

**“Which Kingdom Are You Fighting For?”**  
**1 Samuel 18:6-30**  
**July 14, 2019**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service**  
*Pr. Nicoletti*

Our text tonight is from First Samuel, chapter eighteen, verses six through thirty.

We will begin with the last few verses which we considered last Lord’s Day Evening, in order to give some context.

David has slain Goliath, and Yahweh, the Lord, is granting David success. And we pick up the story tonight with King Saul and his army, as well as David returning from battle. And we hear how they are welcomed, and then we see how Saul responds to David, and then how David responds to Saul.

And so – First Samuel 18:6-30. Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this evening:

<sup>17:6</sup> As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. <sup>7</sup> And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,

“Saul has struck down his thousands,  
and David his ten thousands.”

<sup>8</sup> And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?” <sup>9</sup> And Saul eyed David from that day on.

<sup>10</sup> The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. <sup>11</sup> And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David evaded him twice.

<sup>12</sup> Saul was afraid of David because Yahweh was with him but had departed from Saul. <sup>13</sup> So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people. <sup>14</sup> And David had success in all his undertakings, for Yahweh was with him. <sup>15</sup> And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. <sup>16</sup> But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

<sup>17</sup> Then Saul said to David, “Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight Yahweh’s battles.” For Saul thought, “Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” <sup>18</sup> 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?” <sup>19</sup> But at the time when Merab, Saul’s daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.

<sup>20</sup> Now Saul’s daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. <sup>21</sup> Saul thought, “Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” Therefore Saul said to David a second time, “You shall now be my son-in-law.” <sup>22</sup> And Saul commanded his servants, “Speak to David in private and say, ‘Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king’s son-in-law.’” <sup>23</sup> And Saul’s servants spoke those words in the ears of David. 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?” <sup>24</sup> And the servants of Saul told him, “Thus and so did David

speak.”<sup>25</sup> Then Saul said, “Thus shall you say to David, ‘The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.’” Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.<sup>26</sup> And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired,<sup>27</sup> David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife.<sup>28</sup> But when Saul saw and knew that Yahweh was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him,<sup>29</sup> Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.

<sup>30</sup> Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Let's pray ...

Lord, be gracious to us, your servants,  
that we may live and keep your word.  
Open our eyes, that we may behold  
wondrous things out of your word.  
Let your testimonies be our delight,  
and our chief counselors.  
In Jesus's name. Amen.

[Based on Psalm 119:17-18, 24]

We have again in our text this evening two portraits, side-by-side. Last Lord's Day we had something similar. Last Lord's Day we had a picture of Jonathan and a picture of Saul, and we saw how they gave us contrasting forms of friendship as they related to David.

Now we get two contrasting pictures again – but this time in terms of how Saul and David each relate to God's kingdom.

And so we will look at these two pictures together, analyze them a bit, and ask how each applies to us, and how *we* relate to God's kingdom.

And the first picture comes from Saul.

In Saul, in our text, we see that disordered loves lead to disordered alliances.

And when I say “disordered” I don't mean “chaotic” – I don't mean that his loves and alliances lack order. I mean that they are *wrongly* ordered – that they are out of order. That he has demoted things that are more important, and promoted things that are less important, and the result is that disordered loves in Saul's life have led to disordered alliances.

And the way this plays out is that because Saul loves *his* kingdom and glory more than *God's* kingdom and glory, he increasingly finds himself working against God's people, and in alliance with the enemies of God and God's people.

Let me say that again – because Saul loves *his* kingdom and glory more than *God's* kingdom and glory, he increasingly finds himself working against God's people, and in alliance with the enemies of God and God's people.

And let's take that in two halves. First, why would we say that Saul loves his kingdom and glory more than God's kingdom and glory?

Well we see that in several places in our text.

First, we see in what high esteem Saul holds his own glory.

It begins in verse seven and the first half of verse eight. The women who come out to celebrate the success of David *and* Saul – who are singing primarily of the success of God and God's people, Israel – the women make Saul angry. And why? Well, as we read in the rest of verse eight, Saul is mad that in their song they have ascribed more slain enemy warriors to David than they have to Saul. In other words, Saul is jealous for glory. Missing the point that the greater theme of this celebration was to be the glory of God in the victory of his people, Saul is focused on his own glory – or the lack thereof.

And then he goes on and says of David “what more can he have than the kingdom?” This gives us a subtle indication that Saul is not thinking of the kingdom primarily as God's kingdom, with Saul being a steward. But he is thinking of it primarily as being *his* kingdom, and he is worried that it might be taken from him.

Saul shows that he is focused more on his own kingdom and glory than God's kingdom and glory.

And that comes out even more in a subtle shift that happens between verse 17 to verse 25. In verse 17 Saul refers to the battles against the Philistines as “Yahweh's battles”, as “the Lord's battles.” But then a few verses later, in verse 25, when referring to the same battles with the same enemies, he refers to the Philistines as “the king's enemies” and to fighting the Philistines as helping *Saul* to “be avenged of the king's enemies.” There seems to be a subtle shift in terms of seeing the Philistines as primarily a threat to God's kingdom, to seeing them as a threat to Saul and Saul's kingdom.

And so the pattern that emerges more and more is that Saul loves his kingdom and his glory more than he loves God's kingdom and God's glory.

And then the result of this disordering of Saul's loves is a disordering of his alliances. What we see as that plays out is that Saul increasingly finds himself working *against* God and God's people, and *in alliance with the enemies* of God and God's people.

And those disordered alliances progress throughout the text.

It begins with Saul *acting like* the pagan enemies of God in verse eleven. In verse eleven Saul suddenly hurls a spear at David, while David is playing the lyre and trying to calm Saul from the harmful spirit that was afflicting him. And the fact that it was a spear would seem to highlight something. Because this is actually the second spear that has been mentioned in First Samuel. And along with that, it is the second time David has been threatened by an unusually tall warrior with a spear.

The only other spear mentioned up to this point was Goliath's. And it's reasonable to think that the author expects us to make that connection. Just last chapter David faced a giant with a spear who wanted to kill him, and now once again he faces a giant with a spear who wants to kill him (remember: Saul was not as tall as Goliath, but in First Samuel chapter nine we read that Saul was a head taller than any of the other people in Israel). [Leithart, 113-114]

And those literary links point us to the more obvious fact that Saul not only has some superficial things in common with the pagan enemies of God – but he is *acting like* the pagan enemies of God, by hurling a spear at David, at the Lord's anointed – by attacking his own men for his personal gain.

So, as Saul prioritizes his kingdom and glory over God's, first he begins *acting like* the pagan enemies of God.

Second, Saul begins *actively rooting for* the pagan enemies of God. We see that in verses seventeen and twenty-five. In verse seventeen we read that Saul called on David to fight valiantly for him against the Philistines, but then we are told he did this because "Saul thought, 'Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.'" And then in verse twenty-five we are told that Saul encouraged David to kill one hundred Philistines soldiers because "Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines." In the first incident Saul hoped that David would fall in general battle. In the second incident he encouraged David to collect one hundred Philistine foreskins. While there might be some symbolism going on around that, the overall idea was for David to kill one hundred Philistine warriors in battle, and one way to prove that he had done it (since the Philistines did not practice circumcision but the Israelites did), was to bring Saul the foreskins of all the warriors he killed.

But here's the point: Saul was sending his own soldiers out – and not only *his* soldiers, but soldiers in God's kingdom, faithful soldiers among the people of God – Saul was sending them out against the pagan enemies of God *while hoping that the pagan enemies of God would win*. Saul was rooting *against* God and God's people and *for* the pagan enemies of God's people.

As Saul's disordered loves led him to value his own kingdom over God's, first he started acting like the pagan enemies of God against God's people, and second he started rooting for the pagan enemies of God and against God's people.

But the progression does not stop there. Because after both of these strategies fail him, Saul proceeds to ally himself with the pagan gods themselves, and hoping for the apostasy of God's people – Saul begins to hope that some of God's people will turn away from God, all so that Saul can secure his own kingdom.

We see this in verse twenty-one, where Saul thinks that offering his daughter Michal to David in marriage will present two opportunities against David: The first is that David will again go into battle with the Philistines and may be killed. The second is, he says, that Michal "may be a snare for him." Now ... what does that mean?

Well, one commentator explains – he writes: "When Saul realized that Michal was in love with David, he decided to use here as a 'snare' (18:21), a word often used to describe entrapments to idolatry. Saul apparently hoped that David would be undone by a woman, which, much later, turned out to be a sound intuition. Saul hoped Michal would be a snare in one of two senses:

Either David would be killed trying to win Michal, or once they were married Michal would draw David away from the Lord. Saul may have had some basis for this hope for [we learn in chapter nineteen that] Michal had household idols (19:13). If David were enticed to turn from Yahweh, the Lord would withdraw from him, and the contest between Saul and David would be evened out with no inconvenient imbalances produced by a divine ‘third party.’” [Leithart, 114]

In other words, Saul is now hoping that one of God’s people would turn away from God ... all so that Saul can feel more confident in his own kingdom and glory.

Because of his disordered loves, because he cares more about his own kingdom than God’s, Saul begins by acting like God’s pagan enemies, he proceeds to rooting for the victory of God’s enemies against God’s people, and finally he finds himself hoping for the spiritual victory of the pagan gods themselves, against the souls of some of the people of God.

That’s pretty dark. That’s pretty grim. It’s a good thing you and I would never think like that ... right?

Well ... I’m not so sure.

To begin with, we too tend towards disordered loves. We too tend to love our own kingdom and glory more than we love God’s kingdom and glory.

Of course in our cases we do not have literal kingdoms. But we all have our domains, our accomplishments, our achievements, our families, our little arenas of power. And we all have our reputations where we seek to receive glory. And we all have a tendency to expend much more time and thought and energy ... and love ... on *our* domains – *our* kingdoms ... and *our* glory – our standing in the eyes of others – we tend to expend more time, energy and love on those things than we do on the kingdom and the glory of God.

Think about it for yourself. Where do *you* seek glory? Where do *you* seek to establish a little kingdom for yourself? And where do you see those disordered loves turn into disordered alliances ... disordered alliances that are not *that* different from what we see in Saul ...

So, if your glory ... if the kingdom you seek for yourself ... is found in worldly success – in financial success or career success, or some other form of achievement ... then how might you respond to those who threaten the security of your kingdom and glory – your sense of your accomplishments – by achieving more than you do?

Well ... we don’t throw spears at each other too often in our culture ... but we do sinfully throw words at one another. That is the preferred form of combat in our culture ... and when our kingdom and our glory are threatened, we can act just like the pagan enemies of God with our words.

So how do you speak of your brothers and sisters in Christ who have more worldly success than you do? Do you gossip about them? Do you point out their flaws to others? Do you and your spouse or close friend deride them when they’re not around? Do you pick at and draw out their flaws to others so that you can feel more secure in *your* kingdom – in *your* social standing? Do you, like Saul, begin acting like a pagan with your words?

Or if your glory comes from your family, and from your children, then how do you speak of parents who are parenting differently from you ... or whose kids seem more successful than yours? Do you, maybe with your inner circle, gossip about their parenting and gossip about their kids? Do you roll your eyes about them before others? Do you look for flaws to point out?

Or if your kingdom and your glory are found in political allegiance, how do you speak of your brothers and sisters in Christ who are your political opponents? If you're on one end of the political spectrum, how do you speak of those on the other end – knowing that your brothers and sisters in Christ are among them? If you're on one end, then how do you speak of Christians who tend to focus on social justice issues? If you're another end, how do you speak of Christians who voted for Donald Trump? In general, how do you speak of the intelligence and integrity of Christians who disagree with you politically? Do you speak in a way that honors them ... or, in order to defend your political tribe and your political glory, do you hurl insults at them just like the pagans do – whether your insults are in the form of a shout, a social media post, or a dismissing eye roll or scoff?

Or if your kingdom and glory are found in your moral or theological superiority, then how do you speak of Christians who are different from you? Of Christians whose theology is different from yours, or whose worship music is different from yours, or whose stance on the latest hot-button issue in the Reformed microcosm is different from yours? How do you speak of them? With honor and respect? Or do you toss words, like Saul tosses spears?

When we care more about *our* kingdom and glory than God's, then we soon begin to act like pagans towards those who threaten our kingdom or glory.

But second, like Saul, we begin to root for the enemies of God and God's people against our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We begin to hope that the members of our church who threaten our sense of worth and glory will themselves face some sort of outside difficulty from the world that sets them back. We'd never say that our loud ... but the thought might cross our mind.

We delight in seeing our unbelieving political allies mock and humiliate our brothers and sisters in Christ on the other side of the political divide.

We let it slide when others issue sinful or slanderous attacks against our theological opponents, and we overlook the morality or questionable faith of those who will help us in such battles.

When we care more about our kingdom and glory than God's, then first we begin to act like pagans towards those who threaten our kingdom or glory, and second we begin to root for the enemies of God to triumph over some of God's people.

But then third, when we care more about our kingdom and glory than God's, then we may even find ourselves hoping for the spiritual downfall of some of God's people – we may find ourselves hoping for the devil to win out against them. Maybe that sounds far fetched and overly dramatic. But is it?

Is there part of you that thinks that if that more successful family in the church walked away from the faith, or had some real trouble in their marriage ... well, of course you'd never *hope* for that or *work* for that like Saul did ... but if it *did* happen ... would there be some part of you that

would get a jolt of satisfaction in knowing that you really are better than them ... that your kingdom and glory really are superior?

And while you'd never want a covenant child to struggle in their faith ... there's also maybe some part of you that knows that if the child of a parent who raised their kids differently from how you did it ... if that child struggled ... just a bit ... morally or spiritually in some ways that *your* child did not ... well you might get a jolt of self-satisfaction that your parental kingdom and glory really is superior to theirs.

Or if those social-justice oriented Christians did walk away from orthodoxy ... or if those Trump-supporters did morally compromise themselves ... then it would be evidence that *you* were right, that *you* really are better than they are!

And if that other party within the broader church ... if they really did go wrong in all the ways your party says they will ... if they really did go down the slippery slope to liberalism on one end, or if they really did depart for narrow hyper-conservative factionalism on the other – you'd never hope for that, of course ... but if it happened, wouldn't it feel good to be proved right – to have it proven that you are morally and theologically superior to them? That your theological kingdom is the best one there is?

In each and every one of these cases we are hoping for the spiritual victory of Satan against a brother or sister in Christ ... so that we can secure our own glory ... so that we can feel safe in our own little kingdom in this world. In each and every one of these cases, we root against God and God's people ... and we ally ourselves with Satan ... all for our own self-satisfaction.

That is both incredibly evil ... and incredibly common.

Perhaps we are not as unlike Saul as we like to think.

Disordered loves lead to disordered alliances. When we love our own kingdom and glory more than God's kingdom and glory, we increasingly find ourselves against God and God's people, and in alliance with the enemies of God and God's people – whether in big and bold ways or in small and subtle ways in the recesses of our hearts.

That is the picture that Saul brings us.

Now, what is the contrasting picture we see in David?

What we see in David is that David's rightly ordered loves lead him to rightly oriented alliances.

More specifically we see that because David loves God's kingdom and glory more than his own kingdom and glory, David is content to serve the people of God and to stand up to the enemies of God's people.

This comes out in a few ways in our text – first in the fact that again and again David puts God's kingdom and glory above his own.

Though Saul twice threw his spear at David in verse eleven, David does not use it as an opportunity against Saul – an opportunity to strike back, or to question Saul's position ... but he

evades Saul's attacks and continues to work for the peace and prosperity of the kingdom – not *his* kingdom, but God's people and kingdom.

Some have wondered why David would continue to serve Saul after Saul tried to kill him, but it's actually not that hard to imagine. It seems possible that David believed these attacks were a result of the affliction Saul was struggling with, and not an intentional act on Saul's part. In any case, David evaded him and took steps to protect himself, but he did not use it as an opportunity for his own glory, or to advance his own status.

Then, when Saul gave David an opportunity to enhance his status by marrying his daughter Merab, David's response was not to grasp at a higher position for himself, but to humbly state and accept his status and to continue to serve God's kingdom.

Later when Michal was offered in marriage and David was encouraged to go on the risky mission of defeating and killing one hundred Philistine warriors in battle, rather than doing the bare minimum in order to protect himself, David in zeal for protecting God's kingdom, defeated two hundred Philistine warriors.

Because David loved God's kingdom and glory more than his own kingdom and glory, he was content to serve the people of God and stand up to the enemies of God's people.

And we – you and I – are called to the same.

We are called to be Christians, together in this church, who care more about the spiritual wellbeing of God's people and God's kingdom than we care about how our success measures up to someone else's, or how our parenting measures up to another couple's. If we love God's kingdom and glory more than our own, then we will care more about the spiritual wellbeing of the people around us, than whether we can compare ourselves to them in a way that makes us feel better about ourselves.

We are called to be Christians who feel a stronger connection to those who are fellow members with us of the kingdom of God, than we feel towards unbelieving members of our political tribe. We are called, along with that, to acknowledge a deeper connection with fellow Christians in other countries than we do with non-Christians in our own country – even if those foreign Christians belong to a state that is in conflict with our own country.

We are called to be Christians who would rather see all Christians succeed in their faithfulness to God than see any fall away, even if it would enhance the position of our party. We should want to see churches, that have worship that looks incredibly different from ours, succeed and thrive. We should want to see Christians to our left successfully hold together concerns for social justice and a robust Christian orthodoxy. We should want to see Christians to our right successfully hold together a deep concern for theological accuracy and a catholic and ecumenical spirit. We should care more for the spiritual success of the overall Church at large than for the comparative success of our tribe with in the larger Church.

We should be Christians, like David, who love God's kingdom and glory more than our own kingdom and glory, and who are therefore content to serve the people of God and stand up to the enemies of God's people.

That, by the way, is one important feature to factor in as you considering nominating someone to be an elder or as you consider being nominated yourself as an elder. Among all the traits that are key for a good elder, we need men who love God's kingdom and glory more than their own kingdom and glory, and who are therefore content to serve the people of God and stand up to the enemies of God's people, regardless of what it does for their personal reputation or their social standing.

Leaders among God's people are called to that. And of course *all* of God's people are called to that.

But how do we *do* that? How do we become like David?

Well ... as has so often been the case, we do it by looking to the one whom David is pointing us to. We do it by looking to the ultimate David, Jesus Christ.

In Philippians chapter two the Apostle Paul writes:

“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,<sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Apostle Paul says a lot there – but one thing we see in the midst of others is that the Apostle Paul has much the same message for us as we see in First Samuel eighteen. But what he adds ... or more accurately, what is implicit in Samuel that Paul makes explicit in Philippians is that in Jesus Christ, the son of David, we get not just a *picture* of the kind of loving service we are called to ... but we *receive* the kind of loving service we are called to.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that God not only calls us to love his kingdom and glory above our own ... but he reminds us that in Jesus Christ, God the Son loved *us* rather than grasping at his own glory – he loved *us* as God's people far above his own reputation and standing in this life.

We tend to cling to our standing, to our glory, and to our little kingdoms to grasp at some sense of our significance. That's why we so often, like Saul, have so much trouble letting go of our kingdom and glory ... it's why we find ourselves sliding into the kind of alliances Saul does. We are desperate to secure our standing.

But Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ emptied himself in order to secure *our* standing with God. He reminds us that we have more standing in what Christ has done for us than we will ever secure in our accomplishments, that we have more glory in God's favor than we can ever acquire from the approval and acclaim of the world, that we have a greater place as residents of Christ's kingdom than we could ever have as lords of our own kingdoms.

When we realize that Christ has served *us* as God's people even better than David served Israel as God's people, then we can begin to see that we don't *need* to secure our own kingdom. When we see the love that Christ has shown us, then we can respond with love for him and *his* kingdom and glory that is greater than our love for *our* kingdom and glory.

And then ... and often only then ... we can be content to serve the people of God and stand up to the enemies of God's people, just as David did for Israel ... and just as Christ did for us.

Perhaps a way to think of it all is a series of questions:

- Which kingdom *are* you fighting for?
- Which kingdom *should* you fight for?
- Which kingdom has fought *for you*?
- And which kingdom *will you now* fight for?

As you look over your life ... your thoughts, your words, your desires, where you spend your time and energy, where your alliances are ... which kingdom *are* you more often fighting for? Yours? Or God's?

And as you think then about where each path leads – as you survey the path Saul took and the path David took, which kingdom *should* you be fighting for? Which kingdom *should* have your ultimate love and allegiance? Yours? Or God's?

And as you think then about what your little kingdom, and what your quests for glory for yourself, have gotten you ... and compare them with what Christ has done for you, what glory he has given you, what security he has gotten you, then which kingdom offers you the safety and security you truly need? Which kingdom has fought and sacrificed for you? Yours? Or God's?

And finally ... taken all together, which kingdom *will* you fight for going forward? Which kingdom will you give your ultimate allegiance to? Which kingdom will you strive to live for? Yours? Or God's?

God has made us. He has blessed us. He has given his very Son to die in service to us. He offers us a place in his kingdom beyond what we could imagine. Let us follow Christ, the ultimate David, and take our place in his kingdom, loving it and loving him far above our own tiny kingdoms and our own vainglories. For that is the kind of love he has shown us.

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

- Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000.
- Leithart, Peter J. *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003.