

Round & Round We Grow

1 Samuel 26

*“But **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...”*

Introduction: On May 11, 1685, eighteen-year-old **Margaret Wilson** was condemned to death for refusing to swear the **Oath of Abjuration**, an egregious and audacious statement of allegiance to **King James VII** not only as sovereign ruler over Scotland but also as sovereign ruler over the church of Jesus Christ. Margaret was absolutely willing to acknowledge the king as her secular authority, but as a Christian she could not swear the rule over her soul to anyone but Christ. She boldly and clearly proclaimed that Jesus alone was the sole sovereign over His kingdom, and into HIS hands alone she committed her eternal destiny.

For this “crime”, Margaret was tied to a stake on the Solway River, awaiting the tide to rise. Tied further out into the water was her older friend, Margaret Lachlison, who was within eyeshot where the younger could witness the drowning and reconsider her “stubborn” refusal to swear allegiance to James VII. The deed did not have the desired effect, as young Margaret declared that Christ was Himself suffering in her friend. Then as the waters swirled toward her own post, Margaret recited aloud **Romans 8**, concluding with Paul’s great promise that not even death can separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

On came the waters, and after she had suffered for a while, Margaret’s persecutors removed her from her post. Splaying her onto the beach, where she gasped for air, they asked her if she would pray for King James, which she responded that she would pray for his salvation, since *“I wish salvation of all men”*. But would she swear the oath of spiritual allegiance to Scotland’s king? *“I will not”* she simply stated. At this, the soldier pushed her weakened body back into the waters and held her underneath until her body fell quiet.¹

This is the type of story that we love since it stirs the emotions, gives an extreme example, and displays exemplary faithfulness, stuff that preaches well! We hope that if faced with this type of decision we would respond like Margaret. But here’s why I don’t know if this kind of story is that effective with us: *it’s so far removed from our normal, day in, day out experience*. It makes it difficult to draw application and implication to our life today, since we are not faced with this type of situation. However, there is GREAT value in asking this question: *how was an 18-year-old girl willing and able to STAND alone, to TRUST so deeply and BELIEVE so strongly that death was preferred to dishonoring Christ*. How many of us have Romans 8 at our fingertips to proclaim it to our persecutors? How many of us know it and believe it?

This reminds us of our friend **Charek** who visited us the last few weeks from Poland, and his testimony of coming to Christ and leaving the gang he was in the upper ranks of. When over 90 were indicted in a murder, all he had to do was lie to the judge and they would all get exonerated. But he could not once he bowed his knee to Christ. The appeal of his gang friends: lie, then ask for forgiveness, and then you can move forward. But instead of doing the pragmatic and worldly wise thing, he risked his life, the life of his friends, family, and Vance and Jen Yzbick to not bring dishonor to Christ. *What compelled this brand new believer to make such a decision?* The same thing as Margaret, and the same thing we are called to and have been given.

¹ Richard Phillips, “1 Samuel” Reformed Expository Commentary, p. 446-447, taken from Alexander Smellie, “Men of the Covenant”, 1960.

We've said that this section of 1 Samuel, which tells the story of **King Saul's demise** and **David's rise** is one of **preparation**. God was preparing David, the young, zealous and passionate man who would need seasoning to become a righteous king and a true man after God's own heart. What we've noticed and what has been a bit surprising to me (although it should not be) is how **uneven** his growth has been. David had moments of monumental faith (see *Goliath*), but also times where he lacked faith and made poor decisions (see *deceiving Ahimelech, seeking refuge in Gath, acting like a madman to get away*). He had times where he trusted the Lord's plan and timing (*not taking Saul's life in the cave*) and times of rash and emotional decisions (*his desire to kill Nabal for his insults*). In this, we can relate to David more than we thought as it seems that this characterizes our life.

One other observation of this chapter that we will consider this morning: *it is eerily similar to what was covered in 1 Samuel 24*. We have David on the run in the Wilderness, the Ziphites sell him out to Saul, Saul brings 3000 troops (AGAIN!), and David is once again given an opportunity to end Saul's life and end this madness once and for all. But instead, he hikes over to Saul's camp with young Abishai, and as God put a deep sleep over Saul and his men, David instead steals Saul's jar of water and the spear was positioned near his head. David then calls Abner, the general of the army, into account, calls Saul to stop the mad pursuit, Saul feigns regret and remorse, and David says he will stick with the Lord. This was the last recorded interaction between David and Saul, and as a result of this event, David would once again escape to the Philistines for **a year a four months**, which would culminate in tension when the Philistines attacked Israel, but we'll get into that later.

Approaching this chapter creates a unique challenge. Some commentators believe this was not a new event but a retelling or expanding of the cave event in 1 Samuel 24 since it IS so similar. But we know that this text is in here on purpose and thus has particular principles to teach us. **What we DO see is that God uses repetition in our life to help grow us in grace**. Not only does he call us to discipline ourselves and create habits of grace in our lives, but He gives us multiple of the same experiences to teach us and deepen our convictions. It was not **new information that David needed**, since much of what he said in the two instances were similar, but he needed to truly believe and trust the God who gave the information.

The problem we all face is both forgetfulness and selfishness. There's been times in my life where I've dealt aggressively with my pride and selfishness, only to be betrayed as it comes out again and again. Or there are times in marriage where we will struggle with communication or dealing with conflict, even though we have worked through much and received and given counsel on the very things we struggle with. So God gives us opportunities over and over again to deepen and widen our **trust in Him, and thus grow in grace and knowledge**. He does not necessarily have us go through similar trials because we refused to learn the lesson, its simply that most convictional principles cannot be learned in one lesson alone! So round and round we grow, and God tailors all of it for our best, to strip us of our self-reliance and find our satisfaction in Him through Christ, which brings Him glory.

Now that's a lot without talking a lot about this passage, but let's take one more step before considering what David had learned and how he grew in grace from one incident to the other. It's important that we understand that **growth in our walk with Christ is NOT optional, but is the expectation of salvation itself**. Peter summed it up at the end of his second letter this way: *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."*

When we talk about a growth in grace, we refer to it as a process of **sanctification**, or becoming more and more holy and set apart, becoming more and more like Christ. This process, much like we saw in David's life, can feel uneven, but it is always progressing forward and upward, as Paul said in Philippians 3:12-15:

*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but **I press on** to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and **straining forward** to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of **the upward call of God in Christ Jesus**. 15 Let those of us who are **mature** think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you*

Sanctification is both something that only God does in us through Christ by faith, but also something that we progress toward as we exercise faith and obedience. Here is how Scripture defines it:

We are already SANCTIFIED in Christ:

- **1 Corinthians 1:2** – “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to **those sanctified in Christ Jesus**, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:”
- **1 Corinthians 6:11** - And such were some of you. But you were washed, **you were sanctified**, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God
- **Hebrews 10:10, 14** – “And by that will **we have been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who **are being sanctified**”

Notice that there is a completed, finished component to our holiness, which is called our positional holiness, but also a call to be practically holy, playing that out over our lifetime. But the fact that we are positionally holy, like David being the already anointed king but having to wait and be prepared for the actual kingdom, we are being prepared for perfection one day. This is why we can have confidence that we WILL grow, since Christ has already done the work for us on our behalf. That is why Paul could say in Philippians 2:12-13:

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have **always obeyed**, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling, 13 **for it is God who works in you**, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*

We are engaged in a SANCTIFICATION process in Christ:

Sanctified by FAITH – “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are **sanctified by faith in me.**” Acts 26:18

Sanctified by TRUTH – “**Sanctify them in the truth**; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be **sanctified in truth.**” John 17:17-19

Sanctified in PURITY - *For this is **the will of God, your sanctification**: that you **abstain from sexual immorality**; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgresses and wrongs his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 **For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.***

Sanctified COMPLETELY - *Now may the God of peace himself **sanctify you completely**, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the **coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Sanctified AS CHRIST'S OWN POSSESSION - *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 **that he might sanctify her**, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, **that she might be holy and without blemish***

Growth in grace is the goal. Knowledge is essential, but moving forward in holiness practically takes a growing trust in God's love, care, and providential care. We are to both grow in our **love for God AND keeping His commandments, living out both Biblical principle and doctrine, but doing it out of delight and practice.**

Now, let's go back to 1 Samuel 26 and see a few principles of how David grew in grace from one experience to the next, how he grew in His trust and understanding of the LORD, and how we can learn to follow suit:

1. **Trusting in the Lord allows us to wait patiently, even in the midst of seemingly never-ending hard circumstances**

David was NOT willing to lay a hand on God's anointed in 1 Samuel 24, and he echoed the same sentiment as he found Saul sleeping this time (26:9). But he had also learned from his encounter with Nabal and Abigail, as he saw that God had "struck down" Nabal and avenged his insult (25:38). This allowed David to declare, "As the LORD lives the LORD will strike him (Saul), or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle to perish." (26:10). There is a surety in David's words even though He did not know exactly how God would bring full justice.

2. **Growing in grace means not knowing exactly HOW providence would work out, but that obedience is required**

Waiting and trusting the providence of God means we always know God's **will** but not always the **way** His will works out. David did not know that there was "a *deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on them*" (26:12), but as he walked forward in faith, it was clear that God was taking care of him. God would deal with Saul in His own way and in His own timing, two areas that He rarely gives us information. When we trust the goodness and providence of God, we can wait with hope and joy for God to bring resolution to a marital problem without us taking matters into our own hands or justifying a sinful response – "she won't submit to me, so I'm not going to love her" ... "he won't love me the way I want, so I'm going to shut him out my bed or refuse to follow him". True trust means we are willing to obey even when there is no immediate return. We believe that to "**trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey.**"

3. Growing in Grace is Willing to see others properly

In the midst of his trial, David was willing to call out Abner for his failure to protect his king, a mistake that deserved death (1 Sam. 26:16). He was willing to call Saul to repent, to turn from his pursuit, and cease to drive David away from the land and His God (26:17-20). But he was also UNWILLING to trust the words of Saul (26:21) and return to him, since he had seen this pattern over and over. This was wisdom. It did not mean he COULD NOT trust Saul ever again, but it would have to come with true repentance. Until then, David would stick with the LORD who rewards everyman according to his righteousness and faithfulness (26:23).

4. Growing in Grace Trusts God's provision more than earthly comfort

*The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. 24 Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, **so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.**" (26:23-24)*

The key for David in the midst of this trial and tribulation was to see his deliverance NOT through the lens of physical comfort, but spiritual renewal. In Psalm 63, David wrote about his experience in the Wilderness, and said in vv. 5-8:

*My soul will be **satisfied as with fat and rich food,**
and my mouth will praise you with **joyful lips,**
⁶when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
⁷for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
⁸**My soul clings to you;**
your right hand upholds me.*

This is how David could withstand month after month of disappointment, hurt, and pain. This was his preparation that the LORD continued to put Him through, even in the Wilderness. David had to learn that his satisfaction did NOT come through material means but through spiritual gains, to cling, thirst for, and seek God earnestly.

This is the answer to the **how** of Margaret Wilson and our friend Charek. We have been given all the resources we need in Christ to be able to practice obedience and holiness, to commit ourselves completely to the sovereign and providential care. Growing in grace is both possible and demanded. So we see every circumstance as an opportunity to grow in trust, and we fill our minds with truth to be ready. We place ourselves in the hands of the Righteous King, our Bridegroom who loves us so much that He is willing to put us through hardship and trial to sanctify us, preparing us for a day that He will wipe away every tear and ease every pain, so that He can be with us forever.