

## **The Idolatry of Self**

1Samuel 18:1-30

As far as I can tell from the Bible the first Apostle of Christ to be put to death for his faith was the Apostle James, the brother of John.

According to Acts 12:1-2 he was put to death by a man named King Herod.

His decision to murder James made the Jews happy, so he decided to put Peter in jail as well with the intention of ending his life.

God has different plans and miraculously takes Peter out of prison and keeps him alive for a number of years after that.

Herod is furious with the escape and blames the guards and has them executed.

When we read about that it is pretty obvious that Herod was a pretty bad dude, and what the Bible says right after Peter's escape tells us something about why he was that way.

A political meeting takes place between Herod and some representatives from a place called Tyre and another called Sidon.

They had been having some problems with Herod and needed to work them out because he was very important to their food supply.

Herod came to the meeting "wearing his royal robes" and he "sat upon his throne and delivered a public address to the people."

Hearing what he had to say some of the people listening (probably for the purpose of buttering him up) shouted "This is the voice of a god, not of a man."

"Immediately" It says in Acts 12:23 "because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died."

One of things that made Herod into such a wicked man was his self-worship.

He was the most important person in his own mind and he was quite happy to have others agree with him on that point.

You know that problem is fairly common to the human experience.

It is usually more subtle than someone actually calling us a god, but in our day and age it is likely more pervasive than ever before.

Just think of social media for example.

It has taken the human capacity to be absorbed with ourselves and multiplied it by a lot.

The volume of things in our culture that is focused on the first person is truly unbelievable.

Tragically, it has made its way into the church.

Much of the theology of our time begins with human centered thinking.

Much of the most popular music on so called Christian radio is focused on us.

That is a problem that ought to concern us because the idolatry of self leads to some pretty bad places.

[We can see that clearly in our text this morning. Turn again in your bibles to **1Samuel 18:1-30**. In this chapter we see what kind of trouble self-focus can bring into a person's life through the example of King Saul. The chapter opens on a positive note describing the relationship between David and Saul's son Jonathan. What is described here is something people concerned primarily about themselves miss out on because making ourselves our top priority does not make a good foundation for friendship, instead we see that...]

**Point #1 – Serving God is the best foundation for friendship. (Verses 1-4)**

Every single relationship that we have with another human being works best when the people in that relationship love God more than one another.

Look with me at what it says here in verses 1-4.

That an amazing description of friendship.

The phrase there in verse one that says “Jonathan became one in spirit with David” translates a Hebrew phrase which means being knit together.

It also says that Jonathan “loved David as himself” which is what God commands us to do right. He says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Because our world today is obsessed with the self, people take that command to mean that we need to love ourselves before we can love others.

That is completely upside down. We already know how to love ourselves and the command is directing us to put others before ourselves.

Because our world is so messed up in other ways some very liberal theologians want to push this beyond friendship.

Listen, you can have a PHD in theology and not know the first thing about Bible interpretation.

These verses are about an excellent picture of friendship and in no reasonable way can be made to support the perversion of our own time.

When Jonathan gives David his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and belt it is a way of saying his life is bound up with David's, David's battles are his battles, David's path is his path, and he is willing to lay down everything for the sake of his friend.

The question we need to ask is, what is the basis for this powerful friendship between these two?

It is there shared trust in the LORD.

Why did David overcome Goliath? Because he trusted in God.

Remember back in chapter 14? Jonathan does the exact same thing. Facing impossible odds he entrusts himself to the LORD and wins an incredible victory.

He sees in David a man like himself. He may even see in David greater faith than his own. It does not make him jealous but rather he delights in it.

That is an amazing foundation for the best of friendship.

If we don't have that then relationships are fragile at best.

I believe the number one mistake people make in any relationship whether it be friendship, family, or marriage is that they look to another person to satisfy their deepest needs.

Here is the problem, no human being can do that.

[It's like trying to fill a swimming pool with a bottle of water. It can't be done. The bottle does not have the capacity to fill the pool. If you dump in a bottle into an empty pool and then try a cannon ball you will get seriously hurt.]

It is the exact same with friendship or any human relationship.

If you are looking to people to find worth and satisfaction.

If it is up to them to meet your needs it is a train wreck waiting to happen.

That is what people do who are focused on themselves.

They focus on what they can get from others and have little to no interest in what they can do for others.

When you are the center of your own universe you will have little to no capacity to forgive, you will have little trust, you will be controlling, manipulative, and the list can go on.

[There is no foundation for friendship in the idolatry of self. I believe that is why the friendship between David and Jonathan is mentioned here. It almost seems out of place with the rest of the chapter until we see it as something that Saul is missing out on. It is the faith of these two men that binds them together and Saul misses it because he is focused on himself. That becomes very clear in the next part of our text. What happen here shows us another important lesson. The lesson is that...]

**Point #2 – Self centeredness produces anger and envy. (Verses 5-9)**

When we put ourselves first in our desires and we see other people as the obstacle to those desires it most often causes us to act with hostility towards them.

Verse 5 gives us a summary of David's early military career under King Saul, verses 6-9 zoom in to the soldiers returning home after the battle where Goliath fell before David and the Philistines were soundly defeated by the Israelites.

Along the way a victory parade forms.

That was common in the ancient world and it is still common today.

People like it when their side wins and they like to celebrate those they perceive as heroes.

In this case women come out with dancing, playing music, and singing.

The end of verse 7 tells us what they were singing. Look there it says...**(end of 7)**.

Whatever these women intended the fact of the matter is they are celebrating a victory that came by the power of God.

Had Saul had the LORD in mind he could have responded with thankfulness for God graciously using him.

He could have even celebrated how God was using David.

Instead we read this in **verses 8-9**.

*He has no joy, but instead he is filled with anger and bitterness.*

It is really important to see that David has done nothing bad to Saul, in fact Saul and the nation as a whole have only benefitted from the actions of the young shepherd.

But instead of seeing David as a gift to be thankful for, he sees him as a threat to be despised.

He is right to see the kingdom of Israel as belonging to David, but it is not because David is trying to take it from him, it is because God has taken it and given it to David.

If Saul was thinking rightly, the only person he should be angry with is himself, not this young man of courage and faith.

If he was thinking rightly, he would not be envious of David, but thankful for him.

David is a gift of God's grace to Saul, but he misses it because of his focus upon himself.

[Think of it like this. Think of it like a very wealthy person who leaves a whole bunch of money to his children. The oldest gets ten million, the second born 5 million, and the third born 20 million. How many of you know there is a good chance child number one and two are going to be upset? Why? Because ten million and five million are a small amount of money? No simply because the youngest got more.]

That is what the idolatry of self does to us.

It blinds us to all the enormous riches of God's mercy and it leaves us with anger and jealousy.

Do you not know dear brothers and sisters that Christ died for you!

Do you not know what that means? Do you not know that by your turning away from evil and trusting in the work of Christ that the

infinite offenses you have committed against a Holy God are all forgiven?

Do you not know that because of the power of Jesus' resurrection from the dead you are sons and daughters of the king of the universe destined to inherit the new heavens and the new earth where you will enjoy the majesty of God's glory forever?

If we know these things and we should, how can we possibly want to remain focused on ourselves?

[Are you an angry person today? Do you find yourself struggling with envy? May I suggest you have a problem with worship? Listen, the idolatry of self is not going to take you any place good. In fact we see here with Saul that it gets worse for him. We see that his self-centeredness produced anger and envy and next we see that...]

**Point #3 – With anger and envy come hatred and fear. (Verses 10-19)**

When we become angry for sinful reasons and we are unsatisfied with our lives because of what we see in others we will quickly come to despise those people and we will become very insecure about ourselves.

*We see Saul's hatred come out in verses 10-11.*

This "evil spirit from God" was the reason David first came into Saul's service in the first place.

The thought had been that the music could bring some relief to the king.

This episode was particularly severe. The spirit came upon the king "forcefully" it says in verse 10, so much so that he was "prophesying" meaning he was speaking out loud as a result of the demonic oppression.

The NAS translates it as he "raved in the midst of the house."

In other words it is plainly obvious that the king is being afflicted.

David does his job. He comes and plays the harp.

That is very important to see. David is doing his duty for the good of Saul.

*The king however has no capacity to see that because of his self centered thinking.*

His anger and jealousy lead him to think of murder.

Having a spear in his hand he tries to "pin David to the wall" twice.

David, though, eludes the danger both times.

I suspect David chalks up the incident to the 'evil spirit', but it is more than that.

Verses 13-19 tell us that Saul intentionally sends David on dangerous missions hoping that he will be killed.

On top of that he wants David to marry his daughter on the condition of going out to fight battles once again hoping that David would die.

Again, it is so important to remember that he has no reason to be angry, he is angry because he is self centered.

No matter what the king does, however, David does not die.

The opposite happens. David has “great success” it says in verse 14 as it also said back in verse 5.

That word comes from the Hebrew word meaning “wisdom”.

In other words David’s skill and planning led to victory time and again for the Israelites.

Now look again at verse 14. Why does he have “great success/wisdom”? Because the Lord was “with David”.

Because of that it says twice in these verses once in verse 12 and again in verse 15 that “Saul was afraid of David.”

Self-centeredness brings a terrible mix of things upon us.  
Anger, envy, hatred, and fear.

[That is bad enough but what we see here in the example of Saul is even worse than that. He has no good foundation for friendship, he has a good amount of unrighteous anger in his life, his mind is consistently turning to jealousy, his hatred is strong enough to want someone dead, and his failure to kill David is making him afraid. Considering all that it is not surprising to see this last lesson in verses 20-30. The lesson is that...]

#### **Point #4 – The idolatry of self makes people foolish and unhappy. (Verses 20-30)**

Ironically when we try to find joy by focusing our attention on ourselves we become miserable which proves to be very unwise.

Saul’s hope of making his older daughter a problem for David does not work out, but he renews his plan when he finds out another one of his daughters named Michal is “in love with David.”

Think about that. He is using his daughters to try and hurt David.

How messed up is that? To say it is incredibly unwise to use your children in that way is an understatement to say the least.

David demonstrates humility and wisdom in his answer to Saul’s attendants regarding the proposal in **verse 23**.

You see in the ancient world grooms had to pay something called the “bride price” to the father of the woman he was to marry.

In our day, we might think that is a bad thing, but done rightly it was a tangible way of valuing the bride to be, especially when it really cost the groom something.

In our world marriage is treated cheaply.

*Our culture is constantly training young men to be irresponsible boys who have no sense of self sacrifice and that is bad for women.*

The sexual insanity of our culture is devaluing women more each day.

I know our leaders tell us how great their philosophies are for women, but look at the results its horrifying.

Saul was ready to treat his daughter cheaply to hurt David and that is foolish.

When that doesn't work, he sets the bride price at the lives of 100 of his enemies, again thinking this could get David killed.

David is able to kill 200 enemies instead and therefore is able to proceed with the marriage in integrity.

At first glance it may seem like this was cold hearted murder.

We have to remember that the warfare between the Philistines and Israel was ongoing and that much of the conflict was started by the Philistines.

This is likely not murder, but simply from battles in the ongoing war between the two peoples.

*David's success also highlights Saul's foolishness.*

What Saul intended to bring about David's death brought him more success.

Why? Look at **verse 28**.

When he realized this isn't exactly clear, but at some point along the way he comes to understand that David's success happens because of God.

Now look at **verse 29**. He knows that by fighting David he is really fighting God and yet he still makes David his enemy for the rest of his life.

[We see when the religious leaders in the book of Acts get all upset about the Apostles preaching about Jesus. A man named Gamaliel stands up in front of everyone and using some examples from history makes the point that if the Apostles message comes from men it will result in nothing, but if it is from God they are opposing the LORD and don't stand a chance of winning.]

It doesn't get any more foolish than that.

Fighting against God is the most futile thing a human being can do.

Why does Saul do it?

Because he has put himself in the most important place in his heart and mind.

It turns him into a fool and it will do the same to us.

*I added unhappy to foolish in this last point because this man's idolatry of self makes him angry, envious, hateful, fearful, and foolish for the last many years of his life.*

There is no joy in that state of being, but only misery.

God wants something better for us brothers and sisters.

Do you find yourself to be a bitter and angry person?

Do you find envy and jealousy regularly grip your heart?

Do you find yourself blaming everyone around you for your problems and the unhappy condition of your heart?

I want you to consider the possibility that your biggest problem is you.

Consider the possibility that your problem is putting yourself at the center of your life.

*We were made for something so much better than that.*

We were made to worship the infinite, eternal, almighty God of the universe.

Despite the fact that we have made a mess of everything because of our sinful selfishness, God has made a way through Jesus Christ to bring you back into a right relationship with Him.

With Jesus as Lord we do not need to be angry for no reason, we do not need to be envious, hateful, or fearful because in Jesus we are the recipients of "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms."

Listen, the idolatry of self only leads to misery. Worshipping God through Christ leads to everlasting joy.

May God be gracious and make that true of each and every one of us today for His glory and our good.