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David's Lament for the Fallen

2 Samuel 1:1–27

The First Sermon on Second Samuel

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We turn from 1 Samuel to 2 Samuel this morning. What is 2 Samuel all about? I like how one commentator said it: “2 Samuel is not about David. If you think it is, you will not understand it...it is about a covenant God who makes covenant promises to a covenant king through whom he will preserve his covenant people.”¹ This should be encouraging to us as we read it because the main character is David—David and all his faults and sins. And as you see him and see yourself, we see Jesus.

So as we turn to 2 Samuel, let me also remind you that what we call “1 and 2 Samuel” was originally one volume. It has been divided up for ease of reading. This means 2 Samuel continues the same story. And we see that here. 1 Samuel ended with the death of Saul and 2 Samuel begins with the death of Saul. For this reason, some preachers and commentators lump them together. But we’re going to take up 2 Samuel just like we did 1 Samuel: one chapter at a time to see what the Lord wants to say to us.

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible (1999; repr., Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 9.

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And as the story again revolves around the death of Saul and his sons, especially Jonathan, we learn here about *David's Lament for the Fallen*.

1. *A Shocking Lament*
2. *A Legitimate Lament*
3. *A Typological Lament*

And what I want you to see here in the first two points is David's lament and what it says to us. But in the last point, I want you to see how this points us to Jesus Christ.

May the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth of his Word today.

A Shocking Lament

The first thing we see here about David's lament is that it is *a shocking lament*. We read in verse 1: **After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag**. This takes us back to the end of 1 Samuel 30. David has just experienced a triumphant victory over the Amalekites. Unbeknownst to him, though, is that while he was victorious, Saul died. For two days he enjoyed the spoils of victory. But then, **on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head** (v. 2). This is a distance of roughly eighty miles so he must have something important to say to David, before whom **he fell to the ground and paid homage** (v. 2). When David asks him, "**Where do you come from?**" notice that for a second time the narrator mentions that he was

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living among Israel: **“I have escaped from the camp of Israel”** (v. 3). You’re going to see why that’s important in just a moment. Now remember, David has left the armies of the Philistines and then been engaged in his own battle, so he has no idea what happened between Saul and the Philistines. Then comes the news: **“The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead”** (v. 4). Considering the source, David asks how could this Amalekite know what happened between Israel and the Philistines (v. 5).

Then comes the report of this **young man** in verses 6–10. Now listen closely:

By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. 7 And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, ‘Here I am.’ 8 And he said to me, ‘Who are you?’ I answered him, ‘I am an Amalekite.’ 9 And he said to me, ‘Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.’ 10 So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.

First of all, whenever someone says to you, “By chance,” or to put it into our words, “I just happened to be in the neighborhood,” what does that mean? Most likely it’s not true. Second, we have the benefit of knowing what 1 Samuel 31 says. There we read that Saul committed suicide. Now this Amalekite says Saul attempted suicide but that he finished him off. Third, 1 Samuel 31 says Saul killed himself with his sword, but the Amalekite says he tried to with his spear. Fourth, if Saul was suspended with the spear through him, how could he actually look

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behind him and see this young man? The Amalekite lied. It's obvious. Many critical commentators, though, say this is just another evidence of the Bible contradicting itself. Let me just say that when we read two accounts of one event and they *seem*—*seem* being the operative word—to contradict, oftentimes the answer is in understanding who vantage point is being recorded. 1 Samuel is the biblical narrator; 2 Samuel 1 has the words of the Amalekite.

When David heard this he **took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him** (v. 11). After all the episodes of Saul's hunting down David, after all the times David could have taken Saul's life, and after all the accounts of the Lord's protecting David, David was shocked to hear it was all over. Yes, he's grieved before, but now it all comes out. Like you and I hear of a family member being seriously or terminally ill, then spending all the time and energy with them through the ordeal, only to let it all out when they die, David and his men **mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword** (v. 12). This is also an encouragement to us to be ourselves in sorrow and to grieve the loss of friends and foes alike. Parents, let this be an exhortation to you not to shield your kids from grief. Take them to funerals, gravesides, and memorial services.

A Legitimate Lament

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Children, when you go to a funeral you might wonder if people's feelings are real or if they are just faking it. Maybe an aunt or an uncle dies—your mom's or dad's sister or brother—and maybe they didn't get along. But then there's your mom or dad crying. You might wonder why. Well I want you to see here that's what David is going through. Yes, his best friend Jonathan died, but so did David's worst enemy, Saul. And David is sad for both. Is this all for show? After all, Saul tried to kill him time and time again. The second thing we see here about David's lament is that it is *a legitimate lament*.

Now remember I said remember what the story has said twice about this Amalekite living with Israelites. So after a day of grieving David asks him again, **“Where do you come from?”** (v. 13) and this time the young man says something different than he said before: **“I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite”** (v. 13). His devious, lying ways are beginning to come to the forefront. You see, he thought wrong about David. He thought David hated Saul and that if he stole Saul's crown and armband that David would reward him somehow in his new administration. He's the equivalent of the political opportunists today in our nation! Of course there is an irony in this because Saul lost the kingdom in 1 Samuel 15 because he would not plunder the Amalekites, but now an Amalekite plunders his signs of kingship!²

So he's said he was in the camp of Israel, which means he would know Israel's laws, yet, as David asks, **“How is it you were not afraid to put out your**

² John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel: Chapters 1–13*, trans. Douglas Kelly (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1992), 11–12; see also Leithart, 177.

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hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" (v. 14) So David executes the judgment of God upon political insurrection and regicide (vv. 15-16). Time and time again the narrative of 1 Samuel recorded David as calling Saul "the LORD's anointed." What an example to us of the New Testament's exhortations to us to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's (Matt. 22:21), to "honor the emperor" (1 Peter 2:17), to "pay...respect to whom respect is owed" (Rom. 13:7), and to pray "for kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Tim. 2:2). You may think the President's nose is as long as Pinocchio's, you may totally disagree with his philosophy, you may even think he, like Saul, is an antichrist figure who is seeking to persecute the faithful, but he is still the Lord's anointed.

Because Saul was, we read that **David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son** (v. 17) and that David instructed that **it should be taught to the people of Judah**. Our translation says **it**, but in Hebrew it says, "The Bow," which was the name of David's lament. So important was this lament that it was recorded into **the Book of Jashar** (v. 18), which we infer was a book of war stories or war songs for Israel's army. It was the ancient equivalent of:

From the Halls of Montezuma
To the shores of Tripoli;
We fight our country's battles
In the air, on land, and sea.

David's lament was one of respect and honor for the Lord's anointed king and those who fell with him. You notice that the key line is used three times in verses 19, 25, and 27: **How the mighty have fallen!** In verse 19 David says, "**Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places!**" That word **glory** is not the usual

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Hebrew word for glory, *kavod*, but a word that can be translated as “gazelle.” David is calling Saul the warrior who was as swift as a gazelle, and he had fallen as the glory of the Lord had swiftly departed from him!³ This fits the animal images of David and Jonathan being **swifter than eagles** and **stronger than lions** in verse 23. David honors the military exploits of Jonathan and Saul, saying, “**the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty**” (v. 22). And David especially memorializes his closest friend, Jonathan, in verse 26, whose “**love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women.**”

David did not wish that he could kill Saul or that Saul would die in some other illegitimate way. He honored Saul, despite his serious flaw of standing against David. This lament reminds me of Julius Caesar, who after defeating the army of the Senate under the leadership of the old Roman General, Pompey, had Pompey’s head presented to him. When he saw this Julius Caesar wept and said, “I sought not revenge, but victory” (*Non mihi placet vindicta, sed victoria*). David trusted in the Lord to keep his word to establish David on the throne by protecting him and by dealing with Saul in his perfect timing.

A Typological Lament

And it’s the Lord Jesus Christ who gives this lament of David such meaning. Can we learn about the raw emotion of grief here? Yes. Can we learn how to lament friends and foes alike here? Yes. But I want you to see a final point here

³ Leithart, 178.

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about David's lament. It is that *a typological lament*. This means that David's lament pointed forward to Jesus Christ. As David learned obedience to the Lord's will by what he suffered, so did our Lord Jesus Christ. As David lamented his enemy, Saul, who rejected him, so did our Lord Jesus Christ lament over Jerusalem that mostly rejected him. You see, our grief and our sorrow is authentic and valid before the Lord because we grieve as Christians, not as the world grieves. We grieve in Christ.

But even more, David's lament over his enemy here foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ, who upon the cross looked upon his most hateful enemies and did not lament that they killed him, but he loved them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Amen.