

**Hopeful Mourning: Preparing for Inevitable Sorrow**  
2 Samuel 1

*“It is better to go to the **house of mourning** than to go to the house of feasting...”*

**Introduction:** The Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ speaks to and instructs *every* area of our life. We often think about these in terms of *spiritual areas*, relegated to history and for time of worship, or to a point in time in the past. But the Bible and gospel are given to **transform** every part of us, freeing us from sin, giving us new desires, and preparing us for a better future. These allow us to have clarity in the **purpose of life**, to **grow and mature**, and possess the resources to **have healthy relationships**, including working through conflict and forgiving one another. We know why we exist, where we are going, how to get there, and what all this is for! But one of the most often neglected areas of life that we fail to connect the Biblical dots is that of **mourning, lament, or loss**. Too often we are left unprepared to deal with the death of a loved one or people in general. Particularly in the West, we do not have a grid for mourning, and other than having a couple days off of work, we have a “get back at it” mentality, trying to box in our emotions and dichotomizing feelings from function. However, the Bible DOES speak to mourning and the gospel DOES change it, so we want to prepare ourselves *before we experience it again*, in order to walk through it well.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 states, “*But we do not want you to be **uninformed**, brothers, about those who are asleep, **that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.**” It is clear that believers **WILL** mourn and grieve those who die, but being informed ahead of time will allow us to do it differently than the world who does not possess a biblical worldview of the hope of the gospel. Jesus Himself **wept and mourned** at the death of His friend Lazarus (John 11:34-35), where the text says that Jesus was *deeply moved, greatly troubled*, and it was obvious to all how much **He loved His friend**. One of the great hopes that we possess and cling to is the fact that at the end of all things when Jesus establishes a new heaven and new earth is the fact that He will dwell with us (Rev. 21:3), and that HE WILL *wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death will be no more, neither will there be **mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore**, for the former things have passed away* (Rev. 21:4). **What does that mean?!?** It means that mourning over death that comes from sin is something we experience in THIS LIFE ALONE, that there is a shelf life for mourning, and that there will be a day where we will NEVER EXPERIENCE it again for an eternity.*

Mourning is the inevitable reality of living in a broken, sinful world where death still reigns. So this morning we want to consider a passage that helps give us **information** about mourning so that we can simply not **react** to death but have the opportunity to grow through it. ***True wisdom is developed in the crucible of life’s trials, and mourning well is part of that development.***

**Start of 2 Samuel:** We are starting the book of 2 Samuel, but in reality we are simply continuing the narrative and story of Israel’s united monarchy. Originally 1 & 2 Samuel were one book, but as the original Hebrew manuscripts were translated into Greek (Septuagint – LXX) Latin (Vulgate), and future English versions, it was divided into two books (often to fit on a scroll). However, there is a natural transition here, as the story moves from the life and reign of Saul to the rule of King David. The book outlines in four sections: 1) **David reigns over Judah** (1:1 – 4:12); 2) **David reigns over all of Israel** (5:1 – 10:19); 3) **David’s sin and consequence** (11:1 – 20:26); 4) **Conclusions of David’s life** (21:1 – 24:25). Notice that half of the book will be *positive*, as David rules in faith and walks in obedience, to the degree

that God will make a significant covenant with him that points to the birth and reign of **Jesus** (2 Sam. 7). But the second half of the book will deal with the egregious sin of David and the multifaceted consequences that he endured after that. When we get to that section, it will be one of the sad realities of sin, the cautionary tale of sin's effects, and the hope that comes out of dealing with sin. The events of 2 Samuel cover the timeframe of 1011 B.C at the death of Saul to 971 B.C. and the death of David.

The start of David's rule started at a type of memorial service, since it begins with news of Israel's defeat at the hand of the Philistines and Saul's unceremonious death. What we will see is an unexpected response by the man who was hunted for years, and who gives us a pathway of how to principally deal with grief and mourning.

### **An Unexpected Visitor (1:1-10; 13-16)**

News travels at the speed of technology, and what we get instantaneously today could only be disseminated as quickly as someone *physically* getting it there. The end of 1 Samuel bounces between simultaneous events, as David was wiping out the Amalekites in the south and the rest of Israel under Saul was getting trounced by the Philistines in the north. After recovering their families and resources, David's traveling group of 600 soldiers returned to the burned-out remains of Ziklag, most likely deciding their next move: *rebuild, move back, move on?* It was three days into this quandary that they received an unexpected visitor, a man from Saul's camp, bearing news of the events in the north. You could imagine the intrigue and desire to **KNOW** what had happened, but by the looks of the man, the news did not seem good.

There were several descriptors given about this unnamed informant. His clothes were torn and had dirt on his head, confirming that he had been in the midst of a conflict. He had a story to tell, with pertinent details that only someone who was an eyewitness could know. He had the **crown of the king and the armlet** of Saul with him, which spoke to the fact that he was with Saul. So as he gave his grave description of the battle he had credibility. David asked for details of the battle, and how the whole of it unfolded. At this, the man described the scene. Israel fled from the Philistines and many would fall in death, including Saul and Jonathan! At this, David demanded proof. The man said that he found Saul *"leaning on his spear"*, an action that was typical for the king (1 Sam. 22:6). He described Saul as being *mortally wounded*, and asking the man to finish the job, which the man said he obliged.

Now there are two ironies of this text: 1) the man claimed he was an **Amalekite**, which we remember was the group of people that Saul was supposed to wipe out in 1 Samuel 15, along with **Agag** their king. It was Saul's refusal to kill Agag the Amalekite that caused God to declare that the kingdom would be taken from Saul's hand (15:26-29). The Amalekites were part of the end of Saul's reign and now the end of his life. 2) **Why is this man's story different than the description in 1 Samuel 31?** In the previous chapter it is explicit in the text that Saul committed suicide, falling on his own sword. This man's description was different, though he had enough detail to justify the fact that he was close when it all went down. *How do we reconcile this?* Simply put, as Dale Davis says, *"The solution is simple: the Amalekite lied. If you ever have a choice between the narrator and an Amalekite, always believe the narrator. Have you ever met an Amalekite you can trust?"*<sup>1</sup>

Why would he lie? The Amalekites were raiders in the south by nature, which meant they knew how to survive. This man saw the political winds shifting, and the death of one king would open up an

<sup>1</sup> Dale Davis, "2 Samuel: Out of every adversity", p. 14

opportunity to get in with the next one. His lie was self-serving, and in a stroke of irony, God once again used an Amalekite to move His program along, as this man was the one to **give David the crown!** But his own lie condemned him, as David ordered his death since he had the audacity to kill the LORD's anointed (1:14-15). David fulfilled what Saul did not: he killed this man in justice as the LORD commanded (1 Sam. 15:3) and in so doing, showed himself as the true and better king of Israel.

### **An Unexpected Response (1:11-12)**

*Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. 12 And they **mourned** and **wept** and **fasted** until evening for **Saul** and for **Jonathan** his son and for the **people of the Lord** and for the house of Israel, **because they had fallen by the sword.***

Now that the context is established, we circle back to an unexpected response by David and his men. After having spears thrown at him, priests killed because of him, being hunted and having to look over his shoulder for years, his pursuer was finally dead! Not only this, but God providentially took care of Saul, having him die in battle with Israel's arch-enemy. Though the defeat would have been sad, I'm not sure anyone would have held it against David if there was a bit of relief shown, a bit of an exhale, a silent fist pump that this long ordeal was finally over. But that is NOT how David handled the news at all. In fact, David showed his magnanimous heart, *since we find out about what someone truly thinks with how they react in the moment to shocking news.* David showed a wise, loving, and humble heart.

His immediate reaction was to tear his clothes, to **mourn, weep, and fast**, all signs of deep grief and proper cultural responses. It would also be understandable if David wept for Jonathan, his dear friend, and the people of Israel, the ones he would lead. **BUT SAUL??!** He wept and mourned for him?! This is not only remarkable but instructive. How could David truly mourn the one who had made himself his enemy? David understood the following:

- 1) **God is Sovereign over all things, especially death - Proverbs 17:5** – *“Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.”* – It is our flesh and sin that would cause us to delight in the downfall of another, but we all have a drift toward it. Calamity is something God is in charge of (Isa. 45:7), but we should never *gloat over someone's disaster in the day of his calamity* (Obadiah 1:13). Calamity and death are results of a sinful world, and love demands that we would NOT want death on anyone, including our enemies.
- 2) **We are wary and understanding of our own judgment – Luke 12:2** – *“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”* – None of us have lived up to the glory of God nor have we come close to perfection. We all are known by our God, from the actions we've done to the thoughts we've had to the desires that have originated in our hearts. It's only by God's grace that we are not under judgment, since it is Christ's sacrifice alone that allows God to have satisfaction and payment for that sin. It is the expression of **pride** that causes us to think someone *else deserves punishment*, since we remember we ourselves are the most deserving.
- 3) **There is more to be learned from adversity than pleasure – Ecclesiastes 7:2** – *“It is better to go to the house of mourning than go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.”* David's son Solomon penned these words soon after David's passing, but the principle is abundantly clear: maturation and wisdom come when we grapple and deal with the hard parts of life, not simply avoid them. David also knew this fact, *“In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as*

*the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him” (Eccl. 7:14).* God is in control, so there is much to be gleaned and learned when adversity hits. When people have asked how things are going at the church, I’ve found myself saying that we’ve come out of some rough waters during COVID, but are in some smooth waters now. However, we know rough waters are coming. Why? Is this being pessimistic? No, it’s understanding that rough waters are inevitable, but they are also where much growth happens, and we want to grow and mature in wisdom and understanding, so we embrace the times of **prosperity with joy, but also adversity with the same JOY!!!**

- 4) **We can honor people without having to disparage them in death – Hebrews 11** is often called the “Hall of Faith”, a description of faith-driven people in the OT, including Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Samson, David, and Samuel. Each of these characters were used by God to accomplish His will and were marked by their faith. However, a case can be built that each one fell short and had character flaws and sinful behavior. Yet, the chapter focuses NOT on their sinfulness, but on what God did in and through them. I believe that is what David was doing here. He was able to see how God used Saul and how HE anointed Saul to be the king, even though he fell way short in so many ways. Since God is the ultimate judge, we don’t have to spend time disparaging people in our lives or in the greater Christian world upon their death, and can remember what God had done in and through them instead.

### **An Unexpected Lament (1:17-27)**

*And David **lamented** with this **lamentation** over Saul and Jonathan his son, 18 and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar.*

Throughout the first years of ministry, we probably conducted nine weddings to every one funeral, although as I get older that percentage has almost flipped entirely. Memorial services seemed difficult since knowing what to say feels unclear and people’s emotions run high. But through the years, it’s become obvious that memorial services provide great opportunities to connect the truth with emotion, helping people think rightly as they work through how they feel. This is exactly what David did as his first order of business...after dispatching one Amalekite messenger.

Notice that during his time of *mourning* he **lamented**. We often don’t think or talk in these terms, but a lament is a specific type of grieving. A **lament is an expression of thoughtful grief**. Dale Davis said, “*The intensity of one’s emotions unite with the discipline of one’s mind to produce structured sorrow, a sort of authorized version of distress, a kind of **coherent agony**”.* The reason this is so good and needed is that we often do not think about **how** to grieve until we are already in the midst of it, and by then it is too late to try to think Biblically or if we do, it seems pithy and token. NOTE that David wrote this lament not only for his own soul (as we’ll see), but to **teach the people of Judah**, and had it written in the Book of Jashar – which apparently was a book of heroism, like when the sun stood still at Gibeon as Israel fought against the Amorites (see Joshua 10:13). It seems like there were three reasons why David wrote this: 1) *to teach the people how to grieve the events*; 2) *to remember what happened and not forget*; 3) *as a rallying cry in moving forward*. In the West we often cut grief short (back to work in 3 days), while other times we have a hard time moving forward. David was not only giving a truthful structure to grieve but also the marching orders to move forward. Each time we contemplate our mortality in the midst of mourning it should encourage us and focus us to **move forward in hope**.

There are three main stanzas in this poem of grief, each written around the phrase **“How the mighty have fallen”**. The first (19-21) is a specific remembrance, second (22-25) a rallying cry of what could be, and third (26-27) a personal catharsis and reflection of a deep friendship.

**REMEMBERING BY CALLING OUT** – There is always a narrative after a war, and typically the victor controls it. In verse 20, David calls out the **false gospel** of the Philistines (remember 1 Sam. 31:9) that would be perpetuated in the cities of the Philistines and perpetuated by its daughters. In a world where there is real evil, it seemed like the godless side won. However, David was NOT content to let that stand. He called for a cessation of what is false and cursed the mountain where the battle took place (v. 21), marking the low point of Israel’s history.

There are times to call out evil and wickedness, since it exists, is real, and is destructive. There is always a two-pronged reality with how things change: call out what is wrong, replace it with what is truthful and better. We live in a day where the family is under attack, which is God’s design for the world for its good. Replacing it is a philosophy and religion that is GODLESS, trying to reverse what God has created, from gender roles to purity to the beauty of differences and diversity, our world is upside down. There is a time and place to call out the fact that violent protests are evil, that trying to wipe out a nation like Israel is wicked, and calling child mutilation normal is abusive. These things are not only perpetuated but celebrated, and as believers in a sovereign God and Biblical truth, we must make clear what is wicked and what is good.

**RALLYING TO ORIGINAL INTENT** – David then moved to remember the beginning success of Saul and Jonathan, as Saul was called by God to put down the Philistines and allow Israel to live in peace. They were valiant and effective warriors (v. 22), they never wavered in family loyalty (at least Jonathan), and during his rule, the people of Israel experienced economic prosperity (24). There was reason to weep for the loss of Saul, both in his death and the potential strength that Israel had in his life. *Why frame Saul’s death this way?* By focusing on the positives and original intent of Saul, and Jonathan, it helped redirect their sorrow from looking at their present angst to look at the future possibilities. Memorials are always times to reflect, evaluate, and redirect our minds and hearts.

**REFLECTION OF DEEP FRIENDSHIP** – Finally, David moves from a public view to a private pain. **Greater the love, greater the grief. Sorrow will always cut deepest where love is most experienced.** We remember the love shared by Jonathan and David, a friendship that David said surpassed even by the love of a wife. In memorializing his friend, David did something profound and unexpected. He gave a picture of **true Biblical masculinity, a view that is sorely lacking in every culture but especially ours.** Here was David, a warrior, protector, and leader writing poetry, expressing his emotions, and overtly professing his love for his friend. **What do we need to counter the false gospels of the world? To show something Biblical, different, and better.**

In her book *“The Toxic War on Masculinity”*, Nancy Pearcey explained the difference between Biblical manhood and a worldly kind, and how they get mixed up and confused. She shared an experiment done by Sociologist Michael Kimmel, who asked different groups, from West Point cadets to college classes, the difference between “A Good Man” and a “Real Man”. A good man was defined by “honor, duty, integrity, sacrifice, do the right thing, stand up for the little guy, be a provider and protector; be responsible, generous and give to others”. *Where does this come from?* It’s the software that God coded into the male character. But when asked about **“being a real man”**, they shouted, *“be tough, strong,*

*never show weakness, win at all costs, suck it up, play through pain, be competitive, get rich, get laid.”<sup>2</sup>*  
**Do you see the difference?** One lines up with a Biblical ideal and the other mixes worldly values, creating a version of masculinity where the built-in software has been affected by the virus of sin. A worldly version of a “real man” keeps people at a distance, never embraces humility through meekness, and views others in a condescending way. This “real man” claims Christ, but never yields or knows His Word (other than to justify his choices), is bored with the church, and sees his wife as less than equal. What David does is **show** what a “True Biblical Man” is. He is the one who does not bow to cultural stereotypes, does not give into his insecurities, and does not act on all of his desires. This is how true change happens and we can display to the world something fundamentally better.

**Conclusion:** Grief and mourning are real, and how we process it is important. It is coming, and we must think Biblically through it so that we can not only grow and mature, but we can display to the world the goodness of Christ, the beauty of the Gospel, and the truth of Scripture. That’s why we can say:

*“It is better to go to the **house of mourning** than to go to the house of feasting...”*

---

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Pearcey, “The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes”, p. 19.