



Studies in the Life of David

Text

Second Samuel 1:1-27

Topic

Upon hearing of his death, David writes a stirring funeral lament for Saul that ignores his glaring failures and instead praises every redeeming quality

Title

"The Saul Song Redemption"

Introduction

If I asked you to fill-in the blank and said "onward Christian [blank], you'd say "soldiers" and might even add, "marching as to war."

You certainly would *not* say, "onward Christian **mercenaries**." A mercenary is a soldier-for-hire. He's in it for what he can get out of it - which is typically both money and adventure. He's sometimes called a soldier of fortune.

Is there such a thing as a Christian mercenary? All I know is that if we're not careful, a mercenary spirit can creep in to our way of thinking.

- Anytime I am thinking about what I deserve I'm thinking more like a mercenary.
- Anytime I am looking for what would best minister to me I'm thinking more like a mercenary.
- If I see no need to be a member of a local fellowship, or if I set myself up above the leadership of the church, I'm thinking more like a mercenary.

We want to be good soldiers for Jesus Christ. Instead of wanting our fortune now, in the form of recognition or self-promotion or independence, we should walk by faith trusting that the Lord will reward us later for a life of seeking and submitting to His will.

I started thinking about mercenaries because we encounter one in our text. He comes to David carrying the king's crown with news of Saul's death. It turns out to be a grave miscalculation on his part. David has him executed.

For his part, David shows what a soldier looks like who is walking by faith, looking forward to his future reward.

Am I a soldier of fortune? Or am I a soldier of faith? To answer those questions I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You're A Soldier Of Fortune If You Think You Can Take-up The Crown, and #2 You're A Soldier Of Faith If You Remember You Will Receive A Crown.

#1 You're A Soldier Of Fortune
If You Think You Can Take-up The Crown
(v1-16)

It seems as though the Philistines went out against the Israelites often. For all the many years Saul had been pursuing David, he had been successful in holding off the Philistines. Past successes, however, would not guarantee victory. Not this time.

2 Samuel 1:1 Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had stayed two days in Ziklag,
2 Samuel 1:2 on the third day, behold, it happened that a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. So it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.

David and his men were at Ziklag. He knew that the Philistines had gone out against the Israelites. He anxiously awaited news from the battlefield.

2 Samuel 1:3 And David said to him, "Where have you come from?" So he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel."

2 Samuel 1:4 Then David said to him, "How did the matter go? Please tell me." And he answered, "The people have fled from the battle, many of the people are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also."

2 Samuel 1:5 So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?"

2 Samuel 1:6 Then the young man who told him said, "As I happened by chance to be on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him.

It's clear this young Amalekite was out on the battlefield and, therefore, a soldier. He was thus a mercenary, hired by Saul to help against the Philistines. He was near the action on Mount Gilboa where Saul and his sons fell.

2 Samuel 1:7 Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.'

2 Samuel 1:8 And he said to me, 'Who are you?' So I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.'

2 Samuel 1:9 He said to me again, 'Please stand over me and kill me, for anguish has come upon me, but my life still remains in me.'

2 Samuel 1:10 So I stood over 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 bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord."

Whoa, wait a minute! I thought the last chapter said Saul fell on his own sword and committed suicide?

He did. This mercenary evidently thought that David would be excited about Saul's death because it cleared the way for him to become king. So he inserted himself in the story, made himself look a little heroic from his point of view. Maybe he'd be given a plush assignment in David's army.

2 Samuel 1:11 Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him.

2 Samuel 1:12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

We'll have more to say about David's reaction in a moment. For now, I wonder what this Amalekite was thinking about his strategy in bringing the news to David. This was probably not the reaction he was expecting.

Neither was what happened next.

2 Samuel 1:13 Then David said to the young man who told him, "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite."

2 Samuel 1:14 So David said to him, "How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?"

2 Samuel 1:15 Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go near, and execute him!" And he struck him so that he died.

2 Samuel 1:16 So David said to him, "Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.' "

David had refused to kill Saul on at least two separate occasions. Saul was "the Lord's anointed" king. Regardless his massive failures, it was up to the Lord to bring about his death.

Did the Amalekite protest and try to change his story? It was too late if he did. It would only seem to be a lie to save himself. His "own mouth... testified against" him.

The mercenary took up the crown and thought he'd follow the new king. As Christians we're called upon to take up the Cross and follow our King. The crown comes later, when we stand before Jesus and have our lives reviewed.

With that in mind, let's go back over this encounter to be sure we're not thinking like mercenaries.

The first thing we might notice about the Amalekite was that he was more a spectator than a soldier. He was on the battlefield, but kept a safe enough distance so as to not be engaged. After all, he watched as Saul fell on his sword and then as Saul's armorbearer did the same. He got to them before the Philistines and fled with the crown.

We don't want to be mere spectators!

The next thing we might notice about the Amalekite was that he was more a looter than a soldier. Although he took the crown and the bracelet to David, he expected to gain from them.

We are called to godliness, not gain. The apostle Paul put it like this:

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

1 Timothy 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

1 Timothy 6:8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

1 Timothy 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Truth is, most of us have a lot more than “food and clothing.” Let’s be sure we are using the surplus to further the kingdom of God.

A third thing we might notice about the Amalekite is that he promoted himself to David. I don’t think there’s any disagreement among commentators that his strategy was to impress David by telling him he had killed David’s rival and was now, in a sense, laying the kingdom at David’s feet. He was the first person to bow before David after Saul’s death. It was a very big act of flattery.

Self-promotion is *not* how God raises-up individuals. On a purely practical level, it makes no sense to promote yourself since you don’t know the future plans God has for you. Often self-promotion circumvents the tempering God needs to do in you in order for you to be the servant He desires.

I’ve used Moses as an example. He thought he was ready at age forty to be the deliverer. He promoted himself by killing an Egyptian. God had another forty years of work to do in Moses before He could raise him up to deliver the Israelites.

There are probably other things to notice about this mercenary. The point is that we must guard against his way of thinking. We’re **not** soldiers of fortune.

#2 You're A Soldier By Faith
If You Remember You Will Receive A Crown
(v17-27)

According to Second Samuel 5:4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign. (He hadn't begun to reign just yet, but would soon). If you do the math it indicates that he had been fleeing from Saul's murderous intentions at least a decade, maybe a little more. All that time he knew he was the next king; the prophet Samuel had anointed him as a young man.

David walked by faith in God's promise he would receive the crown.

You and I have a few decades to live on this earth - seven or eight if we're lucky (or unlucky depending on your perspective!). Everyday we face the murderous intentions of the god of this world. We are to walk by faith in God's promise we will one day receive our crown.

Perhaps even more powerful than the example of David is how David treats Saul in his death. He composes a praise song for him. He overlooks every evil intention of Saul's. If you knew only this song, you'd think Saul was an amazing, exemplary king over Israel.

We're each going to stand before Jesus. Here is what will happen:

1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

It seems that in my examination by the Lord everything in my life that did not glorify Him will be "burned." I will "suffer loss" of potential "reward" but "be saved." Once my examination is over, all you will know about me is whatever "work" I did for the Lord that did bring Him glory. It will result in my being awarded crowns.

The Bible mentions five potential crowns:

1. The incorruptible crown (First Corinthians 9:24-25).
2. The crown of rejoicing (First Thessalonians 2:19).
3. The crown of life (James 1:12).
4. The crown of righteousness (Second Timothy 4:8).
5. The crown of glory (First Peter 5:1-4).

After all the believers of the church age appear before Jesus individually to receive our crown or crowns, we will appear before Him corporately.

Revelation 4:10 the twenty-four elders [the church] fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

Revelation 4:11 "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."

Saul thus typifies the believer in his death in that **all you see is the reward!**

Let's take a quick look at David's composition. It falls into three movements that are introduced by the phrase, "how the mighty have fallen."

2 Samuel 1:17 Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son,

2 Samuel 1:18 and he told them to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow; indeed it is written in the Book of Jasher:

The Book of Jasher is also mentioned in the Book of Joshua. It seems to be a record of great military exploits. It's not a 'lost' book of the Bible! The Bible mentions several other books that were uninspired.

David wanted Saul remembered for his successes - even though the majority of Saul's life had been a failure. Is it revisionist history? No. It's an example of how we will be treated in eternity.

2 Samuel 1:19 "The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!

2 Samuel 1:20 Tell it not in Gath, Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon - Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

2 Samuel 1:21 "O mountains of Gilboa, Let there be no dew nor rain upon you, Nor fields of offerings. For the shield of the mighty is cast away there! The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

2 Samuel 1:22 From the blood of the slain, From the fat of the mighty, The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, And the sword of Saul did not return empty.

2 Samuel 1:23 "Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, And in their death they were not divided; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions.

2 Samuel 1:24 "O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, Who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

Wow! Very generous indeed was David in his praise.

So will the Lord be when you stand before Him. He's looking to reward you.

2 Samuel 1:25 "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan was slain in your high places.

2 Samuel 1:26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, Surpassing the love of women.

Admit it. *You wish David had not said this!* It's used by some to suggest that David and Jonathan had a physical, sexual love for one another.

Let's take a quick minute to debunk that argument.

1. First, no matter how hard you try to find something in the Bible to the contrary, God's Word calls homosexuality a sexual sin. It's not the unpardonable sin. It is a sexual sin, as is heterosexual sex outside of marriage and as is adultery.
2. Second, just as a point of reference, Jonathan was at least thirty years older than David. He was more a mentor than a contemporary. They were not two young men who palled around together.
3. Third, it's pretty clear that David was heterosexual. He had been married to Saul's daughter, Michal. He currently had two wives. He would multiply wives to himself and later get in a lot of trouble by sleeping with another man's wife.

2 Samuel 1:27 "How the mighty have fallen, And the weapons of war perished!"

By “weapons of war” David was referring to Saul and Jonathan as weapons in the Lord’s hands.

This was an amazing review of Saul’s life in particular. The things David said of him were true. It’s just that he omitted all of the faults, all of the failures, all of the sin.

We’d say he was “saved, yet so as through fire.” *So will you and I.* How much better, though, to minimize the fire and maximize the reward by being good soldiers, soldiers who walk by faith, deferring fortune to the end when the Lord will reward us.

Here is what Jesus says at the very end of the Bible:

Revelation 22:12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

And here is the proper response we ought to have to His promise:

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Philippians 3:11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Philippians 3:13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

Philippians 3:14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Don’t allow a mercenary spirit to creep in to your thinking. It’s the Cross now and the crown later for you and I.