

1 Samuel 30

Heroes

Friends, I thought I'd begin tonight's sermon by getting you to reflect upon your heroes of literature or the screen.

Who are the women or men that you see on the silver screen and want to be like?

Who are the women or men that you read about in books and want to emulate?

Go through your favourite novels and movies.

Scan them for heroes.

And then ask yourself why these people are heroic for you.

What is it about them that you identify with?

What is it about them that you like?

What is it that attracts you to them?

Well, to get you started, I thought I'd tell you a few of my heroes of screen and page.

They will date my reading and movie watching but this doesn't matter.

They will be chosen from a very male perspective.

But they will at least get us started.

My first hero is Clint Eastwood in most of his movies.

I think that I particularly like his westerns and the Dirty Harry movies.

My second one is Bruce Willis in the first two Die Hard movies.

And in terms of books, most of my heroes are screwed up detectives or spies.

I like Sherlock Holmes.

And I like George Smiley in the John LeCarre books.

Now as I think about it, I think I know why I like these four characters.

I suspect that I like them because they are all somewhat introverted.

But mostly I like them because they are independent men.

They operate independently from their environment.

They are self-made men.

They are canny.

And they are cool.

And my own suspicion is that most of our movie heroes and literary heroes are heroes for similar reasons.

And I suspect that this is even true for the heroes that women name.

These heroes may have flaws.

But what we like about them is their independence.

What we like is their ability to act clearly and independently.

We may like their coolness.

We may like their good looks.

We may admire their competence.

We may even like their maladjusted character.

But most of all, we like the fact that they are self made people.

Well, today we are going to take another look at David the king.

And through him we are going to look at Jesus.

And as we do, we are going to find that these biblical heroes have some things in common with other heroes.

But I think that we are going to find that they are also fundamentally different.

And in finding out these things, we will find out what it is that makes heroes in God's eyes.

We will find out what sort of people God wants us to be.

1 Samuel 30

The story

- Saul, Endor, Philistines, return to Ziglax

The story is straightforward enough.

We are in the dying days of Saul's reign.

In chapter 28 he sees the Philistines amassing for battle.

He seeks God but God is silent.

And so he goes to a medium at Endor.

He summons up Samuel who reiterates that his end is nigh.

In fact, Samuel tells him that within a day he and his sons will be dead.

The events of chapter 29 appear to just precede those of chapter 28.

The Philistines are putting together their forces.

David is with them.

But the Philistines reject David's company.

And so, in chapter 30 David and his company return home to Ziglax.

And when they do, some surprises await.

But before we look at them, let me tell you a bit about the Amalekites.

- Amalek

The Amalekites are remembered in Israel as the ancient equivalent of terrorists.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19 recalls how they attacked Israel soon after they had left Egypt.

They attacked when Israel was faint and weary.

They picked off the ones who lagged behind.

They expressed no fear of God.

And as the archetypal enemy of the people of God they were singled out by God for special judgment.

In Deuteronomy God's people were told to blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

They are not to forget.

Now we have already encountered the Amalekites in 1 Samuel.

It is the king of Amalek that Saul spares in chapter 15.

He refuses to blot out the memory of Amalek as God commands.

And it is his disobedience over Amalek that is the principal stimulus for God's rejection of Saul.

These are the Amalekites who are the focus of 1 Samuel 30.

- Distress

A chapter or two earlier we had heard that David had made raids on the Amalekites.

Well, now the Amalekites have made raids on Ziklag.

Verses 1 and 2 deftly paint the picture for us.

The Amalekites had attacked Ziklag.

They had burned it down.

As in the time of the Exodus, they had attacked the weak and the vulnerable.

In the absence of David and his men, they had taken captive the women and all who were in Ziklag, both small and great.

They had not killed anyone.

But they had carried them off.

And verses 4 to 6 tell us of the distress this causes to David and his company.

The men have lost their wives and children.

David has not been spared.

The distress is palpable.

There is wailing and weeping.

Together David and his men weep until they have no more strength to weep.

But then, in their distress over their wives and families, the distress of the men turns to anger.

And that anger is directed toward David.

And in verse 6 we are told that the men begin to speak about stoning David.

- Dependence

And it is at this moment that David turns dependently to God.

At an earlier time in his life, David had been in deep distress.

David was in the Wilderness of Ziph.

Saul was seeking his life.

And Saul's son, Jonathan, came out to him.

And he strengthened his hand through the Lord.

He encouraged his hand through the Lord by telling him that he would be king over Israel.

Well, perhaps David learnt something from Jonathan's encouragement.

For we are told that David now strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

We don't know what he did or how he did it.

But we get the impression that he turned in dependence upon God.

And then, in verse 7, he expresses his dependence by calling in the priest Abiathar.

Through the ephod, David inquires of God.

And God encourages him to pursue the Amalekites.

They move fast.

So fast, that some of the men could not keep up the pace.

And verse 10 tells us that the six hundred men becomes four hundred as the exhausted ones are left behind.

In verse 11 they have good fortune.

They come upon and Egyptian.

They treat him with mercy and he gives them valuable intelligence regarding the Amalekites.

And in verse 16 they track down the Amalekites.

They are partying because of the spoil.

- Defeat

David and his men attack and the Amalekites are thoroughly defeated.

Their families are rescued and recovered.

And much booty is taken as well.

And the people who were going to stone David now rightly recognise him.

They drive the flocks and herds in front proclaiming, 'This is David's spoil'.

- The weak

And as they journey back toward Ziklag, they encounter the weak that they had left behind.

They come out to meet David and his successful warriors.

But some of David's successful men disdain the weak.

They are willing to give them back their wives and children.

But they do not wish to share the rest of the booty.

But David remonstrates with them.

Rather than commanding them as their ruler, he cajoles them as brothers.

He identifies with them as a brother.

He reasons with them rather than simply commanding them.

And he urges them to recognise that what has happened has not come about because of their might but because of God's intervention.

Look at verses 23 and 24:

²³*But David said, “You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us; he has preserved us and handed over to us the raiding party that attacked us.*
²⁴*Who would listen to you in this matter? For the share of the one who goes down into the battle shall be the same as the share of the one who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike.”*

And David’s generosity becomes a statute in Israel from that day forward.

- Give and take

And in the closing verses, David shares the booty around.

Samuel had warned that kingship would be about taking.

Kings would take, take, take, and take again.

But here the future king does not take.

Instead, he gives.

Now some of his giving is undoubtedly political.

But it also needs to be seen in the light of his references to God’s activity.

He regards the booty as a gift of God.

And he shares that gift among God’s people.

He distributes the spoil.

He gives gifts.

Purpose

So, there is the story.

Let’s now see if we can work out why it is here.

And my own feeling is that it is deliberately here as a contrast to Saul.

Some scholars have argued that the events of chapter 30 occur at the very same moment that Saul is consulting the medium at Endor.

And when you look at the chronology in detail, there seems to be some merit in this.

Saul is a king who appears to have no personal relationship with God.

Through continual disobedience and unwillingness to obey God he has distanced himself from God.

God no longer hears him.

And so chapter 28 finds him consulting the dark powers of a medium.

Chapter 28 finds him alone, being looked after and cared for by a practitioner of the dark arts who has no place in Israel.

But David has a ready relationship with God.

He strengthens himself in the Lord his God.

He consults God and God speaks to him.

He cares for the weak.

He leads men who follow him.

He defeats the enemies of the people of God.

He distributes gifts among the people of God.

Chapter 28 tells us that Saul is no longer fit to rule over the people of God.

Chapter 30 tells us that God's appointee, David, is a model king.

He is no longer a shepherd boy with a sling.

He is a man ready to take on rule.

He is God's man.

God's king.

Fulfilment

Friends, in David we see a small snapshot of the kingship of Jesus.

Just as David strengthens himself in distress, so does Jesus.

Just as David depends upon God in the face of deep distress, so Jesus turns to God and prays as he faces the cross in the garden of Gethsemane.

His whole life is governed by a concern for the weak.

He feels the distress caused by sin and evil.

He comes alongside people.

He identifies with them in the incarnation.

He heals their diseases and cares for their infirmities.

His whole ministry is geared towards delivering those who are spiritually weak and cannot save themselves.

He defeats the spiritual enemies of God.

In the cross he defeats them and makes a public display of them.

And when he ascends on high he leads captives in his train and gives gifts to his people.

He is not self interested, taking, grasping king.

He is self giving in death.

And he goes on giving well after death.

In fact his ministry now is one of intercession on behalf of his people.

A model for Christian living

But Jesus is not just God's true king.

He is also a model for Christian living.

You see, he lives as one whose allegiance is to God.

He lives as one dependent on God.

He models what we are to be.

Humble.

Obedient.

Dependent.

Strengthening himself in the Lord.

Depending upon God.

Trusting in God (cf. Hebrews 5:7-10).

Living this way

Friends, the David we meet here in this chapter is the David we meet time and time again in the Psalms.

He is the David who, although imperfect, prefigures the perfect Christ.

And tonight I want to urge you to be like the David we have seen here.

You see, I suspect that many of you are like me.

I was sent off to boarding school at 11 years old.

I have spent my life priding myself of my own self sufficiency.

I think of myself as a self made man.

But this is not how God wants me to live life.

God wants me to live life as though it comes from the hand of God.

He wants me to live as though life is fragile as it was for David when he returned to Ziggag.

He wants me to live life strengthening myself in him.

Reminding myself that I am not able to save myself.

Reminding myself that all of life comes from his hand.

Reminding myself that whatever I have comes from his benevolent hand.

Reminding myself that a true person is one who lives like a dependent child upon him.

Reminding myself that he is able to care for me.

This is how God wants me to live.

This is how he created me to live.

And this is how he created you to live.

Not self made.

But God made.

Dependent upon God and his strength.

Now because this runs so much against the grain, I wonder if I might give us a final word.

I wonder if you remember Jonathan back in chapter 23.

David was in deep distress.

He was fleeing from Saul as Saul sought his life.

And Jonathan came to him.

And Jonathan reminded him that his destiny depended upon God and God's purposes.

Jonathan strengthened his hand in the Lord.

And this is why we meet together.

Whenever we Christians meet, whether it is in ones or twos, in small groups, or here on Sunday evening, we meet to strengthen each other in the Lord.

We encourage each other to remain firmly dependent on our Lord and saviour.