The Jealousy of Saul and the Humility of David
1 Sam 18:6-29

Last week, we saw the young man David slay Goliath, the giant. And that was the event that propelled David onto Israel's public stage. But it also did something else: it became the catalyst for something that would profoundly shape the rest of David's life, and that was the jealousy of King Saul.

Read 1 Samuel 18:6-29

The Jealousy of Saul
Music's powerful, isn't it? And songs can be even more so: they have this power to move you in ways that plain spoken words just don't. And if ever that was true, it was most certainly true with the song of these women - just for all the wrong reasons.

You see, David and Saul and the army have come back from battle with the Philistines in triumph. And their women-folk come out to meet them, the writer tells us in v6, from 'all the cities of Israel'. And they're singing and dancing and shaking their tambourines, he tells us, with 'songs of joy'.

And they've got every reason to sing, haven't they? Because the army had been faced off against the Philistines for over a month, and everyone thought this was going to end in disaster, and these women must have woken every morning, wondering, will my son or brother or husband or dad survive the day? Will today be the day he's brought home in a body bag? And yet here they were, those sons and brothers and dads and husbands marching home. No wonder they sang for joy!

But when Saul managed to pick out the lyrics from all the cheering and shouting and marching of feet, when it dawns on him what they're singing, those words did anything but bring him joy. Verse 7, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Now, they didn't mean anything bad by that, did they? I mean this wasn't some kind of underground coup in the making, led by the women's guild. They're just celebrating.

But not Saul: v8, 'And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him.' And verse 9, 'And Saul eyed David from that day on.'

Now, if the song had ended with 'Saul has struck down his thousands' Saul would have been perfectly happy, wouldn't he? But it was that 'and David…', it was that comparison - that unfavourable comparison to David as he saw it, that got to him; that began to eat away at him, and from now on he sees David as a threat.

And that's jealousy, isn't it? Because to be jealous of someone is to compare yourself to this other person, and you see what they have and you want it. You want their success, or status, or appearance, or reward, but not just in an ambitious way, but in a way that makes you unhappy on the inside; in a way that wishes they didn't have it, but you did. That makes you think, 'hey, I deserve that - not them. That should be mine, not theirs.'

Now, I don't suppose many of us would think this is a problem we suffer from. But just think what might stoke those kinds of feelings. I mean, Saul can't cope with the idea that someone else might be on the upward path to success, or even worse, have overtaken him, can he? So how do you feel when someone gets that promotion at work that you wanted, or gets put in charge of that project that you wanted to lead on? The American writer, Gore Vidal once said that 'every time a friend

succeeds, something inside me dies'. Have you felt that? That when someone succeeds, in comparison to you, a shadow falls over you?

Or here, Saul resents the women's attention on David. And he feels that comparison; that the eyes of the women are on David and not him, that he's the one they're all talking about; he's the one who's turning heads. Have you ever felt that? About someone else's looks, or appearances? I don't like the way she looks, she shouldn't be that pretty? Why is he the one all the women go to? Why can't I look like that?

And here, Saul sees David as a rival for the affection of the nation. And Saul thinks, 'hey, I'm the king. I'm the one who deserves the praise and the glory. It's me they should be singing about.' So how do you feel when someone else seems to be the person in favour in the office, or your friendship group, or the one getting the recognition?

You see jealousy is about 'I deserve that, not them'. And when we feel these emotions of jealousy it reveals something about what we most love, doesn't it? And it's self, or the attention of others, or position, or power, or physical beauty or reputation, and how others think of us. And if we could just clear the green mist long enough, we could see, 'man, I love that thing way too much.'

But the problem is that if we let jealousy get a foot-hold it becomes destructive - and we can find ourselves doing things and treating others in ways that, if we saw it in someone else, we'd deplore. And Saul's a sobering example of that, isn't he, as his animosity to David escalates.

In v9 the writer tells us that 'Saul eyed David from that day on.' And jealousy makes you suspicious of others. And you find yourself questioning and thinking the worst of their motives. Then, in v11, Saul tries to take David out: 'And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." And just think about that? Who did we last see threatening David with a spear? Goliath. And here is Saul behaving like the enemy, trying to kill David.

Now, you and I aren't exactly going to try and kill someone because we're feeling jealous. But plenty of people do, don't they? I mean think how many murders, or acts of violence, or domestic abuse have had jealousy as their cause, from the days of Cain and Abel down to today. But even if you wouldn't dream of killing someone, might you dream that they were out of the way? Or what about those subtle critical comments you make about the person, say that work colleague. Or the ever-so-subtle attempts to turn others against them and win them to your side. Now, of course we don't try and pin them to the wall with a spear, but do we try and blacken them just a bit, or question their integrity, or ever so slightly smear their reputation? And you're not trying to assassinate them… just their character. Or if not actively trying to engineer it, do you ever feel just a tiny upswing of happiness, a little kick of joy when the person fails, when things don't go well for them, when that project their leading on doesn't work out?

Or consider the way Saul manoeuvres against David. He can't bear to have him around the palace and so he promotes him in the army and sends him off to war. And he's not doing that to prosper David's career, is he? He wants him to fail and fall. The problem is David doesn't fail or fall. The reverse happens. David's a success, and the people's affection for him grows, and the very opposite of what Saul hoped would happen, happens. And Saul's enmity against David festered until another chance presented itself. And having withdrawn one offer of marriage, Saul learns that his other daughter Michal is in love with David.

Now, some of you have heard this before, but a friend once sent me a photo of a t-shirt. On the front, in capital letters, it had DADD, then on the back it said, Dads Against Daughters Dating - shoot the first one and word will soon get around. But Saul does something very different. Rather than protect his daughter from a man he doesn't trust, he uses her as bait. Now, whatever problem you've experienced with your in-laws, attempted murder probably hasn't been one of them! But Saul tells David he can have Michal as a wife, provided he brings back a hundred Philistine foreskins. Now, apart from the grotesqueness of that, it's a blatant attempt to kill David isn't it? Verse 25, 'Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.' It's the ancient equivalent of a father saying, sure you can marry my daughter, but first you've got to go to Syria and Iraq, and bring me back the dog tags of 100 ISIS fighters who you have personally killed in hand to hand combat. This isn't an offer of marriage, it's a sentence of death.

But that's what jealousy can do to you, can't it? Give it a foothold and you'll be tempted to use people, like Saul uses Michal, and scheme against people, as he does against David, in the hope you can harm them, or keep them down.

But if Saul teaches us anything, it's that jealousy doesn't just destroy others - it can destroy you. And from now on until his death, we see this steady but relentless disintegration of Saul's character. William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania wrote, 'the jealous are troublesome to others, but a torment to themselves.' And he's right isn't he? Proverbs 14:30 says, 'A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh but envy makes the bones rot.' It's like a cancer to the soul, it eats away at you. It promises that if you nurture it it will make you feel so much better, but it becomes this terrible master.

And v9 tells us that 'Saul eyed David from that day on' and then v10 says, 'the next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house.' Now, whether that harmful spirit was just a dark and ugly mood, or whether it was an evil spirit doesn't really matter. Open your heart to jealousy and you put yourself at risk of a downward spiral. And God's Spirit had once rushed upon Saul - but now it's something very different that's rushing on him.

And whilst everyone else loves David, Saul grows more and more fearful of him. Verse 12, 'Saul was afraid of David'; v15, 'he stood in fearful awe of him'; v29, 'Saul was even more afraid of David.' You see, jealousy never makes you more happy, does it? Despite it's promises. It just makes you more afraid - more fearful that someone else might be taking your place, or enjoying more success, or getting more attention. Sir John Geilgud, who was one of the greatest Shakespearean actors of the last generation, said that when he read the reviews of another great actor's performance, he wept. He cried. Something inside him grieved.

Now, why is that? Why that fear, that dread, that grief? Well, look what the writer says: v12, 'Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.' And Saul is a man who has lost sight of God. He's no longer secure in what God thinks of him, so he's thrown by what the women think. And jealousy comes from that kind of insecurity, doesn't it? And when your security rests on others' approval of you, or your performance, or your looks, then you'll fear and worry and grieve when someone better than you comes along.

But look again at v15: 'And when Saul saw that [David] had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him.' *Fearful awe*. It's the kind of language you'd use of God, isn't it? And that's Saul's problem. David and his success have taken on a position in Saul's life that only God should have. Except

rather than it doing Saul good, and bringing him wholeness and inner health, it becomes this destructive idol in his life. And that disordered desire to be someone, someone apart from God, to be recognised, leaves us vulnerable.

And Jonathan, Saul's son, and Michal, Saul's daughter, and all of Israel, love David. But Saul wants to kill him. He wants to cling on to power and so he wants to be rid of the one the Lord has anointed to be king - the messiah. But it ends up destroying him. And if we want to cling onto our own self-power; if we try and find our identity and security in all these other things rather than in God and *the* Messiah, we'll never know that inner peace and joy the Lord would have us know.

So, if Saul's a warning against jealousy, is there a better way?

The Humility of David

Proverbs 27:21 says, 'The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise.' And if *faint* praise tests your character - as it does here with Saul, how about full-throated praise? How about when people say really nice things about you, and tell you how great you are, or how good you're looking? That has a temptation all of its own, doesn't it? And here the crowds love David, and the women adore him. It's the kind of fame and praise that has destroyed plenty of young men, hasn't it. So how does David respond?

Well, look first at Saul throwing the spear at him. David is sat there, trying to sooth Saul's disordered mind with his music, when this spear flies at him. What does David do? Well, the writer says in v11, 'David evaded him *twice*.' That means that David didn't run for it after the first time. He stayed there, trying to calm the man trying to kill him. And that gives Saul time to take another shot. But how does Saul retrieve his spear? Does David hand it back, after the first attack? Or does he just watch him as he comes and gets it and throws again?

What David doesn't do is yell out, 'hey, who do you think you are?! Treating me like that! Don't you know who I am? I'm David the giant killer, I deserve better than this.' And neither does he pull the spear out of the wall and aim it straight back at Saul and seize his chance for the throne. Instead, David's loyal to Saul.

And then, look at his response when Saul offers him his daughter Merab in marriage. And remember, this is what Saul promised to the man who would slay Goliath - so in many ways David has earned this opportunity to enter the royal family. But look what he says, v18, 'And David said to Saul, "Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" Now, when Saul won his great battle against the Amalekites, what was the first thing he did? Build a monument to himself. Because his reputation was what mattered most to him. But here is David, after his battle, and he doesn't think himself worthy to marry one of Saul's daughters. Here, Saul thinks he *deserves* the praise and adulation of the crowd; he *deserves* the glory that goes with being king, and when he doesn't get what he wants, he's jealous. But David knows he doesn't deserve the honour of becoming royal and is both humble and humbled.

And that humility of David is way more attractive than the jealousy of Saul, isn't it? Proverbs 27:4 says that 'wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?' And you and I would way rather be humble than jealous, wouldn't we?

But how can we get there? Because if as CS Lewis said, humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less, how can we see ourselves grow in humility, when even to focus on yourself would undermine the very thing you're seeking to grow in and feed the very thing you're wanting to kill?

Well, what we need is a jealousy and a humility from outside that has the power to change what we love most.

The Jealousy and Humility of God

Now, whilst the kind of jealousy that Saul displays is clearly wrong, there is a right kind of jealousy, isn't there? A jealousy not *of* someone but *for* someone, or something. There's a right jealousy that wants to protect and defend, like jealousy for a marriage against an intruder; or jealousy for those you love, like the apostle Paul describes for the early Christians against false teachers. And whilst our jealousy *of* others is disordered, that right jealousy *for* someone has a much better origin.

Look at Exodus 34:14, where God says, 'For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.' That's extraordinary, isn't it? That God would say that his name, his very character, who he is, is jealous. But look at the context - it's about God's people worshipping, and seeking their protection and identity and well-being in things other than him, in idols.

And that tells us that God is jealous for two things. Firstly, he's jealous for his own glory and secondly, he's jealous for our good. And idolatry is where those two things converge - because idolatry is about looking to something other than God and his glory as our greatest good and highest treasure. And Saul grew jealous of David because he loved himself, and his reputation, and the adulation of the people - his own glory - more than he loved God, and it ate away at him. But God is jealous for his glory, because he knows there is nothing greater or more glorious - and anything else is a cheap imitation or imposter; and he's jealous for us, because he loves us and because he knows that we will never be truly happy or whole all the time we're exchanging his glory for something else; that we'll only ever truly flourish when he's our God and not our reputation or our success or our image.

So Saul's jealous because he wants what David has. God's jealous because he wants you to share what he has: his glory and his love. And Jesus is God's jealous love for you in bodily form; and he's the glory of God come as a man. And David humbled himself, because he knew he wasn't royal. But his greatest son - the Lord Jesus - humbled himself knowing he was royal.

And when Saul offers David a second chance to become his son-in-law by marrying his daughter Michal, David knows he can't afford the bride-price: v23, 'And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?" So what does Saul do? He's so jealous of David he makes him pay - at the risk of his life. But Jesus is so jealous for you, that you might experience his love, that he doesn't just risk his life, he gives it. He knows that you could never earn or pay your way into his family, but that's where he wants you, so he pays for you. And Saul loved himself so much he tries to kill David. Jesus loves you so much he dies for you.

And it's that jealousy of God for his glory and for our good that can both humble us and lift us up. Because when you know that you have nothing attractive about you, that you are undeserving, and

the Son of God has to die for you to rescue you, it is deeply humbling. But when you know Christ did die for you, and that you are loved intensely with a jealous love, it lifts you up. When you know that God, and not you, is the only one worthy of praise, it brings you down to the dust, but when you know that same God has chosen you by grace, it lifts you to the heavens.

And so Christ's love for you at the cross becomes the graveyard of insecurity and the jealousy that flows from it.

And that has the power to prise the claws of jealousy from off your heart. You see Saul is jealous and fearful of David because he knows God is with David but has departed from him. But what if you knew that God was with you, like he was with David? What if you knew that like David you were chosen and loved, not because you've earned it, not because you're more attractive than your friend, or more successful than your colleague, or more liked than your boss, but because of grace?

And in Jesus, that's exactly what you know and it gives you this rock solid security. Because you know you're loved and accepted and forgiven and adopted into his family. And that sets us free to worship the only one worthy of our ultimate love, and be the people our heavenly Father has created us to be, rather than eyeing everyone else jealously. And we'll rejoice in others' success, because we stand secure in our Father's love.