

April 3, 2016  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: The Life of David  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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## AN EXPEDIENT MARRIAGE 1 Samuel 18:17-30

We typically begin our Christian wedding ceremonies with words like, “God commends marriage to be held in honor among all and therefore should not be entered into lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently, discretely, advisedly, and in the fear God.” Those are good words—the kind of words that should attend a solemn ceremony in a cold, dark, ecclesiastical sanctuary with good acoustics. Or even a ceremony in a rose garden.

I have used those very words in every wedding ceremony I have done over the years. I use them because I think they fairly express God’s view of marriage. There is abundant evidence throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Bible that God commends marriage and insists that we humans hold the institution in highest regard. God established this relationship in the very beginning when He created Eve to be the suitable helper for Adam (Genesis 2). God’s amazing plan is that a man and a woman come together in this covenant to become one unit. *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).*

This idea of two people becoming one unit is one of the most amazing processes in life. That is why Jesus appealed to this rule when He taught about divorce. *“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:6-8).*

With that foundation of the marriage covenant in mind, we should be a bit surprised to discover how marriage was often used for advancing political agendas, contributing to parental agendas,

satisfying lusts, and any number of unholy, unsanctified purposes. Throughout history kings and powerful leaders used their own marriages or the marriages of their children to advance their causes. Some of the great scandals of royalty have arisen when a royal heir decides to marry a commoner. These things make for great stories, plays, and movies, but not for righteousness.

Frankly things have not changed all that much even in America. It is not hard to imagine the arguments and fights that would erupt if little Rachel Richkid from Snobknob doesn’t want to attend the Cotillion Ball and doesn’t want to marry Benson Blueblood the lawyer who will graduate from Yale. Imagine the social chagrin if she decides to marry Mike the mechanic who works at the auto shop. Lord have mercy on a boy from down in the boondocks!

Using marriage to advance a personal agenda is the theme of this part of David’s life found in our text today. Saul was a very determined father who was more concerned for establishing his posterity on the throne than he was for his daughters’ well being. It appears that he would stop at nothing to keep David out of the palace. Which being interpreted means that Saul would go to any extreme to try to subvert God’s will.

The text teaches us important lessons about the depravity of humanity. It teaches on the one hand that the sin nature found in us humans is almost boundless in its expressions. It teaches us who claim to love God to be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves as we trust God to lead us in His way.

### **Expedience Failed (vv.17-19).**

In the David story, King Saul has become a prime example of the frustrations and fears that accompany being at war with God. In an effort to protect his own interests, Saul devised a shrewd plan (v.17). Granted, it does appear that by offering his daughter to David in marriage the king kept his word about rewards. *Then Saul said to David, “Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife” (v.17a).* On the surface it looks like Saul remembered his side of the deal about the giant Philistine. He had offered to give one of his daughters as wife to the man who killed Goliath, as well as making him wealthy and famous and giving his father’s family tax

exemption. When David had asked about the matter, he was told, “The king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father’s house free in Israel” (1 Samuel 17:25b).

It is important for us to rehearse the situation and affirm that we know from the evidence in our text that David was not motivated to kill Goliath by the possibility of marrying the king’s daughter. We know from the David and Goliath story that it was the giant’s blasphemy of God that drove David to kill him. That truth leads us to ask the important question about ourselves. What motivates us to do God’s will?

Nevertheless, motivated by his love for God, David killed the giant and now it was time to receive the promised reward. We do not know how much time had passed between David’s victory and Saul’s offer of reward. There is little doubt that Saul did what he did when it was expedient for him. At the convenient time, he offered his daughter Merab to David. We really do not know if she was pretty or homely, smart or dense, gregarious or a wall flower. We know that she was the older of his two daughters (14:49). Are we surprised that there is no indication in the text that Saul ever asked Merab if she liked David? We shouldn’t be. Often mutual attraction or love was not an issue in those ancient cultures when parents arranged marriages for any number of reasons.

While we are not impressed with Saul’s character at this point, it is obvious that the king kept his word and offered his daughter as wife to David — but not without a price. Because he was suspicious and protective of his own territory, the king was shrewd in his offer. Granted he offered Merab to David, but he attached this qualification: *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” (v.17b).

Saul did not have visions of David becoming his friend and wonderful son-in-law with whom he could attend ball games, fishing and camping trips. Rather his plan hoped that David would be killed while keeping his end of the agreement. Wasn’t the original agreement that the guy who killed Goliath would get the king’s daughter? Yes. David already did that. He already kept his end of the

deal. What is this additional requirement “*Be valiant for me and fight the Lord’s battles*”?

An untrustworthy person changes the rules in the middle of the game. This is just another example of Saul’s faithless character. Solomon warned us about people like this by writing, *Trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips* (Proverbs 25:19). A treacherous man is one who deals deceitfully. Working with that kind of person, you never know for sure if this is the final agreement or if the requirements will change when it is to his advantage. To be fair, we must admit that it is true that sometimes circumstances change at your work place and that requires change of staff or change of policies. But beware the man who makes a promise and then changes it for his own advantage.

Observe Saul’s awful confusion about his relationship with God. He requested David to *be valiant for me and fight the LORD’s battles* (v.17). No doubt the king tried to convince others that he was the servant of the Lord who was in the position of fighting for the Lord. Yet the truth slipped out when he requested that David be valiant for **him**. Saul was not interested in the good of the nation, but in his own good.

Saul was like a company president who inflates production figures artificially in order to sell the company, knowing full well that the new owner will have to lay off several employees when the true financial condition of the company becomes known. Such a leader doesn’t care about the people but only about himself who the people can make rich. Can God deliver His servants from such subterfuge and underhanded dealings?

The story shows us how David thwarted Saul’s plan (vv.18-19), though thwarting Saul’s plan was not really David’s intent. In this case the shepherd boy simply appealed to his humble lineage. *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?”* (v.18). Okay, let’s be painfully honest. It is possible that Merab was not as pretty as her sister Michal, and David was holding out for her. Possible but not likely.

David has already in the story revealed a genuinely humble heart in his relationship to the king – and will continue to do so. Therefore, he was sincere when he balked at marrying Merab because

of his background. David came from a poor family not a royal blood line. In fact, not that far back in his lineage, his great grandmother Ruth was not even a Jew, but a Moabite. Therefore, David genuinely questioned the idea of him merely walking into the palace to be son-in-law of the king.

He taught us that true humility is contentment to serve God where He places you using the resources God gives you. Therefore, humility can be found in lowly, unnoticed service in circumstances considered poor or unfavorable by human wisdom. But at the same time, humility can be found in highly visible circumstances that human wisdom deems favorable or even privileged. The servant's attitude in the circumstances, not the circumstances, determine humility. Poor and unnoticed people are not automatically humble. In fact, they can be very proud of their station in life.

David, clearly indicated that he was not in favor of marrying Merab, and the king grasped David's clue. However, he wasn't very nice about how he handled the situation. *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 (v.19).* In this verse, the words "should have been given to David" reveal Saul's motives in giving the promised wife to another man. This was another example of Saul manipulating people. The agreement, Saul's promise was that Merab would be David's wife. Granted David balked due to his genuine humility. Saul could have pursued the idea, pressured David, or at least engaged David in conversation about it. Instead he quickly gave his daughter to another man in order to "teach David a lesson about who is in charge."

This kind of manipulation, this expression of human depravity is very common. It essentially says, "Okay, if you don't want to do what I want you to do, I'll show you who is in charge by punishing you." This is a common reaction when a person gets "miffed." Getting miffed is what happens when we don't get our way or someone makes a decision that affects us and we don't agree with it. Miffed people often respond, "We'll show them!" It is a reaction of selfishness, self-centered protectionism. That reaction is evident when we decide to take our business elsewhere, or we decide to leave a church, or we decide to break off a relationship, or we quit a job because it appeared that someone slighted us.

Sometimes the distant end of those manipulative decisions can be painful. The painful conclusions remind us that ultimately God is in charge, not us. Such was the case in this story. There is no evidence, but we might wonder if Merab responded to David's slight by thinking, "Well, if David is going to shun me, I'll show him and make a great wife for Adriel the Meholathite." Or did Adriel think, "What a jerk David was. Now I get to be the king's son-in-law!?" We have the advantage of knowing the rest of the story, and it did not end well!

At some point in his career, while he was responsible to lead God's people, King Saul had killed Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21:2). That was a bad situation because God's people had vowed to protect that tribe of people way back at the time of Joshua (Joshua 9:3-27). Then, after Saul was dead, and several years later in David's reign, God sent a drought as punishment for Saul breaking the vow. God has a long memory. What should David the current king do to relieve God's hand of judgment? According to God's plan, David asked the Gibeonites who had survived and lived in his kingdom how he could make restitution for Saul's sin. They demanded that seven of Saul's relatives be killed in exchange for Saul trying to exterminate their forefathers. Here is what happened: *The king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; and he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the LORD, and the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest (2 Samuel 21:8-9).*

Poor Merab. Now who thought it was a great idea to be married to Merab! The better choice all along the way is for us to humbly serve God and try to follow His leading as much as we can discern it. That idea wasn't on Saul's radar.

### **Expedient Marriage (vv.20-30).**

Not to be defeated, King Saul devised a second shrewd plan (vv.20-24). This time Saul capitalized on his younger daughter's emotional state (vv.20-23a). *Now Saul's daughter Michal loved*

*David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him (v.20).* How convenient. Michal's love for David pleased Saul. We are probably not surprised to hear that the young woman Michal fell in love with David. We can debate long and fervently if she really understood love, but that is another issue. That she was very attracted to David was enough for Saul to hatch plan "B" in his efforts to rid himself of this popular, handsome, godly man David.

Saul was not happy about the matter because he cared in the least for Michal or David. Rather, *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" (v.21).* Because Saul's youngest daughter Michal loved David, it presented the perfect opportunity for Saul to get rid of David. Outwardly he made the kind gesture of giving the young woman who loved David to the young warrior. Inwardly, the man who was out of sorts with God and, therefore, out of sorts with God's servant, devised a plan of "unavoidable" murder.

Knowing that peer pressure can accomplish wonders, Saul put his servants to work on David. *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.'"* And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David (vv.22-23). Maybe because by now it had become quite obvious that Saul hated David, he sent a message by way of his servants. Also, knowing Saul's sorry character, it is likely that by not talking to David directly, Saul indicated that he, being the superior, would not condescend to talk to the commoner.

Try as he might, Saul just couldn't get this shepherd from Bethlehem to cooperate with his plan to kill him. David thwarted Saul again (vv.23b-24). Nothing had changed in David's status whether the reward was Merab or Michal. *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?" (v.23b).* Again, David being humble and knowing his station in life refused the king's offer. How could he being a poor man marry into royalty? Besides, David didn't kill Goliath to get a wife. He killed the pagan because he blasphemed God.

The king's servants went back to Saul and reported the bad news. *And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak" (v.24).* Saul was just stubborn enough to come up with a third shrewd plan to rid himself of David (vv. 25-30). He reasoned that he could appeal to David's strength as a successful warrior (vv.25-26). Was the shepherd concerned that he could not afford to give an honest bride price for the king's daughter? No problem. Saul decided that David could circumvent the lineage thing and could offer an acceptable price for his bride. *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 (v.25).

This was Saul's counter-offer to David. David need not worry that he was not wealthy enough or from a significant enough family to marry into Saul's family. Of course Saul understood that David could not offer a price to Michal's father. But father Saul, knowing that David was a valiant warrior, offered to accept the bride price of 100 Philistine foreskins. This sounds pretty gross to us 21<sup>st</sup> century sophisticated Americans. Actually counting body parts was a common way of counting the number of enemies slain. The ancient Egyptians cut off the hands from their dead enemies in order to count the casualties. In other cases, as with the Lybians, the Egyptians cut off and counted another body part.

Though it sounds awful, basically Saul wanted 100 dead Philistines as the price for his daughter's hand in marriage. But more than that was in his plan. The king knew that this act by a circumcised Jew against uncircumcised Philistines was going to really infuriate them. No doubt the Philistines were going to target this young punk who appeared to be ruthless. And that would be the end of Saul's enemy!

As Saul had calculated, David the warrior agreed to the contract. *And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law (v.26).* Was that a bad choice? Did David blindly walk into his demise? No, David served God and trusted Him.

Again, God thwarted Saul's plan (vv.27-30). David went out with his men to gain the price for Michal's hand and God delivered

His enemies into David's hands. *Before the time had expired 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 (v.27).*

In typical David fashion, he gave double the price. Now his lot was cast and he became part of the royal family. Yet, through it all, this was God's will and way of continuing to exalt David in Saul's presence. How amazing that as God kept arranging circumstances, Saul knew that he was fighting God (vv.28-30). It was obvious to him that God blessed David. *But when Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him (v.28).* Saul knew what was happening. David knew what was happening and experienced the Lord's care. Though he didn't write the song, David no doubt lived in the confidence of Psalm 121: *The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life (Psalm 121:5-7).*

Everyone seemed to sense that God was doing something special with David. Perceptive people could see that God was doing something special in a negative way with Saul. Therefore, the king feared David more and more. *Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually (v.29).* And the more Saul feared, the more God continued to exalt His servant David. *Then the princes 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 (v.30).*

It appears from this statement that, driven by revenge for their 200 fallen and desecrated peers, the Philistines launched attacks at David and his men. No problem! God was fighting for David. How could he lose? How can we lose while we are in God's will? Do we confidently agree with Paul who wrote, *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).*

Far better for us to be the person who is trusting God like David, than the person who is fighting God like Saul was. Yes, it is

true that the people who fight against God can try to make life miserable for those who trust God. In fact, it is a bit strange that the servants of God often have more reason to expect trouble from other so-called people of God (Saul), than the avowed enemies of God (Philistines). For example, the religious authorities who claimed to love God killed Jesus. The same religious authorities persecuted the apostles and killed James. Judaizers who claimed to believe in Christ harassed and tried to kill Paul. The Roman Church persecuted and killed many Christian forefathers. In America, great resistance to the truth of the Bible is found commonly in so-called Christian colleges, seminaries, and denominational organizations. Even in independent churches the greatest fights and resistance is found at the hands of so-called Christian leaders and people. But God uses all of these trials and pressures to make us who trust Him more like Him by increasing our faith.