

## Fearing God in Matters of Life and Death

2Samuel 1:1-16

### *I remember my first year here as a pastor.*

I started on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 and I admit I lacked a full appreciation for what I was in for. One of the things that surprised me was the number of funerals I would have to conduct.

My first year here I conducted close to thirty funerals.

What surprised me more than the number was how few of them were regular attenders.

There were varied reasons but I quickly learned that many people from many years ago felt a connection to this place and so they would call us to do their funeral even though they hadn't attended for multiple decades.

### *That was a challenging year and I am thankful that volume went down over the years, but I am also thankful for the experience.*

It gave me a chance to share God's word with people and it also gave me some insight into how people think about life and death.

One of the big things that I observed was how easy it is to go through life and never really think much about dying or what happens to us when we die.

It seems to me a significant number of people talk about something that comes after, but have nothing solid to believe in.

People will say things like, "They are at peace" or "They are no longer in pain" or "They are in a better place."

Others will say things like "God needed another angel" or "The deceased person is now watching over us."

I sympathize with why people say such things. I think people are feeling the grief of death or see others in sorrow and want to offer something to ease the burden.

Things like that, though, fall short because there is nothing concrete to hold on to.

### *When people come up with their own ideas about matters of life and death they end up in varying degrees of error and nothing really substantial to hold on to.*

People do not become angels, departed souls don't hang around on the earth, and where a person spends eternity depends on whether or not they know Christ as their saviour.

[I know death is not a particularly popular subject to think through, but I would say it is an incredibly important one. It is something we all have to face and it is something that can happen at any time. That is the subject of our text this morning **2Samuel 1:1-16**. This text shows us how

easy it is to get off track in our thinking about life and death and it shows us the importance of fearing the LORD in such matters. This text is about a young man who comes to David—a man God chose to become king of Israel—bringing him news from the battlefield. From what happens here I want to highlight three lessons for us this morning, the first is this...]

**Point #1 – Failing to fear God distorts our view of death. (Verses 1-10)**

As human beings there are many things that we cannot understand rightly in and of ourselves, we need God to tell us things and we need to care about what God says if we are to think and act rightly in this world.

The first words of this chapter refer to the death of King Saul, the first king of Israel.

The book of 1 Samuel ends with the death of Saul and it is important to keep that in mind as we look at these verses this morning.

The fact that the end of one book and the beginning of the next start at the same place is one of the reasons commentators think the books of 1 and 2 Samuel were originally written as one book.

This is a continuation of God establishing kings over His people to rule them for His glory.

Saul, the king God set over the people as a means of judging their worldly desires, had died and now the focus is shifting to the man of God's choosing as the LORD brings him to the throne.

**Verses 1-2** set the scene for us.

Again we are reminded that we are in the middle of the story here because we are reminded where David has just been in chapter 30 of 1 Samuel.

David's wives, his children, and the families of his men had been taken captive by a group of people called the Amalekites and he had just returned from the battle he had fought and won in order to rescue them all.

That is an important detail because it was the Amalekites that God had commanded Saul to bring judgement upon and Saul had failed to fully obey the LORD, so the sense here is that David is succeeding where Saul had fallen short.

On the third day following his victory over the Amalekites a man shows up from the site of a battle between the Philistines and the Israelites with "his clothes torn and dirt on his head."

Based on his appearance David would know whatever this guy is about to tell him is likely going to be bad news (verses 3-4).

The news fits with the man's appearance, but David wants something more substantial from the messenger in **verse 5**.

This is the young man's answer...**verses 6-10**.

It is important to know that the account this man gives is a lie.

If we turn back to the end of 1 Samuel we will read there that Saul asked his armour bearer to kill him because he was severely wounded and did not want to be at the mercy of his 'uncircumcised' enemies, but the armour bearer refused because the bible says, "he feared greatly."

At the refusal of the armor bearer the bible says, "Saul fell on his own sword and when his armor bearer saw that he was dead also fell on his sword and died."

*It is quite possible that this messenger saw what happened and changed the story, or he invented it all on his own but either way it is a lie.*

Why lie? Because he thought he would make himself look good to David and perhaps receive a gift or a job when David takes the throne.

If we consider this from a purely human perspective it is sad that David's best friend Jonathan is dead, but Saul dying actually works out ok for David.

Saul had been trying to kill David so that threat is gone and it means the way is clear to take the throne.

No doubt this young man thought this would be good news to David and so why not be the guy to bring him the royal crown and bracelet.

He thinks that way because he doesn't fear God.

Even though his story is a lie, it does reveal to us his thinking about the death of the king.

*He says, "I was sure he couldn't live". He totally discounts the fact that the LORD alone is sovereign over life and death.*

No doubt he thought he was making himself out to have done something good.

The way he tells the story Saul is in excruciating pain and he is putting Saul out of his misery and at the same time he is doing David a service.

He gives no regard for God at all and so he says he was willing to take the life of the king without hesitation.

Even though his story isn't true it tells us that the law of God is of little or no importance to him.

He sees death as a mercy rather than tragedy. He sees himself as the one who gets to decide rather than the LORD.

His thinking is godless and distorts his view of death.

[Has anyone here ever looked into a curved mirror? Depending on how much a mirror is curved it can really distort the image of the object it is reflecting. It can make you look tall, short, big, little, or some of each in there are multiple curves. That is not the kind of mirror you want to use to get ready to go out the door. Why? Because you can't see things rightly in it.]

That is what is going on with this guy. He doesn't fear God so his view of death is messed up.

That same kind of thinking is all throughout our own culture today.

Our culture has pushed the LORD aside in matters of life and death.

If a person is sick and in pain they are permitted and often encouraged and helped to end their life.

*Listen, I have nothing but empathy for people suffering with a terminal illness.*

It is easy to see why people would think just like this young Amalekite and think I'll push the button for you or give you the pills.

I've watched a number of people die over the years, it is a horrible process and I very much see the temptation to speed it up, but that is not for us to decide.

Of course it is important to see a distinction here between actively ending a person's life and continuing to artificially sustain it beyond reason.

I'm not saying here there aren't difficult things to think through, but one thing we must keep at the front of our minds is that people belong to God and not to us.

We belong to God and not to ourselves.

Does that make death easy? Not in the least, but it is perhaps one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate that we trust Him.

[When we ignore the Lord is distorts our view of death. We end up with hollow sayings and idolatrous actions. We need to be careful to strive to think biblically about what it means to die. We get a glimpse of that in the next two verse where we see that...]

## **Point #2 – Fearing God shapes our response to the tragedy of death. (Verses 11-12)**

If we believe what God says, then we must feel the weight and sorrow of life coming to an end.

*Even though this messenger had lied about the details of Saul's death, the evidence of the crown and the armlet show that he has in fact died.*

David had served Saul many years, sat at his table many times, and he was even the king's son-in-law so he would have recognized those items immediately and known that there is only one way this messenger could be in possession of them.

This is how David reacts in **verses 11-12**.

As I mentioned earlier, the tearing of one's clothes were signs of distress and mourning.

To us this may seem like a strange thing to do, but the picture it presents fits with what the bible teaches us about death.

Death happens because the world is in a state of brokenness and ruin because human beings did and continue to do what God said not to.

A torn garment obviously shows something is wrong.

*In addition to tearing their garments, David and his men mourn and weep and fast.*

The words translated mourn and weep here have very similar meanings and so it is likely that both are used here in order to emphasize that this is genuine sorrow.

While it is possible for people to put on a show of fake sadness, David here is shedding real tears and is feeling a sense of true loss.

Fasting is another common action taken by the ancient Israelites in times of loss.

It is often an expression of repentance an acknowledgement that there has been a drifting away from the LORD and there is a need to turn back to Him.

Going without food, which we need to live, is a way of saying we need God more than other things that we need to live.

*It is easy to see why David does this for Jonathan and for the people of Israel.*

David and Jonathan were the best of friends. To say they were like brothers would fail to do justice to the love they had for one another.

Jonathan had been used by God to save David's life, he—like David—was a mighty warrior, and he had shown an uncommon faith in the LORD on more than one occasion.

This was David's best friend so of course he is going to tear his clothes, mourn, weep, and fast.

It is easy to see why David would mourn for the people of Israel.

These were God's people whom David had been set apart by the LORD through the prophet Samuel to lead, serve, and protect and many of them were now lying lifeless on the battlefield being killed by people who worshipped false gods.

Those are all good reasons to be in mourning, but what about Saul?

*A cynical interpreter might think that David is just going through the motions here.*

Saul did try and kill David on multiple occasions even after David had spared Saul's life.

He and his men had been forced to live in the wilderness and ended up in a foreign country where their families were taken captive all because of Saul.

If we were to apply human wisdom to this situation what would we expect from David?

We would likely expect him to be relieved and maybe even happy that Saul had fallen in battle, but only the opposite is ever mentioned in the scriptures.

If we go back to see why David spared Saul's life on multiple occasions we will see that he does that because of his fear of the LORD.

*Saul was anointed King by the prophet Samuel at the command of God.*

David had a good sense of what it meant to be appointed by God to be king over Israel and therefore could rightly see the sorrow in the king's death.

Did Saul go off the rails? Yes. Did he wrong David and his men? Yes. Did he turn away from the LORD in many ways? Yes.

Does that make his death a good thing? No. There is no joy in someone going to their destruction on account of their sinful choices.

David has genuine sorrow over the death of someone who considered him an enemy because of his fear of the LORD.

Having a deep regard for what God says and the consequences of living in disobedience to His law should affect the way we see things.

[How many of you wear glasses? I wear glasses too. I need them to see objects at a distance. While my prescription isn't all that strong I notice a big difference when I put them on. Michelle will tell you that I drive differently when I'm wearing my glasses. Why? Because with them I can see things rightly.]

*The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Caring about what God says in His word is like putting on a pair of glasses and helps us see things better.*

We should sorrow over death.

We should not bring it about unjustly and we should not act as though human beings are property of the state, but rather we should think and act as though people belong to God.

While we should sorrow over death, we also should know that there is genuine hope to be had in the face of death.

The bible tells us that death is something that God in Christ has overcome on behalf of His people.

*Jesus died in my place and in your place to pay the consequence of our breaking of God's law.*

If we understand that we are law breakers, see that as a real and serious problem, and trust in Jesus for forgiveness then we are forgiven and made right with God.

Jesus did more than die, He also rose from the dead and is alive reigning in heaven forever.

Because He has the power over life and death he will raise up from the grave everyone who trusts in Him to eternal life.

The fear of God and faith in Christ does not remove the seriousness of death, but it does conquer death and that has to change how we see things.

[We live in a time where technology has opened up a whole bunch of questions regarding life and death issues. Do we take time to think about such things biblically? I fear the ability to do things often takes priority over asking the question of whether or not we should do something. Government, science, and technology can very easily become gods, but the Christian must fear the LORD. We see the consequence of failing to do so in the next few verses. That is the third lesson of this text, that...]

### **Point #3 – Failing to fear God leads to death. (Verses 13-16)**

It is impossible to cast aside the commands and designs of the LORD and live.

*The way the text seems to read here is that David and his men mourned, wept, and fasted for several hours and after that he returns to question the man who brought the news of Saul's death. (Verses 13)*

When David asked this question in verse three, the young man answered by telling him about his coming from the battle.

By asking a second time it is obvious he wants the young man's background information.

He already knew he was an Amalekite from his story about killing Saul.

That is a significant detail because David had just come back from fighting with the Amalekites according to verse 1.

More than just the immediate offense of taking his wives and children captive, the Amalekites as a people were also under God's judgement.

*So this man comes from a culture of showing contempt for the LORD, but this man was given a great measure of grace.*

Yes he came from a godless people group, but look again at what he says at the end of verse 13.

He is more than an Amalekite. He says, "I am the son of a sojourner."

A sojourner is a foreigner who has lived among the people of Israel for an extended period of time.

While it is true that the Old Testament gives a number of examples of what God's judgment apart from grace looks like, it is a mistake to think that grace was unavailable to people.

*This man had escaped previous judgment and had the opportunity to live among God's people and learn God's law.*

He had the opportunity to fear the LORD and live.

That is why David asks what he does in **verse 14**.

This is a rhetorical question. How could you be the son of a sojourner and have no fear in striking down the “Lord’s anointed”?

The word “anointed” there is the Hebrew word Mishiah which is where we get the word Messiah.

The king of Israel was chosen by LORD to lead, serve, and protect, and deliver God’s people.

David’s question is, “How could you think striking down the king is no big deal?”

It is a huge deal and that is made clear in **verses 15-16**.

*I know some might want to jump in here and say, “That is a contradiction!”*

You were just saying how seriously we need to take death and how we need to fear God in matters of life and death and then David kills this guy.

One of the reasons we may struggle with this is because we live in a society that is far removed from capital punishment.

The Bible both in the Old Testament and the New Testament gives permission to governing authorities to take the life of those who unnecessarily take the lives of others (Genesis 9:6, Romans 13:4). This authority is given to the state not individual citizens that is important.

David is also the LORD’s anointed and as king he has both the right and responsibility to carry out just punishments for crimes committed against God’s people.

I will certainly admit there are challenges to carrying out capital punishment in justice, but the idea behind it in the bible is to highly value the lives of victims.

This is David highlighting the seriousness of what the Amalekite has said and seeking justice for a grievous sin.

*It is true that he was lying, but the reason he lied is the same reason he thought very little of taking the life of the king, he did not fear God.*

He was seeking worldly gain and gave no regard to God’s law or His judgement.

Where does that lead? It leads to his destruction.

[We know that disregarding danger does that. If the instruction of “Don’t play with matches” get ignored what can happen? You can get burned and much worse. If a sign says, “Road closed due to avalanche risk” and someone goes through that sign what can happen? Their car could get buried. People get hurt or worse every day because they disregard warnings.]



That same thing is true spiritually speaking.

The Bible says God has made Himself known in multiple different ways.

In our country the Bible is readily available and a Christian worldview has shaped our society for a long time.

Sadly, much of that is being ignored.

That fact that it is ignored, the fact that the fear of God is on the decline in our culture does not change Who God is and it does not change the fact that every single person will come before Him to face eternal judgment.

Living like that doesn't matter can only ever lead to one destination and that is destruction.

*Do you fear God in matters of life and death this morning?*

I pray that you do, because the good news of the Bible is that by trusting in Christ you can have eternal life rather than destruction.

God is being gracious to you today! If there is air in your lungs and your heart is beating in your chest it is because the LORD is sustaining you.

For the Christian this means living as new creatures striving to think and act in ways that reflect our delight in Him.

For the unbeliever it means you have been given another day to turn from godlessness and live.

You may be walking away from the LORD today, maybe you have been doing that for a really long time.

If you keep going it will end in destruction, but no matter how many steps you have taken away from the LORD it only takes one to come to Him.

Don't live with a distorted view, think biblically, don't ignore God and go head long into destruction, but rather fear God and live!