are Psalms from this era in David's life.

A Murderous Strike

(v. 11)

Twice, in a fit of murderous rage, seeks to kill David. Saul's tormented soul is poisoned by jealousy. The comfort offered in David's playing is rejected. He rises up from where he is sitting and hurls a spear at David. David the comforter is seen as David the tormentor. The narrator lets us hear his thoughts. He wanted to strike down David. Twice David eludes these fumbling attempts on his life.

John Woodhouse draws out the contrast between David and Saul:

There is a stark contrast now between Saul and David. One, we know, had the Spirit of the Lord; the other had this evil spirit. One had "in his hand" his lyre, with which

he could “refresh” Saul (1 Samuel 16:23); the other had “in his hand” his spear, with which he intended to do to David what David had done to Goliath! (Woodhouse, p. 353)

The Lord is with David

(v. 12-16)

David was not just a natural leader and talented warrior. There was more to his success than merely natural skill.

¹² Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul. ¹³ So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people. ¹⁴ And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him. ¹⁵ And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

The original repeats the word for “face” several times. It gives us a sense of the way people were responding to David. The word “face” or “presence” gives us a richly textured text. Saul fears the presence of David (v. 12) and was in awe in his presence (v. 15). Saul removes David from his presence (v. 13). David went in and out in the presence of the people (v. 13, 16). Saul is overcome with fear and dread. The people are overcome with love and respect. (Woodhouse, p. 354)

In Saul's Fear

(v. 12)

Verse 12 is very surprising. Saul is afraid of David **because** the Lord is with Him. This means that Saul is afraid of the Lord. The Lord has left Saul and given him an afflicting spirit. The Lord has come upon David and abides with him, blessing him in what he does. God's evident presence in David's life makes Saul afraid. Saul is afraid for his power, his place and his prestige in the eyes of the people. His fear of man has now ensnared him.

In David's Success

(v. 13-15)

Since Saul is afraid of the presence of David, he removes him from Saul's presence. He in essence banishes David to the garrison. He made him a commander of a thousand which meant commanding and quartering with them. This is a tactical mistake. It puts David visibly before the people. He is now out where they can see him more readily. He is much more visible as the commander. And the Lord's presence is with David so that all that he does is blessed. This is in stark contrast to the foolishness and occasional madness of Saul.

In the Nation's Love

(v. 16)

All the nation loves David. Jonathan loves him. The people love him. Saul's daughter will love him as we will see. He is a handsome, capable, visible leader whose victories pile up. But there must have also been a humility and winsomeness about him. He appears to be going in and out among the people. He is accessible. And so the people love him.

Saul's Plotting against David

(v. 17-29)

Saul then begins to plot against David.

To Incite a Foolish Reaction

(v. 17-19)

¹⁷ Then Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him." ¹⁸ And David said to Saul, "Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" ¹⁹ But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.

Initially, Saul realizes that he cannot openly oppose David. So he begins to plot. It is a bit hard to detect exactly whether this is step one in a two step plot or Saul is thwarted at first and then tries a second. At any rate, Saul had promised riches, freedom to the clan and his daughter to whomever would defeat Goliath (1 Samuel 17:25). So he is offering his daughter to David as a part of the reward package. This may have been an incentive offered for David to take the commander position.

David appears to protest this reward. It is not clear whether he rejected it, but in humble words he does not see himself as worthy of it. What he says here is so ironic for it is close to Saul's words when Samuel prepared to anoint him king. Now, one thing we must keep in mind. David knows that he has been anointed to be the next king. I think that part of what is going on through much of the rest of the book is David is avoiding Saul being the king-maker. He will come to the throne the way God wants. He will not come as a proxy for Saul. He will not rebel and overthrow Saul, though at this point it would have been relatively easy. He is willing to wait for God's purposes and providences to be carried out.

But then Saul insults David. When it would have been time to carry through with the grant of his daughter, Saul gives her to Adriel instead. It is intended as a slight. It might have been intended to provoke a sinful reaction from David. It certainly was intended as a slap in David's face.

To Expose to Fatal Danger

(v. 20-29)

But maybe there is another reason David doesn't want Saul's daughter, Merab. David's heart is set in love on another...

²⁰ Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. ²¹ Saul thought, "Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." ²² And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law.'" ²³ And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I

am a poor man and have no reputation?"²⁴ And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak."²⁵ Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.' " Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.²⁶ And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired,²⁷ David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife.²⁸ But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him,²⁹ Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.

Michal and David fall in love. Saul has to be wondering what is going on. The military loves him. The nation loves him. Jonathan loves him. And now, Michal has fallen in love with him.

Since Saul's first plot didn't work, he now plots to use this potential marriage to have David killed. So he offers Michal in marriage so that David will become his son-in-law. Saul also arranges for servants to prod David and encourage him to accept Saul's offer. David initially responds as he did before. The servants carry the messages back and forth.

Well, the final objection has to do with the bride price. In the middle eastern cultures including Israel, the groom would give the family an agreed upon sum of money or goods to compensate the father for the loss of his daughter. It frankly was a foolish practice and one still carried out in many third world counties today. But David has nothing to offer. Just in case that is going to be the final objection, Saul sets the bride price. If David wants to marry Michal, then he should bring to Saul 100 Philistine foreskins. Saul seems to think that David would accept this because of his reference to Goliath as "that uncircumcised Philistine."

But Saul is secretly hoping that David, loving Michal enough, will accept this offer. If David accepts this offer, then Saul is pretty certain in his own mind that the Philistines will kill him. And that will be end of the problem.

But of course, Saul is a fool. While this may be a dangerous undertaking, David is becoming a very competent warrior. That should have given Saul pause. David agrees to this. So he takes some of his men and they go and kill 200 Philistines. They bring all 200 foreskins back. (Kids, if you do not know what a foreskin is, ask your parents when you get home.)

This is one of those places where our western sensibilities find this hard. But just because this seems gross to us doesn't make it sin. Nothing in the text indicates that David sinned in doing this. Saul sinned in asking it because he was hoping that David would be killed in the process. So he had murder in his heart. David has love in his heart.

Saul's plot is thwarted again. He has no choice now but to give Michal to David. And so they marry. Michal loved David much. And it seems like that was salt in Saul's

wounded mind. The Lord is with David so that he is successful in all he does. Now, Saul is even more afraid of David. From this point on, Saul becomes ever more public in his hatred and pursuit of David.

David's Fame Increases

(v. 30)

³⁰ Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

The Philistines keep coming out to attack Israel. David keeps coming out to soundly defeat them. Ever more David's name and fame increases. He is looked up to, admired and esteemed.

Reflect and Respond

Jesus' name and fame invokes hatred and anger.

The Serpent hates Him with fear and jealousy and anger. Satan will do all he can to destroy the fame and name of Jesus - usually by destroying the reputation of his servants and sheep.

The world hates Him and is in open rebellion against Him. They will keep coming against Him until the day of His final victory.

Jesus' name and fame is our trust and our triumph. Who He is what He has done is everything to us.

We love Him because our hearts are knit to Him as Jonathan's was to David. We will give up our all to be called His friend.

We love Him for His great saving and transforming and triumphing exploits. Because of His great love to us, He has done amazing things for us. We celebrate Him just as the Israelites celebrated the triumphs of David.

We love Him as our King and our Groom. Our love is not distant but personal and intimate. We love Him like Michal did David.

Do you? Do you truly love the Lord Jesus Christ? Has His triumph delivered you? Has His winsomeness enthralled you? Has His well favored character and countenance won your heart? Will you give your all? Will you sing and speak of Him to the neighbors and nations?

Will the day of His return have the feeling of, "At long last, at long last, my king, my groom, my Jesus..."

Notes

⁷ There is no evidence in the text at all that this was a wrong kind of love. Sometimes this is portrayed as a homosexual relationship. That is patently false. This is the great love of which homosexual love is dark, twisted, damnable perversion.