

August 7, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: The Life of David
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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GOOD NEWS; BAD NEWS 2 Samuel 1:1-16

What sounds like good news to one person might be bad news to another. For example, there are times when the Supreme Court is deciding on a culture-changing issue that both conservatives and liberals await their decision with bated breath. A few weeks ago when the court announced their decision to strike down a Texas law that restrained abortion, the liberal people of the nation rejoiced and celebrated with parties while the politically conservative folks mourned the decision and wondered if there is any hope for innocent babies in America.

But sometimes, odd as it may seem, a piece of news can be bad and good at the same time. For example, someone just ran into your car and totaled it. That's bad news. Yes, but no one was injured. That's good news. Yes, but you can't drive your car now. That's bad news. Yes, but insurance will pay for a new one. That's good news. Right, except your premium rates are going to sky rocket. That is bad news.

David must have felt like that when he received news of the battle between Israel and the Philistines. On the one hand, he had to be relieved that he was not part of it. However, he learned that Saul, his archenemy, had been killed. The good news is that David could now be king. The bad news is that Jonathan his dear friend was also killed. Furthermore, it saddened David that the first king of Israel, bad as he was, had been killed by godless pagans. How dare they attack God's anointed king. That was something David never dared to do.

If we think David suffered from mixed emotions, what about the Amalekite messenger who brought the good news to David from

the battlefield? He had to be motivated by the thought that when he told David that his enemy Saul was dead and presented him with the king's crown and armband David would reward him handsomely. How shocked he must have been to discover that he had just delivered really bad news and it was going to cost him his life.

We should rejoice to remember that no news is news to God. He already knows what is going to happen – when, how, and why. God is never surprised by tomorrow's headlines. That is because God is the blessed controller of all things, all the time, in all the universe. No, our finite intellect cannot begin to fathom that idea. But, that reality gives us peace even in times when good news sounds like bad news and bad news is actually good news. Jesus gave us confidence with these words, "*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me*" (John 14:1). The messenger in this story didn't believe in God and his lack of faith was costly. Likewise people who engage in sin are often convinced that their sin brings them benefit. The bad news is that sin ultimately never benefits. Ask the Amalekite.

Bad News From a Dubious Source (vv.1-10).

The new king was concerned about the old king (vv.1-4a). Maybe that concern was present throughout the day, or maybe it popped up when the Amalekite showed up. In the day-to-day activity, David returned as victor again. *After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag (v.1)*. "Returning as victor" was a common theme for David. In this case, David and his men had just finished defeating the Amalekite raiders. They were just returning home and trying to get reestablished. No doubt setting up tents or temporary shelters. Actually, these men had been accustomed to returning home after a military victory for the past year and a half.

But while David and his men were victors, things did not turn out the same for his friend and national family. This statement flows right out of the previous story about Saul's death at the end of chapter thirty-one. Saul and his sons and the army of Israel had been soundly defeated on Mt. Gilboa. The next day the Philistines picked through the carnage and found the bodies of Saul and his sons. They hung the bodies on the city wall at Beth Shan. That night men from Jabesh-

gilead removed the bodies and took them to Jabesh to be burned. This all took about three days. David had no idea that at the very moment he was destroying Amalekites, which Saul refused to do, which cost him the kingdom, the Philistines were killing Saul and all the heirs to the throne.

On the third day, an escapee showed up in Ziklag with news for David. *And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." And David said to him, "How did it go? Tell me."*

The fellow showed up at David's town with torn clothes and dirt on his head. He looked a lot like the citizen of Benjamin who brought Eli bad news that the Philistines had captured the ark (1 Sam. 4:12). David didn't have to ask if the man bore good news or bad news because he had the appearance of a bad-news bearer. But was the bad news that the Philistines were routed (David had been living with them and supposedly helping them)? Or was the bad news that Israel had been defeated (David was one of them)?

How would a foreigner know which was bad news and which was good news? No doubt this fellow was confused. Though he was not familiar with or motivated by godly wisdom, we might wonder if the principle Solomon wrote about later drove this man to Ziklag and David. Solomon concluded, *Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country (Proverbs 25:25)*. And so the Amalekite might have thought, "Ah yes. David will be greatly refreshed by what I have to tell him."

Boy was he confused because he actually brought bad news from afar (vv.4b-10). The news was that David's archenemy and a dearest friend were killed. *And he answered, "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." Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"*

The man told his news. Probably he knew that David had been running from Saul for many months. It seems certain that he was aware that David would be the next king. But was he aware that

Jonathan and David were closest friends? Probably not. David did not accept the news without probing the source. How did this man know these things? David wanted the man to give evidence that what he said was true.

How unlike us when we hear news good or bad. Human nature is to respond to gossip as though it is the gospel truth. That is especially true if the gossip makes someone other than us and our family look bad. Human nature loves to hear bad news about other people. Too many people love to hear that leaders have fallen. Most people love to hear bad news about people they perceive as their opponents or the competition or the enemy. When we hear a bit of news (or more likely gossip), do we ever stop the person and ask, "How do you know that is true?" "Have you talked to the people involved?" "Were you there to see this or hear it yourself?" "How do you propose to fix this situation?" Too often, even professing Christians are not nearly as interested in probing the source as they are in repeating the news.

David heard the news from the Amalekite and might of thought that "something's rotten in Denmark." Everyone is familiar with that saying, but it demands a certain amount of clarification. The actual quote is "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." It comes from Shakespeare's famous play *Hamlet*, Act 1, scene 4, where Marcellus, a minor character in the story, uttered the line to point out that the political situation in Denmark was in dismay. It was as though the fish (Denmark) was rotting from the head down (from the leaders first). That might be why we also use the phrase to say the same thing as, "Something is fishy here."

Something about this messenger's story seems to be out of sync with the record from God's eternally established inspired Word. Consider how the messenger explained why he knew what he claimed to know. *And the young man who told him said, "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. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' And he said to me 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' 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” (2 Samuel 1:6-10).

Now let’s stop to compare what 1 Samuel 31 says actually happened. *Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me.” But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together. And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. And the Philistines came and lived in them. The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa” (1 Samuel 31:1-8).*

This story tells about the death of Saul and his sons. That means there was only one immediate heir left to take the throne— Ishbosheth, who for whatever reason was not at the battle. This was clearly the work of God in bringing about the fulfillment of His promise to put David on the throne.

But how do we reconcile the conflict between God’s inspired Word in 1 Samuel 31 and God’s inspired Word which recorded the Amalekite’s rendition? Until the early 20th century, Bible scholars concluded that the Amalekite lied about what happened. However, for the past 100 years Bible scholars have concluded that the Bible is in error because whoever wrote 2nd Samuel was not aware of the story in 1st Samuel. We would say that is a lie also. Or in other cases, scholars try to reconcile the two stories; and by manipulating a few facts, they are satisfied that both accounts tell the same story.

I prefer to believe the old-timers who concluded that the Amalekite didn’t tell the truth. What probably happened if that is the case? It appears that the battle went late into the evening (1 Samuel 31:7). When darkness fell, the Philistine army withdrew from Mt. Gilboa. Then the Philistines came back the next morning to collect booty from the battle (1 Samuel 31:8) and discovered the bodies of Saul and his sons. Sometime in the night, between verses seven and eight, this vagabond Amalekite was collecting booty from the battle. He obviously came across the bodies of Saul and his sons and picked up the important possessions. Then he made up a story that he thought would put him in good standing with the new king.

Consider the problems with his story. The guy claimed that he just happened to be passing by while a major battle raged. *And the young man who told him said, “By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa” (v.6a).* And we are supposed to believe that? He just happened to be in the heat of the battle? Yep. That’s what he claimed. *And there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, “Here I am.” (vv.6b-7).* He just happened to be close enough to see the approaching chariots? The chariots were on Mt. Gilboa? We wouldn’t have a problem with chariots in the valley, but there is not much of Mt. Gilboa where chariots could operate. And how long did it take for those nearby chariots to arrive? Wasn’t the man afraid the charioteers would kill him?

Furthermore, we are left to wonder from his story if he was the only one alive and well that Saul would call out to him for help. And when Saul called out for help, why did they guy confess that he was an Amalekite? *“And he said to me, ‘Who are you?’ I answered him, ‘I am an Amalekite.’ And he said to me ‘Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers’” (vv.8-9).* If he had any idea where David and his men had just come from and what they had just done, he surely would not have confessed that he was an Amalekite.

Okay, try to make it fit. Did Saul’s suicide attempt fail even though the previous text said that his armor-bearer saw that he was dead? We almost want the guy’s story to be true simply because it would be poetic justice for an Amalekite, who should have been dead

long ago, to be the instrument of God's choice for ultimate judgment against Saul. He determined God's anointed could not survive. "*So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen*" (v.10a). Who was this foreigner to decide if God's anointed king should live or die? Do we sense an attitude of arrogance in the resident alien?

The man tried to verify the truth of his story by presenting Saul's possessions, the king's symbols of authority. "*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*" (v.10b). This statement pretty much uncovers the fellow's motivation. He knew David would be the next king and he was looking for reward. How he came to be in possession of these things is just not clear.

We can probably assume that at this point, the Amalekite was feeling pretty good about himself and his lot in life. Things were working out pretty well for him, especially if the truth is that he was "wise" enough to go searching through the spoils of war before the Philistines showed up. It was King Ahab who told Ben-Hadad (both evil kings) "*Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself like he who takes it off*" (1 Kings 20:11). So, too, this guy was counting his chickens before they hatched.

Worse News for the Dubious Source (vv.11-15).

Abject grief signaled David's attitude toward his relatives (vv.11-12). Notice the signs of great grief in this case. *Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him* (v.11). Tearing one's clothes was a common expression of great grief in that culture. Not only David, but all the 600 men with him tore their clothes and expressed deepest grief. And this was not put on as the displays of grief were at times in those ancient days. We know that in Jesus' day, and probably earlier also, professional mourners were hired to mourn the dead. That kind of insincere mourning might be what we see when Jacob died and many important Egyptians mourned for over two months (Gen. 50:3). But, David and his men were as grieved about this news as they were when they came upon the evidence of the Amalekites' attack against their homes and families.

Was the Amalekite surprised by David's response? Did he entertain thoughts of slinking away in the shadows? Maybe he should have.

The Bible explained the reasons for this display of grief. *And they 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). They grieved for Saul because, as bad as he was, he was God's anointed king of Israel, the first king of Israel. They grieved (David especially) for Jonathan, the dearest friend David had. They grieved for the dead from the people of the LORD who were of the house of Israel (born in Jacob's line). These were people chosen by God, part of God's special nation, unique among all the people of the earth, who the Philistines had mercilessly killed in battle.

Death of a loved one always causes grief. When it is a national leader the whole nation grieves, especially when the leader's life was taken violently. I was a child when Lee Oswald gunned down President John Kennedy. I still remember all the news coverage of the event, especially the funeral and internment with full military honors. Thousands of people lined the streets of Washington while millions of Americans watched on television as we grieved the loss of our leader. No one but no one had warm feelings for Lee Oswald. Nor did David have any positive feelings for this dishonest Amalekite.

After a day of showing grief, the attention was focused back on the messenger who brought this news. He suddenly learned that touching God's anointed brought serious consequences (vv.13-16). It is significant that before he responded to this man, David gave him opportunity to confess. Just to make sure that he was doing the right thing, David gave the guy an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings. *And David said to the young man who told him, "Where do you come from?" And he answered, "I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite"* (v.13).

Things were getting serious now. David, not having access to the story recorded in 1 Samuel 31 by which to compare the Amalekite's claim, had no solid reason to disbelieve this fellow. But surely the circumstantial evidence made him wonder. As we have seen, the man's story does prompt questions. Nevertheless, having been given the chance to tell the truth, the man compounded evidence

against himself. He made known the fact that he was an Amalekite. Maybe he even boasted in the fact that he was born into a people group that God had slated for annihilation because of their ruthless attack against the unprotected people at the back of the group of Israelites who were moving to Canaan. He was from among the very people who caused Saul's downfall when he refused to obey God's order for annihilation.

Furthermore, the man stated that he was a sojourner. That means that he was not a citizen of Israel but was from a family that lived among the Israelites. He would have been similar to an unregistered immigrant in America. Therefore, because he lived among the Israelites, he was certainly aware that David was anointed to be the next king. He should also have been aware that Saul was already the anointed king and he should have respected the position.

The man had two serious strikes against him. *David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" (v.14)*. He was a dishonest, sojourning foreigner. He should have known better than to kill the Lord's anointed. The LORD's anointed is an important and repeated theme throughout 1 and 2 Samuel. In these books we read how God picked Eli but not his sons. God picked Samuel. God picked Saul. God picked David. None of these men were perfect, but all of them were God's choice. It seems that Samuel was quite righteous, David tried, but Saul and Eli were failures. Nevertheless, all of them were God's anointed servants just like King Cyrus of the Persians would be in the future.

The story indicates the Mr. Sojourning Amalekite didn't have a right to a speedy trial. The sixth amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads in part: "In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation." Mr. Sojourning Amalekite didn't live under the rules of the Constitution of the United States. But in light of the conclusions of the Supreme Court in the past generations, we do not live under the rule or authority of the Constitution either. We must live according to whatever a panel of nine non-elected judges decide is right or

wrong. They perceive that their duty is to reinterpret the meaning of the founding fathers' words to fit their predetermined conclusions.

Things were not that much different for Mr. Amalekite. *Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died (v.15)*. At that moment, David was the prosecutor, the jury, and the judge. He sentenced the man to immediate execution. Why? Was this vengeance? Was David in an emotionally unstable condition? No. David appealed to the higher court of God's law for his conclusion. *And David said to him, "Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD's anointed'" (v.16)*. David appealed to God's law about not touching God's anointed servant. By the man's own confession he sealed his execution.

But what if it was a lie? David the new king could have had the man executed for lying. If nothing else, David was in line with God's commands to have the man executed because he was an Amalekite. Whatever the justification, the man who concocted a scheme to gain a promotion from the new king instead lost his life at the hands of the new king.

This story reminds us of a very important principle. What benefit do you hope to gain by wrongdoing? The person who lies, or cheats, or commits fornication, or breaks the laws of the land almost always does so from the beginning in order to gain some kind of perceived benefit. Sometimes the benefit is financial. Sometimes it is merely a feeling of power or satisfaction. But we live in God's world. He is King and Sovereign ruler. All things work out according to His rules and for His glory. Sometimes our wrongdoing has immediate and unfavorable consequences. Sometimes our wrongdoing leads to addiction which leads to a life of misery. Far better for us to identify sin, call it sin, repent of it, and enjoy the forgiveness of our King.