

Title: Politics as Usual
Text: 1 Samuel 18:6-16
Theme: Living for self is a sure way to a miserable end
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmt: Living for self is a sure way to misery.

“It’s just full of politics. It’s politics as usual. The entire thing is so political.” When you hear statements like that, you tend to think of people promoting themselves, making promises but never intending to keep them, people using other people, people pretending to like someone or agree with them in order to get their vote, their money and people who just lie in order to get ahead. The old question is, “how do you know when a politician is lying?” The answer is: when his/her lips are moving.” While that is the sentiment, it really is not fair because there are some good and honest politicians and the word politics does not actually mean that. Politics is defined as: “the way that people living in groups make decisions.” So, after church today, your friends meet in the Gathering Space and someone asks, “what do you guys want to do?” How the group answers that is politics. If the group votes and the majority wins, that would be an example of a democracy. If the group is a family and mom and dad talk with the kids, then confer among themselves and make the call, that would be a good example of a monarchy. If the one person makes the decision to go to his favorite restaurant and everyone else has to pay for his meal, that would be congress. There are good examples of how people living in groups make decisions and, obviously a lot of really bad examples.

In 18:1-5 we saw a beautiful example of politics as unusual. A person in power (Jonathan), used his influence to elevate someone (David) even though David could potentially take over Jonathan’s role as the heir apparent. This week we see politics as usual. From here to the end of 1 Samuel, we witness the ugly reality of how people in power, tend to use that power for the despicable, vain and empty purpose of just hanging on to that power because they believe the lie that the illusion of power makes them something. Saul is a sad and hollow man.

Read Text:

When you want to be God and make the rules, you are always angry, never satisfied and always threatened. Even a celebration can be a disaster. Anger – fear; very angry – in fearful awe. 1) Your anger reveals your true beliefs (6-9); 2) Sinful anger positions you as an enemy of God. (10-11) 3) This IS politics as usual. (12-13) 4) God is sovereign even over politics. (14-16)

1. **Your anger reveals your true beliefs.** (6-9)

Back in chapter 15, the prophet Samuel relayed the devastating news to Saul that “*Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.*” What we witnessed then is the first of many pathetic scenes in the life of Saul. As Samuel turns to leave, the king falls on the ground, grabs the end of his robe and it tears. Adding insult to injury, Samuel said, “*The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.*”

Don't miss this. Saul is now the anti-king who is determined to find and kill the real king because he refuses to submit himself to God. Saul knows that there is a neighbor of his that is better than him whom the Lord has chosen and Saul is hellbent on finding and killing that person. Saul does not know who that is, but you know that he is on high alert for anyone who might be that one. *"As they were coming home..."* (v.6), the victorious army with the spoils of war should have been a wildly exciting and exhilarating ticker-tape parade spectacle. The women came out of all the cities of Israel, they were singing, dancing, and celebrating with songs, but now, a new song was being sung. The lyrics were, *"Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands."* Hebrew poetry often says something and then repeats it for emphasis. You see this over and over in the Psalms. It is likely that the gals meant nothing by this in terms of an insult. Saul was mentioned first and it is very likely that the song was intended to say that between Saul and David that they have been exceedingly successful. It is interesting to note that there is no mention of God being the One who brought deliverance, though. And while the girls could have possibly been a bit more artful, Saul is on edge, looking for any threat to his power and he does not hear this with any grace. This celebration became a tipping point. Saul was not going to share the glory of his position with anyone, even when they deserved it. We saw this back in chapter 13. Jonathan was the one responsible for Israel's victory, but the press release gave all the credit to Saul.

For Saul, the song was a knife in the heart. And in that moment, he realized that he had created a major problem for himself. This kid, this new hero was the neighbor that Samuel spoke of. The loyalty of the crowd is a very fickle and illusive thing that Saul was realizing, but what was worse, Saul had helped make David a hero by letting him fight Goliath and now he had invited the hero to live with the king giving him access to the seat of power. What had he done and how could he fix this?

Notice v.8. *"Saul was very angry."* Alright, let's start peeling back some layers. Why was Saul so angry? Were the girls singing something that wasn't true? No, it was true. David's victory over Goliath resulted in complete rout of the Philistine army that Saul had never been able to accomplish. Why was Saul so angry about it? The truth was, David was a better man than he was. Jonathan appears to have come to the same conclusion but his response was completely different. David, you need to be the heir to the throne and I am going to help make that happen. For Saul, it was, "I'm going to kill you." Jonathan did not believe that the throne was his, Saul did. But it goes deeper. Saul's problem was not David. Saul's problem was Saul. Saul had rebelled against God and refused to repent and therefore determined that he was going to use his power to stop the consequences that God said were going to happen.

Saul did not initially want the throne and hid on the day of his coronation. But now the humble man who did not seek power is obsessed with keeping it at all costs. Why? What happened? Saul's anger revealed his true belief. He believed the lie that your title defines you. Having influence, power, prestige means that you really are influential, powerful and prestigious. Happiness is defined as being desired and envied by others. Security is defined as being protected by forces under your command.

Think about the things that you get angry about. It is good to be angry about unrighteousness. It is good to be angry about injustice and sin. You can be angry and not sin, when you are angry about the same things that God is angry about. But, for most of us, we probably get angry about other things and those other things reveal what we are trusting in.

When someone dings your car in a parking lot, do you get lit up because the fame of God is under attack? When you go off on your kid is it because you are grieved over their foolishness or just lit up because you feel disrespected? When someone takes credit for something good that you did, do you seethe at the slight because righteousness has not ruled, or because you didn't get the credit that you thought you would get? It is so good to stop and dissect our anger, even frustration and ask our souls why we are angry and if it is right that we are so? What is it that I want so badly that I am angry about not getting it? (Jonah 4.4,9 – *“Do you well to be angry for the plant?”*)

2. Sinful anger positions you as an enemy of God. (10-11)

Envy does not play nice, nor does it stay in its own little corner. Envy is like a malignancy that seeks to take over and rule with a thick darkness that blocks out all light. The Spirit of God has departed from Saul and an evil spirit has come over him. This is what happens when Saul determines that he is going to rule his own destiny. Saul's capacity for judgment is so skewed and twisted that he sees the blessing of God as the enemy. David is a blessing. Jonathan sees it. Saul's daughter sees it. The army sees it. The nation sees it. Saul is blind to it. David is his enemy and David deserves to die. Hold the phone. What did David do? Did his victory go to his head and he tried to leverage his new found fame for a power-grab? Hardly! In fact, the opposite takes place. David, goes back to his job as the musician who tries to soothe the maniac of his episodes. David does whatever he is asked to do and he does not complain. There is nothing to accuse David of. Saul is so owned by his own sin that he now sets himself in the place of God and determines who is right and who is wrong and who deserves to live and die based on a very skewed perspective.

And it escalates quickly. Look at the time-line. “As they were coming home” (v.6) speaks of the return from the battle. Look at v.10. “The next day” Saul raved within his house. His anger turned him into an unhinged, unreasonable lunatic. He became obsessed with killing David and removing this threat. David saved his bacon! David is trying to soothe him down, but this is what happens when the rule of God and the rules of God are rejected. Right is hated and treated as being wrong and wrong is celebrated and then demanded to be accepted. Sinful anger skews everything.

Sometimes we read these accounts without really taking the time to consider what exactly we are reading. Saul and his entourage are at the peak of glory with this victory and yet Saul is raging in his house. Obviously, everyone is on edge and it's David's job to calm him down by playing and singing to him, only for Saul to throw a spear at him twice. That's all that we know. David obviously jumped out of the way. Did he run then and later come back only for it to

happen again? Or, did Saul throw, miss, then grab it and throw it again before David got out of the room? Either way, this is crazy stuff! The king is back to being crazy. Next week we are going to look at the account where Saul decides that David should marry his daughter, changes his mind, then decides he should marry his other daughter. This is bizarre! The guy who tried to make David a 3D artifact on the living room wall now wants David to marry his daughter. I tell you all the time that sin causes brain damage. This is crazy stuff, however, (and this is a big however), we have the enormous advantage of the Scriptures. We have God's perspective on this. That is what the Bible does. It not only tells us what happens, it tells us why. It gives us history from God's perspective. The text tells us that Saul is being eaten alive with fear, so what appears to be irrational actions make sense when we understand what is going on in his heart. God knows our hearts and reveals them. When you rebel against God, you will become your own worst enemy and will turn on others. You can't trust others because you fear that they are just like you. Saul hates David because Saul sees power as something to grab, manipulate, hold on to and step on others with and he assumes that David will do the same. Saul is an enemy of God and is incapable of loving others and living for their joy.

Some of you have lived with this. You walk on eggshells not knowing what is going to set someone off. People who live without a genuine love for God, live in darkness and that darkness influences a lot of sinful, brooding and dark thoughts. Members in the family are burned by the fire of the explosive words hurled like spears behind closed doors, that can crush a soul and suck hope out of a kid.

We all have crazy thoughts from time to time, but most of the time, there is at least a thin layer of propriety that shields that from the view of others. That thin layer is of reason is the grace of God. When that layer is peeled back, the crazy stuff is exposed. Saul loses it and tries to kill David. Saul fears that he will lose his power, which, ironically, only makes him lose his power. By David witnessing the unhinged Saul, the Saul that Saul could not conceal nor control, Saul lost even more power and David, without seeking it, gained more power over Saul. He witnessed what Saul was really like. He now could use that against Saul, should he ever want to. Saul knew what he would do with information like that, and I am guessing that he assumed that David would look for a way to use it against him. Saul, the double-minded, haltering, indecisive, and insecure lunatic looks pathetic next to the unflappable, irresistible, self-aware and self-assured David. No wonder, as v.12 begins, "Saul was afraid of David." David was everything that Saul wasn't.

3. **This is politics as usual.** (12-13)

These two verses are a preview of the rest of 1 Samuel. Saul is afraid of David and his fear becomes an obsession that destroys his own life and dynasty. The Lord is with David and the Lord is against Saul. That is the story behind the story. Therefore, Saul spirals into complete despondency and in the end, takes his own life. Saul uses his power to remove David from his presence. He cannot stand to see this charming, skillful youth any more in his house. He set him over the men of war (v.5) and now, changes his mind and gives him a troop of a thousand. Later on we find out that Saul sends David on military missions in the hopes that David will die.

Interesting, right? It is probably just a matter of time. It's the nature of war. It would be a convenient consequence. Then, Saul would pretend to mourn, but would be relieved. In v.13, Saul is the one giving the orders. Saul is the one who is in charge, but David is the one who now has the influence. This is politics as usual.

A. Political power often masks and reveals deep-seated insecurity.

There are a lot of people who are driven to get into positions of power because they are trying to hide something. In Saul's case, he did not seek this position, however, once he started snorting the crack of power, he became so addicted that he killed in order to feed his habit. Now, the power that he wielded was not for the good of those he ruled but only to stay in power so he could maintain the illusion that he was really somebody. Therefore...

B. Power is used to protect and promote self and destroy anyone who is a threat.

You've heard it said about certain politicians that they are only loyal to themselves. This is Saul. This is what gives politics and power a bad name because this is how power and opportunity are often used. Saul is afraid of David. Saul fears that David will take something from Saul that Saul now believes he owns. But, he doesn't. Only God is the true king. No one has any inherent right to any position. I earned this. I deserved this. I achieved this. Are all mistaken and skewed views.

Beloved, here is one of the story lines of the Bible. Man's political power vs. God's real power. (chart)

Christ is not only the true King by right and position, he is the best King by practice and he calls his followers to walk in his steps. In his churches, there are two offices: Elders and Deacons. Deacons and deaconesses serve the congregation and elders are pastors/shepherds who lead and feed the congregation in order to build them up, encourage them, train them, and in some cases, send them out for ministry. The posture of leadership in a congregation is giving that others might be lifted up, serving that others might be blessed so that the congregation is unified in the gospel. The influence of a position is used to make much of Christ by making much of his people. Politics as usual is commodity that has no value or place in the body of Christ.

Everything that Saul did in order to destroy David, only contributed to David's success. Saul removed him from his presence which placed David with the people, and they love him. Saul, who is hidden behind his walls, robes, crown, throne, staff, entourage and the demands of a monarchy is removed from the people. David "*went out and came in before the people.*" Our first impression of Saul at his coronation, is really bad. He runs and hides. It's like he doesn't want to be around people. Dude, you are a king. David, on the other hand, seems to be very comfortable with and very accessible to the people. Saul uses others for his own sake. David is willing to be used for the sake of others.

4. God is sovereign even over politics. (14-16)

A few years later David would write, *“in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* (Psalm 56.11) In the end, it did not matter what Saul did. God is sovereign even over incompetent leaders, corrupt leaders, insecure leaders and clueless leaders. And at the end of the day, Saul went from being afraid of David (v.12) to standing “in fearful awe of him” (v.15). Instead of isolating David from the seat of power, he only succeeded in elevating him in the eyes of the people. The Lord was with David (14b). And when Saul saw it, (15a) he was terrified. Saul could do no right and David could do no wrong. It is such a pity that Saul had no heart and did not love and would not make room for David. In spite of Saul’s power and position and his determination to kill David, God is sovereign. God anointed David as king. And God keeps his promises. This nation of tribes during the turbulent time of the Judges only united in fear of a common enemy, was now united in love – they all loved David. They had a leader who went out and came in before them.

What is the cause you believe in? Who is the king that you are following? Will he lead you by fighting and dying for you, or will he use you to die for him?