

“Pinned to the Wall”

1 Samuel 18:1-16

I'm going to read a few verses before this week's sermon text so we can build some context for what we will talk about today. From chapter 17, hear the word of God.

17:57 And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. 58 And Saul said to him, “Whose son are you, young man?” And David answered, “I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.” (ESV)

Starting this fall I picked up in I Samuel again. We began with the story of David and Goliath. The overall context of the whole book of Samuel is that the author is trying to make a case that Israel needs a king, and not just any kind of king, but they need a king like David. As you work your way through this Book of Samuel you see first that Israel wants a king and ultimately they get a king named Saul, and then David comes on the scene. With David and Goliath there's really a turning point because that's when you begin to see Saul's kingship and David's kingship put side by side, you can see how different they are. In fact, today as you look at the text that we're going to talk about in chapter 18, you find out is that everybody loves David. It almost sounds like it could be a TV series. Everyone loves David. Saul's children love David, Judah loves David, Israel loves David, Saul's generals – everyone loves David except for Saul. Those two things are going to be contrasted here.

Remember that Goliath, this giant who's nine feet tall (give or take six inches), came out and constantly challenged Israel to come and fight him. Saul, Israel's king, should have gone out. Saul should have been the one to step out by faith and say, “I will take you on, on behalf of my people.” But he didn't. Instead David came up, this boy sixteen or seventeen years old, and he said, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” Then most of you know the rest of the story. Even Tom Sawyer knew this story. David goes to fight Goliath but before he does that Saul stops him and says, “You need to wear my armor.” And David says, “I can't wear those things.” David goes and there begins a little trash talk between Goliath and David. Goliath says, “I'm going to give your flesh to the birds of the air.” And David says, “Oh, yeah? Well, I'm not only going to give your flesh to the birds of the air, but I'm going to give the flesh of the whole Philistine army to the birds of the air.” In a sense he was almost saying, “Infinity. Infinity. Infinity. You can't beat that.” So he takes the stone and throws it and kills Goliath. If you remember, one of the ironies is that the penalty for blasphemy was stoning, and Goliath in fact was stoned dead.

Do you remember what David said was the reason he was doing this whole thing? Why would he take on this giant? The reason was really twofold. He said, “I'm going to take you on and kill you and cut off your head with your own sword in order that the world may know that there is a God in Israel and that this assembly (the church people, if you will, Israel) will know that God does not deliver by sword or by spear. David tells him, “The reason I'm doing this is because of the Gospel – the good news of God's salvation through His king.” The good news of God's salvation to those outside is that there is a God and He is willing and able to receive you and forgive your sin. The good news for those inside the church is that there is a God. And you always forget it. He not only is willing to forgive your sins but He has forgiven your sins. What's it now going to look like in your life?

That's where the story picks up because then Saul says, “I want to talk to that boy.” We're going to look at three things today. We're going to look at Jonathan's friendship with David. We're going to look at Saul's envy of David. Then the last thing we're going to look at is Saul's predicament which really, at the end of the day, is our predicament as well.

The first thing we'll look at is Jonathan's friendship with David. I'm going to look at it from the outside first and then we're going to go inside where the deals are being cut.

18:1 As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul (that's David), the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. . . 5 And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. (ESV)

So before we actually talk about David and Jonathan specifically, what's the 10,000-foot view? The 10,000-foot view is that Saul was talking to David and he decided that David was going to work for him full time. If you remember, up to this point David had been going back and forth. He'd take care of his father's sheep for some amount of time and then he would serve Saul for some amount of time. Then he would go back and take care of the sheep and he would come back again and take care of Saul. Saul at this point decides that David was going to stay here and be a full time member of his staff. That's what it means when it says, “Saul took him that day.” It wasn't something violent; it was actually sort of a promotion. “You're not going to be a part-time servant, you're going to be full time, and you're going to be in the military.” It says that David went in and went out and he was successful wherever he went. As a result of this Saul made him commander of all the men

of war. That's big. You need to catch that because at the end of this passage he demotes David. So at this point David is made the General of the Army. He is basically like George Washington. He is in charge of the whole thing. That is how good and how successful David has been. Then you hear one of those editorial comments, "and this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants." Saul made a really good decision by making David the commander of all the men of war. Not only did all the people think that but even Saul's own servants thought, "Saul, that is a good thing." Saul did something smart. A good commander, a good leader is always going to choose people who are going to make him look good. That's what Saul had done.

Now, what about David and Jonathan? The story of David and Jonathan is one of the most sentimentalized stories in the Bible. Oftentimes from this passage, you hear a sermon or a series about what it means to be a friend or what it means to be a best friend. At some level Jonathan and David no doubt were friends. At some level they were best friends, I'm guessing, and they loved one another. But that's probably not what's going on here. Remember the purpose of the book is to make the case that Israel needs a king like David. Who do you think it would be good to have an endorsement from? As the 2010 and 2012 elections come up, politicians are always scrambling to get the endorsement of this group or that group. If you were going to replace Saul as the king of Israel, who do you think would be best to have an endorsement from? If you were thinking the rightful heir to the throne, you're right. That's probably what's going on here. When it says that Jonathan loved David and his soul was knit to him, the language could either be the language of affection or it could be the language of politics here, or it could be both. That's what I think it is.

³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (ESV)

The first reason you know that it's not only affection but also probably a political aspect here, (in other words that Jonathan is throwing his lot in with David) is the very fact that they made a covenant. If they were just friends they wouldn't have had to make a covenant. It wasn't like blood brothers. When I was a kid, we used to do that all the time. We'd cut our thumbs and put them together. It wasn't that. This was a covenant like from Genesis 15 where they cut the animals in half and moved through them. Jonathan is saying, "I'm so committed to you as king, may it happen to me what happened to these animals if I break that commitment." Jonathan makes a binding covenant with David. That's big. That's a political move. We tend to think negatively when we talk about politics. I do. But it's just a move, that as the readers of this book would have seen, that Jonathan's the rightful heir and yet Jonathan is so committed to David being king that he's willing to make a covenant with him. No, there's more than that. He's not only willing to make a covenant with him but he is actually willing to divest himself of his very royal clothing. In the Ancient Near East to give your clothing to someone else was also to give your rank to someone else. That's why two weeks ago when we looked at how Saul was trying to give David his armor, Israel would have looked at that and thought it was a joke because here's David the hero, and he's going to replace Saul, and Saul is basically giving him his armor. Even Saul endorsed David as king without knowing it. Yet what does Jonathan do? It says,

⁴ And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (ESV)

Jonathan says, "Here, I'm the rightful heir and here is my armor. As the rightful heir, you wear it, because actually you are the heir, not me." Jonathan has done something extremely wise here. Jonathan is quite different than his father as we learned in chapter 14. You know that old saying that "The apple didn't fall far from the tree?" If Saul was a tree in Washington, the apple that was called Jonathan would have fallen someplace around Florida. He could not have been more different than his father. For one, he was brave. Secondly, he was sane. But more than anything else, he was faithful. By faithful I mean full of faith. He actually believed the promises of God. Remember in chapter 14 (this is before David came along) the Philistines were mocking Israel and Jonathan took his armor bearer by himself and said, "Let us go and attack the Philistines. Who knows, maybe God will deliver us but we can't know until we actually exercise our faith." So Jonathan was full of faith. What this has to do more with than friendship or politics in this passage is Jonathan's faith.

If you remember the story of Abraham, what did God promise that he would do when we interact with His blessing bearer or His anointed one? He told Abraham, "To you and your descendants, your seed, I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you." We saw what happened last week to the one who cursed God's anointed: Goliath. It said, "Goliath cursed David by his gods" and within moments he was dead. Jonathan, on the other hand, blesses God's anointed. He embraces God's anointed. Jonathan has a decision to make. "This is obviously God's anointed. Do I fight for my own rights or do I give them up in order to bless him? By giving up my rights and blessing him, I in turn am blessed." That's the decision Jonathan made. Not only did Jonathan make that decision but he made it very publicly. We'll find out later.

Imagine how horrified, or at least surprised, those in Israel might have been to see David walking around with Jonathan's armor. For one thing, he had snubbed Saul. Saul didn't embrace David by faith. Saul was just being a pragmatist. "Take my armor so you don't die." or "Take my armor so everyone thinks that you're me." Jonathan says, "Take my armor because I know that you're the man and I'm not." So when David left there wearing Jonathan's armor everyone had to be

completely shocked. No one would have been more shocked than Saul. More and more as the story goes on Saul begins to realize that the jig is up for him, and instead of submitting to it and embracing David by faith as Jonathan does, Saul continues to kick against the goads, and that's the next thing we'll look at – Saul's envy.

⁶ *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.* ⁷ *And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands."* ⁸ *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?"* ⁹ *And Saul eyed David from that day on.* (ESV)

When I was a sales representative for Eli Lilly I worked with psychiatrists, basically every psychiatrist from Renton down to Vancouver, Washington, and out to Port Angeles. A lot of them I became good friends with. I'd love to ask them what they think of Saul here. "What would be your diagnosis of Saul?" "Narcissistic personality disorder, paranoia, what is it?" Actually I'd love to hear their answer and then say, "Nah, I don't think that's it." "What do you think it is?" I'd say, "Saul doesn't believe the Gospel. Saul doesn't get it." A lot of the things that we attribute to mental illness (and don't get me wrong, there is mental illness) come down to whether or not we trust Jesus. In Saul's case whether or not he trusted Yahweh. When we first met Saul, he was pretty good at making a show of being religious, but the deeper you get into his life you realize that not only is he not religious, he doesn't know God from Adam's house cat. He doesn't know anything. If Saul really understood the promises of God and the mercy and loving kindness and the grace of God, that would inform the way he looks at everything. But since he doesn't, what informs the way that Saul looks at everything is his own insecurity and his envy and his fear. You either believe that you have God's affirmation and you look at the world through that lens or you don't believe you have anyone's affirmation and you look at the world through that lens. Depending on which lens you use, the world is distorted. So why do I say that? Because everything Saul looks at as he interacts with David from here on out is completely and utterly skewed by his own insecurities and fears. It would have been clear at least to the original audience.

They come back from killing Goliath. I don't know if David was still holding this nasty giant's head in his hand, but nonetheless they're coming through the city and the women are coming out like they always would when the men came back from victory and they're singing songs of joy and shouting and playing tambourines and instruments. In other words they weren't Presbyterians yet, they were actually getting jiggy with it. They started to sing this song which would have been completely typical of Hebrew narrative. If you read the Psalms and you read Hebrew poetry what you see over and over again is this thing called parallelism. The Lord is my rock and my fortress. The Lord is my strong rock and my fortress. In other words they're saying the same thing twice, they're just trying to say it in a different way. As the men are coming into the city and the women are singing they say, "Saul has killed his thousands and David has killed his ten thousands." What they're saying really is, "Saul has killed a whole bunch of people and David has killed a whole bunch of people, too." The numbers are not to be taken literally unless you're completely and utterly insecure and you think, "I wonder why they said ten thousand in front of David's name instead of my name? I bet they think David's better than me. I bet they think he's a better warrior than me." Saul becomes angry and envious. You've heard me say this a number of times, "Why do we ever become angry or envious?" The root of almost all anger is you think you deserve something that you didn't get or you think you got something that you didn't deserve. Why is Saul angry here? Because he didn't get something that he thought he deserved. What did he think he deserved? Credit for killing Goliath? He didn't do it. Credit for winning the war? He didn't do it. Saul's anger is understandable, but it's not justified because Saul doesn't deserve anything.

The other way to look at this text is that Saul could have been elated. If he really understood the promises of God they could have come into the city and the women would have said, "Saul has killed thousands and David killed ten thousands." If I was Saul I would have said, "That's right, and guess who was smart enough to hire David? Guess who was wise enough? Guess who was manly enough and willing and humble enough to put down his sword and let this boy try it? Me." But because Saul doesn't have that, because Saul doesn't really understand the promises of God because he doesn't understand the Gospel, he cannot help but look at things through the eyes of his anger and the eyes of his fear and the eyes of his insecurity. The question is, "Why do you do the same thing?" Why do I do the same thing?

We get personnel reviews every year. They're confidential, but I'll tell you a secret about mine. I said of myself, "I need God's help to work with me on being more patient." What's impatience? Impatience is simply veiled anger because you think you deserved something. You think you deserved to go home and have everything quiet and put together and dinner be on the table, or you think you deserve to have just a day where no one calls you. I become very impatient and the reason I do that is because I think I deserve something that I really don't. The reason I don't deserve anything and you don't deserve anything is because we are sinners. Now, what the smart person would say is, "I not only good enough and I don't deserve anything." The smart person would say, "Look how wise I am to have chosen Him to represent me. Jesus has come and He was completely patient, He was completely humble, and completely meek. He was never angry in an unjust way, and He came and bore my sins. I don't deserve anything, but He deserves everything. Look how smart I am. I'm not trusting in myself. I don't bring anything to the table. I'm brilliant because I know enough to throw my lot in with Him. I know enough to throw my lot in with Jesus." He's accomplished the victory. Is the smart person going to be angry that Jesus

accomplished victory over your sin, or is the smart person going to embrace the fact that he has gained victory over your sin? If you're going to try and do it yourself let me save you some time. You don't have what it takes. That's our predicament. On one hand you want to do it yourself, but on the other hand, he's the only one who can do it. That was Saul's predicament as well. Let's look finally at Saul's predicament at the end.

¹⁰ *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.* ¹¹ *And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice.* ¹² *Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul.* ¹³ *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.* ¹⁴ *And David had success in all his undertakings, for the LORD was with him.* ¹⁵ *And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him.* ¹⁶ *But all Israel and Judah loved David . . . (ESV)*

So what is Saul's predicament? Saul's predicament here is basically a catch-22. If you don't know what is meant by "catch-22," it comes from a novel called "Catch-22" by Joseph Heller, and it was set during war. It was about this guy named Yossarian who was an Air Force bombardier. He didn't want to fly combat missions but the catch-22 was that the only way to be relieved from having to fly a combat mission was to go to the doctor and make the case that you were insane. And if you went to the doctor and said, "Doctor, I can't fly because I'm insane." The doctor would say back to you, "Well, the fact that you understand that you're insane means that you're not insane to begin with, so you're flying." In other words, no matter what you do it's (forgive my language) damned if you do and damned if you don't. You can't win. If you're younger it's like when you go for your first job interview and they want three to five years experience and you sit there going, "Well, how am I supposed to get three to five years experience if you won't hire me?" And they say, "Yeah, that's a problem, isn't it?" That's a catch-22. We sang about a catch-22 earlier in the service today. You sing it all the time. Do you know what I'm talking about? It goes something like this. "T'was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved." Which is it? Is grace a bad thing if it makes me fearful? You see, when you begin to deal with the Gospel it's not damned if you do and damned if you don't, it's blessed if you do and damned if you don't. Literally. What is Saul's predicament here? It's the same one that we have. Saul's predicament is in verse 10.

¹⁰ *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. . . (ESV)*

In other words, Saul is a raving lunatic. Let's just get that on the table. We learned back in chapter 16 that whenever Saul would get into these states of madness or these states of lunacy, the only thing that could bring him peace and calm his heart was David. On the other hand, what's the thing that points out Saul's sin and his insecurity and his fear and his lack of success more than anyone else? David. So which is it? Do you say, "David, I'm just going to get rid of you completely because I'd rather not deal with you and I'll live with my madness" or, "I'll embrace you completely in hopes that you'll take away my madness"? Do you know of any other situation where you can see one person who, when you come into their presence, points out all of your sin and all of your badness and all of your wickedness and insecurity and fear on one hand, and on the other hand He's the only one who can take it away? If you're thinking the name of Jesus, you're correct. Jesus, when we come into His presence everything about us is undone. "I'm sinful, I'm rotten, I'm wicked, I break all the Ten Commandments all the time." You come into the presence of Jesus and what does He do? He says, "Give that stuff to me. I'm the only one who can heal you." The question is, "Are you going to give Jesus your sin? Do you trust Him to forgive you or do you stiff arm Him and say 'I'm going to do it myself.' Or, 'I'm going to try and live without You.'" The smart money is on Jesus because the same thing that happened with Jesus is the same thing that happened with Saul and David. The further you try and push Jesus away, the worse it gets, not for Him, but for you.

It's really interesting. Did you know that Saul demoted David? Saul made the decision, "I'm going to get rid of David." So more and more Saul is going to put David into situations where he's likely to get killed, and he demotes him from being over all the army to being in charge of just a thousand people and being out in the field and fighting. Instead of David being killed, he has more success and the people love him more. The further away he tries to push David and the further down he tries to crush him, the more David looks good and the more Saul looks bad. The end result that you see in the last verse is, "all Judah and all Israel loved David." That's important. We'll talk about it in weeks to come because David is the only one who can unite both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, and the writer of this story wants us to know that. Think about that.