
Mighty and Merciful

1 Samuel 30²⁹

Russ Kennedy

What does power do to people?

Tends to corrupt... Tends to amplify pride... Tends to harden against others suffering...

The Unexpected Disaster

(v. 1-6)

Our story picks up with David on his way back to Ziklag, his town in Philistia. He has dismissed from going to battle with the Philistine army. It is a three day journey heading home. But not all is well...

¹ Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire ² and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way. ³ And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴ Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. ⁵ David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ⁶ And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.

The Raid

The Amalekites were a warlike peoples who had been occupants of Palestine for a long time. They were supposed to have been destroyed in Joshua's day. They were supposed to have been destroyed by Saul. Now they have raided across this part of Philistia taking several cities.

The Result

David and his men are riding towards their town. Over the horizon, they see smoke. Their pace quickens. And at the top of the hill and they stopped dead. They find that Ziklag has been burned. Everything of value is gone. All of the people are gone. The way it was done was characteristic of the Amalekites. They have come upon the town soon after the raid. But the Amalekites usually sold their captives into slavery, particularly the women.

The Responses

All the people are grieved and weeping. This is a great disaster.

Some of the people are blaming David...

²⁹ Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Submissive Trust

(v.6b-8)

David is a man who finds refuge in God in trouble.

Personal Trust

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

One amazing sentence. David turns to the Lord for strength. He doesn't just wait for it to happen. He seeks God and strengthens himself in God.

The Psalms are full of this. Over and over again we find David turning to God in disaster, attacks from others, perplexity and personal failures.

This has to be the habit of his life in smaller troubles. Otherwise it will not be the habit of the soul when everything you have worked for has gone up in smoke. When your family are taken captive. When you must face the horrible loss and grief and anger of your most trusted friends.

Practical Submission

David seeks the Lord to know what to do.

⁷ And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. ⁸ And David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?" He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue."

Pursuit is not automatic. We would think so. Why would going after the captors and possibly murderers of your family be something you would even have to ask God about? How many of you would stop to ask God?

But David inquires of the Lord. He summons the priest and the ephod to see what God would approve. Though we do not know exactly how it worked, God answered specific questions through the jeweled breastplate that the high priest wore. So David asks if he should go after the marauders. And he asks if he will be able to catch them. God answers yes, yes and you will rescue them all.

But this does raise a question: what if God said no? We don't know what David would have done. We assume he would have obeyed the Lord. But my question is: what would you do?

The Immediate Obedience

(v.9-15)

David does not wait. He gathers up his men and sets out.

Pursuing the Enemy

(v. 9-10)

⁹ So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed. ¹⁰ But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor.

David and his unit of 600 men set out in urgent pursuit. God has approved their going. In fact, God has sent them to pursue by giving them a prophecy.

But they hit a major obstacle. The brook Besor prevented them from taking their supply wagons further. One third of their force were simply too exhausted to continue. David and his men had been on the road for three days. They gone through an emotionally exhausting

experience. And now, after riding hard, they have had to pause and 200 men sink down in exhaustion. They can't go on.

So David presses on with a weakened military. He has four hundred men. That does not seem to daunt him. He has God's promise in his heart and presses the pursuit.

Providential Help

(v. 11-15)

¹¹ They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, ¹² and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. ¹³ And David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" He said, "I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. ¹⁴ We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." ¹⁵ And David said to him, "Will you take me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band."

As they are pursuing they found an Egyptian. He was in desperate condition and in a dangerous place. They graciously stopped and gave him food and drink.

The he tells a dreadful story (v. 13-14) when asked who he is and why he is here. He was a captive servant of an Amalekite. He had been in the raiding party that had swept through and finally burned Ziklag. His master little cared for him. He was left to die when he fell sick. Through this we see the heartless brutality of the enemy David is pursuing. I am sure their hearts had to sink.

So this young man knows where the Amalekites are camped. Probably at this point David tells him where they are from. Here is both the gracious provider and a mighty warrior. David is on the Lord's mission. He wants this young man's help. Will he lead David and his men to the Amalekite camp?

Now the young Egyptian is frightened. He knows that he was part of inflicting the disaster on David and his men. He knows that David is in pursuit of the raiders. He knows that David and his men are formidable force. Maybe his life hangs by a thread. But he wants to live. So he asks David to swear to let him live and to protect him from his Amalekite master. And he asks David to swear by God. The sense of this here is that the young man knows the one true God or at least knows who He is. He knows that David is a Hebrew and a worshipper of God. He does not ask David to swear by "the gods" which would have been normal speech for an Egyptian. He does not ask David to swear by "your God" as though he worshipped another. He asks David to swear by God, simply God. The text does not say that David made this promise and agreement, but certainly the young man rose to lead them the Amalekite camp.

The Rescuing Victory

(v.16-20)

The Amalekites have put at least three days journey between them and the last town they raided, Ziklag. On this particular night, feeling safe, they decide it is time for a party...

¹⁶ And when he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. ¹⁷ And David struck them

down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled.

A Foolish Celebration

(v. 16)

The Amalekites must think they are safe. They are not in a battle camp. They are celebrating this great raid. They have no perimeter established. They are not on guard. Their hearts are merry. God has prepared for David's arrival.

A Decisive Battle

(v. 17)

Imagine the chaos and rising panic. The initial attack is launched at dusk. It is fought through the night. And waged on through the whole day. Only four hundred escape because they have jumped on camels and raced away into the darkness.

Only four hundred escaped. So just how big is this Amalekite army? And David has thoroughly and soundly defeated them with four hundred men. That's the point of the irony. David has wiped out the Amalekite force with as many men as were able to escape.

A Recovered Treasure

(v. 18-20)

¹⁸ David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. ¹⁹ Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. ²⁰ David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, "This is David's spoil."

They recover all their families. This alone makes the long ride, the wearying pursuit and the frightful battle worth it. Not one was lost. All were rescued

They restore all their fortunes. Nothing was lost. All was restored. At great price all that was lost to the Amalekites was rescued and restored.

What a great scene! What a reunion! What joy! What amazement! What gratitude!

The Gracious Generosity

(v. 21-25)

But even in David's military there were those who having seen the mercy of their king had little mercy for others...

The People's Meanness

(v. 21-22)

²¹ Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people he greeted them. ²² Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart."

They meet up with those who stayed behind. Here is a reunion. 200 men reunited with their families. What light for the eyes and joy to the hearts.

But the wicked and the worthless refuse to share the spoil. Sure, we must give them their wives and children; that is only right. But they were too tired for the journey and battle. They stayed behind. They are baggage handlers and camp guards. They have not risked all so they should not participate in the reward. Give them no spoil.

The King's Grace

(v. 23-25)

²³ But David said, "You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us. ²⁴ Who would listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike." ²⁵ And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.

In How He Thinks

What has happened is God's doing. He has given it back. He has strengthened our pursuit. He has delivered over the enemy. We will not treat each other this way as though all this were our own strength, prowess and cunning. God gave it all. We make no boast save in the amazing grace of God's great and many gifts.

In What He Establishes

So David makes an equitable distribution. Some will be on the front lines fighting the battle. Some will stay behind and guard the supply lines. Some will guard the luggage. But all will receive an equal share in the spoil. Regardless of your role, there will be an equal reward.

David also says, "Not just for today..." He establishes as a principle for any under his command. He makes a law. Whether someone fights the battle or supplies for the ones fighting the battle, all will share equally in what God brings into our hands. At least till the writing of the Books of Samuel, this policy held true.

The Kingly Grant

(v. 26-29)

But David is not finished. He is not only a mighty warrior but he is a wise and merciful ruler.

²⁶ When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord." ²⁷ It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir, ²⁸ in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa, ²⁹ in Racal, in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, in the cities of the Kenites, ³⁰ in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach, ³¹ in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed.

His Settlement

David sends a portion of the spoil to his friends who were the elders of Judah, his home tribe. He gives as a gift out of his own share of the spoils.

He points out the source of the spoil. David has defeated and despoiled the enemies of the Lord. He has done what Saul could not. He has risen in victory and has given gifts to men...

His Purpose

Here is a list of cities that either were the homes residences of those elders or were additionally given gifts. The idea here is David is on a "Win the hearts..." campaign. These are the places where David had visited when he was roaming. It seems these were places where he sought refuge from the murderous intentions and actions of Saul. In these places, they shielded, succored and supplied David. They took great risk being danger of Saul's wrath.

The future king is mighty. He has defeated the enemy. He has taken great spoil from them.

The future king is merciful. Out of all that bounty, he gives gifts to those who helped. He does not have to do this. But he wants to. He is pleased to.

Reflect and Respond

David is such a contrast to Saul:

David sought God's prophet not a medium...

David almost completely destroyed Amalekites. Only those who fled escaped...

What a King we have:

The authority of Jesus...

The mercy of Jesus...

The power of Jesus...

The generosity of Jesus...

The victory of Jesus...

The conquest of Jesus...

How do we respond to unexpected adversity and trials? What do we find in this text that is true of David in the text and Jesus in the New Testament?

We may be genuinely affected in our emotions...

We will encourage ourselves in God...

We will seek God's:

Will - what is clearly given in His Word...

Wisdom - deciding what is best...

We will obey God...

We will be alert to God's providences in our situation. What people and what provisions does God give...

We will intentionally be aware of the hardship and suffering of others.

We will be generous to others even when it costs us...

Some questions for us:

Are you willing to submit to God's will regardless? Sometimes God gives a hard "yes" in His Word. Sometimes, God gives an even more difficult "no".

Is your heart tender towards others? Do you rejoice when others have what to rejoice over? Do you weep with those who weep? And do you do so even more when your own heart wants to focus on its own troubles, hardships and difficulties?

Are you merciful and generous and wise? So much to say here. But what do you do when you have the money to do most anything? More upping your lifestyle? Or more serving and giving to others?

For us, our Lord is mighty and merciful. Praise, oh praise his glorious Name.