

SERMON – 17/10/21**'David and Saul (part 1)'**

1 Samuel 17:55 to 18:16

“Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with David but had abandoned him.” (1 Samuel 18:12)

As we continue to follow the story of the life of David on Sunday mornings, I'm very grateful to Brenda Fraser for the last two Sundays when in my absence you have looked at David's anointing by the prophet Samuel and considered how from the very beginning God could see David's inner character, and then at the first public outworking of that when David became the champion of Israel by taking on the Philistine giant Goliath, although as Brenda rightly pointed out last week, David's heroism was a direct result of his faith in God. Although King Saul has been in the background of the story so far we come now to consider the relationship between David and Saul, this week focussing on Saul's attitude towards David and next week, God-willing, looking at David's attitude to Saul – because, as we will see, they are very different indeed and we need to be sure that we follow the right example.

On a weekend when, because of the shocking assassination of Sir David Amess MP on Friday, our eyes are focussed on public servants, it is not insignificant that we come in Scripture to look at two individuals who in very different ways served their country in their time. Neither of them was perfect – none of us is – but there is a distinction to be drawn between them in regard to their relationship with God. Although most of us regularly throw up our hands in exasperation at our leaders in all areas of life, we have been reminded in the last couple of days of the many good ways in which dedicated politicians faithfully represent their constituents week in week out year after year, and while it is vital that our leaders should be held to account for their words and their actions, not least by those of us who have an allegiance to a higher Power, we must not forget the Scriptural imperative to pray for all who are in authority.

However, although what I have to say this morning may be usefully applied to the behaviour of our leaders in their interactions with one another, it is addressed primarily to each one of *us*, for we are no different from them and our interactions with other people day by day are of no less

significance than any exchanges that may take place in parliament or palace, in the corridors of power or on national and international media. As we consider how David and Saul related to one another, let us shine the spotlight on ourselves and take heed to our own attitudes and actions before we are too quick to criticise those whom we have elected to represent us or have been appointed to lead the nation or indeed the church.

We saw a fortnight ago that while human beings may look at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart, and that is exemplified in this morning's passage and particularly in how we see Saul reacting to David. It is perhaps understandable that Saul is initially suspicious of this young shepherd boy who has taken up Goliath's challenge when none of his fighting men would dare. "Whose son is he?" Saul asks Abner but the general has no idea. "Young man, whose son are you?" he asks David himself as he returns with the giant's head in his hands. It is the kind of question that people ask of newcomers to this day as they seek to get the measure of them and the kind of threat they might pose – are they from a good family or from a bunch of ne'er-do-wells, what school did they go to, where did they do their training, have they got references? "I am the son of your servant Jesse from Bethlehem," David replies. And here is where we first get the measure of Saul because he should already have known David - in the previous chapter we read that for some time David had come to play the harp to Saul when he was ill at ease with himself (which happened often). "I like David, he is recorded as saying, let him stay here in my service." (1 Sam. 16:22). But although young folk sometimes change a great deal as they mature, clearly Saul hadn't remembered the lad even though he had done him a very great deal of good over a considerable period.

Here's something for all of us to think about. When we want to know all about someone to make sure they are not going to be a threat to us, do we actually do anything meaningful with that information or do we just go on to pass judgement on the next person who comes into our line of sight? There are people who do good to us all the time – it may be their job but like many a constituency MP or receptionist or waitress or call centre operator they serve and they serve well and it says more about us than it does about them when we make a big thing of their credentials but then fail even to recognise them the next time we see them.

There is another important thing I want you to notice about Saul in what we read this morning from 1 Samuel. Brenda mentioned last week that the Chinese character for 'threat' also means 'opportunity' and it's significant that although Saul perceived David to be a threat, everyone else regarded him very differently. Saul's son Jonathan found David to be a deeply attractive individual – we will look in a couple of weeks at the relationship between these two, but suffice it to say for now that Jonathan (as Saul's heir) had even more to lose than Saul did if David was genuinely a threat, but Jonathan saw the good and the godly in David while his father, by contrast, became more and more paranoid. Again, although Saul had to recognise David's military capabilities by promoting him in the army, the officers and men rejoiced in that even though he would have been promoted over the top of some of them while Saul only became jealous that as women across the country were praising him for killing thousands, they were praising David for killing tens of thousands. The population wasn't being critical of the king, they were just highlighting the particular triumphs of one of the king's men, but Saul took it to heart and his bitterness festered there..

How quick are we each to get jealous when someone else does well instead of rejoicing at what has been achieved for the common good, whether that is in national life or in the fellowship of the church? When you are the only one who is being suspicious of another, perhaps it's time to recognise that you are the one who is out of step.

Finally, it's clear from what we are told in Scripture about Saul that he was a very troubled man. Perhaps he suffered from what would now be regarded as mental illness or perhaps his own false attitudes and behaviour had spiralled out of control and driven him mad. Either way we each need to recognise our own weaknesses of character and of health and to develop strategies for coping with them. What for Saul began as suspicion of David soon grew to become jealousy and we read this morning of the astonishing episode where Saul became so wound up that he raved around the house like a madman, anger bubbling up in him until in his rage he picked up a spear and fired it towards David not once but twice as he sat playing the harp. Thankfully he missed, because as we saw on Friday, a sharp weapon in the hands of someone whose bitterness has got out of hand has devastating consequences.

Perhaps it's time for *us* to stop and take stock of our attitudes and put the brakes on behaviours that could easily get out of hand. Let's all do it before things go too far.

Our text this morning says that “Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with David but had abandoned him.” It is a matter of debate which came first – Saul's rejection of God or God's rejection of Saul – but the outcome is tragically the same and there is a message for each of us in what we see here in the attitudes and behaviour of the king, because what we are before God that will shape the way that we are not just in our being but in how we act towards other people. And that is where we each have to begin this week - all of us have our weaknesses and insecurities – some of us are by nature suspicious or prone to jealousy, others prone to let our temper get the better of us, others quick to judge others and slow to praise them. My friends, let us each take time this week to bring our character and attitudes into the spotlight before God and ask Him to heal us that we may act more graciously towards those around us, family or friends or strangers alike. Next week I hope to look with you at the rather different (though no less challenging) example that David himself gives us of how to relate to others that we might be more like God in Jesus Christ and that the world may be a better place as a result.