

Title: The Power of Power
Text: 1 Samuel 18:17-30
Theme: How power can “change” a person
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmt: Blessing begins with humility while being cursed begins with pride.

I knew someone who treated every conversation like a chess match. It was exhausting and stifling since every word was scrutinized then responded to. With no love, there was no trust and no joy. The other person was so strangled by suspicion that all light for laughter or light-heartedness was blocked from getting in. Some of you work with people like that and it makes for very long days and shifts. Their misery in all things is a sad preview of the future that awaits them without Christ. They grasp for power, for an advantage, for an opening, for a strategy, but even when they think they have control of the board, an overlooked pawn takes out their queen and their fearsome rage is only stoked. It is sad to watch the disintegration of a life. The tragedy of King Saul is a case study on how his demonic attempt to grip power sucked all of the oxygen out of his soul, leaving him alone, dark, obsessed and paranoid. There is a better way to live, a better way to think, a better way to respond, because there is a better way to be. This text is not telling you and me what not to do, it is telling us what not to believe, who and what not to trust in, so that, we will love, trust and rely completely on Christ.

Read Text:

In Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, Galadriel said, “*The hearts of men are easily corrupted and the ring of power has a mind of its own.*” In their book, *The Beginning of Politics*, authors Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes observe, “*Whether attained by craft or by chance, great power has a way of defining the person who wields it. Finding themselves venerated by those around them, the supremely powerful almost invariably begin to worship themselves. Once such intoxicating superiority is tasted, relinquishing it can be experienced as an obliteration of the self. This is especially true for an office that can be bequeathed to one’s heirs, a promise or expectation that gives its present occupant an intimation of immortality.*” (pp. 23-24)

Why do we tend to have such a fear of those who are in authority? When one gets power, they get a taste of being God. However, our hearts are consistently attracted to replacing God. That was the lie that we believed from Genesis 3. If we eat this (have this, do this) we can be like God. It was a lie that we have wanted to believe ever since so we have been craving power ever since. Power is dangled before us, like Tolkien’s ring that promises control and outcomes, but like the ring, it betrays the one who wields it, by destroying the life of the one who tries to own it. Only God is capable of bearing the weight of God. God uses power to carry out his good and perfect will. We are prone to use power to carry out our selfish, foolish, ill-informed and myopic wills. Our souls must be on alert. In this text we see how 1) a sinful view of power is displayed and yet 2) how a sinful view of power reveals the heart. But in the end, 3) the pawn of love will topple the king of fear.

1. **A sinful view of power is displayed:**

Here is the situation and many of you know it well. The one in charge has the ability and the opportunity to set the table and define the terms. His actions can be innocent, or devious, no one can tell just by watching. Because he controls the scene he can, he believes, determine the outcome. He thinks that he can find ways to get himself out of the mess that he got himself into without anyone knowing, or him having to admit to his own failures.

A. When familial affection is replaced by political schemes. (17-29)

Marriage is profoundly deep and it changes people. I generally tell couples in my wedding talk that this relationship will change them, for the rest of their lives. Therefore, marriage is not a game, a plot, a tool. It is marriage. If you are in a culture where marriages are arranged, you are at the mercy of your parents who you can only hope will provide for you a spouse that will love you and serve you well, not an arrangement that makes much of them. Can you imagine being a girl whose dad treats your marriage like a political scheme? How does that affect you? What does that mean about how your dad views you? You are a convenient tool for him to get power over an enemy. He doesn't care about you. He is willing to play with your life for the sake of someone else, either his own or your brother's.

Merab is promised to David. Look at v.17. "Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife." Doesn't that sound like Merab is there and David is there and Saul is making this promise to them both. Saul is in charge. Here! I will give her. Merab does not say anything. We don't know if she has, if she was consulted, if she had a voice, if Saul cared. She may like this idea and be excited about it. But Saul is exercising his influence and from the outside we don't know what to think. No one knows. Is he rewarding David for his success? Is this a peace offering because Saul tried to kill David and now, he wants David to believe that all is fine, that Saul was just off his game that day? Is this Saul making good on his promise back in chapter 17 to give his daughter to the man who killed the Philistine? We just don't know.

But then comes v.19. "But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife." Saul is the one in power. He has power over Merab, over David and over Adriel. He can make and break promises without remorse and apparently without feeling. Did Saul explain himself to Merab? To David? To Adriel? To anyone? We're all left hanging, but then, we read that Saul was told that Michal, his other daughter loved David. Saul does not care about Michal. Her love for David is only an advantage to be pursued. Think about this. Saul's daughter loves David, so Saul realizes that this will possibly give him an opportunity to kill David, which would mean that he would be killing the very man his daughter loves! What kind of a man kills or tries to kill the very person his own daughter loves? Daughters are influenced so deeply by their dads. If your dad treats you as a commodity to be traded, a tool to be used, what are you tempted to believe about yourself?

Dads, when you are told that your daughter loves someone, do you think, "how can I use this for me?" That's wicked! That is satanic! The pursuit of power has so seized the heart of Saul that he doesn't even have a place for loving his daughters. His own girls are now pieces on a

chessboard only to be moved by his power so that he can try to trap his opponent and stay in power. In the weeks to come, we will see how both Merab and Michal experience the effects of their dad. Both are tragic figures. It goes on today. A dad violates his daughter, and mom doesn't defend her out of fear of losing her power. A powerful relative abuses a family member and everyone stays quiet out of fear. But we are not pawns, we are people with souls, a conscience and a heart. Sinful power is profoundly sinful when carried out in and on a family.

B. When what you say does not match what you think or do. (17-29)

V. 17 tells us what Saul said and what Saul thought and v.19 tells us what Saul did. V.21 tells us what Saul thought and what Saul said. V. 25 tells us what Saul said and what Saul thought and v.27 tells us what Saul did. This is the power of God's Word and we, the readers are taken, by the Spirit of God into the heart of Saul. This helps explain to us why Saul did what he did. His girls, his servants, his officers and even David did not know at the time, but we are told. I made a chart of what Saul said, thought and did and compared them. It is very clear that sinful power is clearly displayed when what you say does not match what you think or do. (chart)

What Saul said	What Saul thought	What Saul did
<p>"Here is my eldest daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles."</p>	<p>"Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him."</p>	<p>"But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife."</p>
<p>"You shall now be my son-in-law."</p>	<p>"Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him."</p>	
<p>"The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies."</p>	<p>"Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines."</p>	<p>"And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife."</p>

Sinful power or a sinful view of power says things but doesn't really mean them. It plays with promises or words only to gain leverage. Words are not seen as expressions of truth, but only as tools for influence. This happens in a couple of ways. People can say really nice things in the moment not because they believe a word of what they are saying but because they are trying to make you feel a certain way. "Oh, you are the best. You are the greatest. You are my best friend. I can't wait to see you. I will be there. I will always be there for you. ..." That is what they say, but it is not what they think and it is not what they end up doing. On the flip side is the person who uses threats and intimidating words to keep people off balance and, in their mind, at their mercy." Later they justify their words and blow them off as if it is no big deal, but, it is a

big deal. Hey, it worked, right? In other words, it doesn't matter that I lied, or frightened you, or threatened you, I got the result I wanted, and that's all that matters. That is a sinful use of power and it often leaves the victims, really messed up because they don't know if they can believe anything anymore. Everything that Saul says is suspect and it should be. He uses partial truths to distract from the entire truth. (17a, 21b, 22a, 25a)

"Only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles."

"You shall now be my son-in-law."

"Behold, the king has delight in you."

"The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies."

This was not about the LORD, but Saul used that language because he was shrewd enough to know that the fame of God mattered to David. Saul said the LORD's battles, but it was really his battle against David. So, Saul toyed with his faith, just like he toyed with his daughter's lives and then with Michal's affection for David. Saul made it sound like he was excited to have David as a son-in-law, but somehow, he thought that Michal would be a snare to David. This was not about a wedding, but about a funeral and Saul did not care whose life he ruined so he could stay in power. He called the Philistines his enemies but he wanted them to win and kill the Israel's hero and his daughter's husband. These passages reveal that Saul is willing to play on another's faith, loyalty, affection, and honor in order to get what he wants. Saul sees faith, loyalty, affection and honor as commodities to be used and spent. He sees these as holes to bore into and hooks to grab onto in order to twist the will of another to his side. Saul sees faith, loyalty, affection and honor as being able to be used, because in his mind, they are dispensable. Saul doesn't have faith, loyalty, affection and honor. All Saul has is his perceived hold on power. That is his identity and salvation and like trying to hold onto a fistful of oil, the power is running between his fingers and dripping on to the ground.

Three times this chapter points out that the LORD was with David. (12, 14, 28) Therefore, I think that we can safely conclude that David was not clueless. He had some reason to be wary. "Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" Perhaps this was the reason why Saul did not give Merab to David.

Power gives one the ability to control situations, which is why it can be so dangerous. The one in authority can give a job or take it away, can help a career or ruin it, can reward or punish and when one's view of power is unhinged from a proper view of God, then that power can be used for so much evil. Saul was feared, but not loved. He demanded respect because he failed to earn it. What would it look like for you to demand respect vs. earning it?

2. A sinful view of power reveals:

These verses are a spiritual echocardiogram or an electrocardiogram that reveal the condition of Saul's heart. The way that he (and anyone) uses power reveals what is in our hearts.

A. A willingness to use others for your personal desires.

Saul has no loyalty to his daughters, no loyalty to David, no loyalty to his servants whom he sent to do his bidding who are now, unwittingly complicit in his scheme. I suspect that most of you know this feeling of remorseful humiliation when you realize that someone played you. You believed them and they used you to hurt someone. They used your good reputation to get them something. Saul did not care about Merab, Michal, David, his servants, etc. They were like the girls in Jeffrey Epstein's evil and twisted world. They meant nothing. Smoke 'em, use 'em, flick 'em to the curb. A willingness to use others for personal desires reveals a heart that does not love and in time will be incapable of loving. That is less than human. We are witnessing the shrinking and disintegration of soul's capacity to love. This sinful exercise of power also reveals

B. A willingness to hide behind social conventions for evil purposes.

As a father, Saul had the authority to give his daughter to marry whom he wants. That was the social convention. That is still the custom in some places, and we can see here, how this can be abused, but ideally, a dad loves his daughter so much that he would only give her in marriage to someone who would cherish her as much and over time more than he does. That social dynamic gave Saul some capital that he spent for himself without caring how it would break so much trust. Related to that, Saul as the father and the king had the authority to set the bride-price. And here is another dynamic at play. David pointed out that he was a poor man. He had no standing, no possessions and therefore, nothing to offer. This is exactly what Saul wanted. Saul wanted a relationship of power, not love. Saul wanted David to owe him, so Saul could control his life and his death. The father over a son-in-law, a king over a subject, a commander over a captain and a wealthy man over a poor man were all in play here and Saul, from a social level had all of the cards. This is not how we are to view power.

We will continue to see this in Saul. He not only hides behind social conventions; he uses God as an excuse to carry out his evil. Why is the abuse of power by a religious leader such a heartfelt betrayal and so destructive on the victims? The initial response is because of how much trust there is between religious leaders and their people. But why so much trust? I would suggest that it is because God really is worthy of our trust because He uses power so perfectly to care for his own and not abuse them. Since we are not God, any authority that we have, should be viewed with a level of fear over what we are capable of doing with it. We need to humbly ask the Lord to help us serve those under our care, love them, protect them, ensure them, encourage them, provide for them, rather than use them. Beloved, look to and lean on Christ for this. Look at how the Shepherd of our souls loves his sheep, leads them beside still waters, restores their souls, leads them in paths of righteousness for his name's sake, all because he loves them! Ask God for grace that we might truly love one another. Finally, a sinful exercise of power reveals.

C. A fractured soul.

Saul pretends to be a dad. He pretends to be a father-in-law. He pretends to be concerned about the Lord. He pretends to be concerned about others. This guy is desperate to re-establish his large and in charge position. He orders David to bring him 100 Philistine foreskins. What was that about? Ewww! Saul, probably didn't think David could do this without getting killed and, if he was successful, this would ensure that the Philistines would have such an intense hatred for David that everyone would want him dead. What kind of a leader gives these kinds of orders? This guy is dark, really dark. What is David to do? Perhaps not trusting Saul to keep his word again, David brings 200. The trap that Saul set for David caught Saul. He now has to follow through and give Michal to David and give his enemy a direct line to the throne. After all of his plotting and scheming, v.28 summarizes the results. The LORD is with David, and Michal, who was supposed to be a snare to David, loves David. Saul was even more afraid of David. People may have feared Saul, but they loved David.

3. Sinful power and fear are no match for Godly power and love.

This chapter is fascinating in so many ways. The story line is riveting and the plot twists are deep, but I think the most amazing thing about it is how it really portends the story of two kings and two kingdoms. We are witnessing the demise of Saul and the rise of David. The power that Saul tries to use against David betrays Saul and uses him. He cannot control the power that he tries to wield for his own purposes. Even though Saul is the one in the position of authority and is the one issuing orders, devising and executing plots and schemes, working behind the scenes according to his own machinations, Saul ends up losing power. The more he tries to use the power, the less he has. Saul knows, but refuses to accept that his days are numbered and no matter what he does, he cannot stop David's ascent. The one with no power is the one who has all the influence and, in the end, real power. This is the story of Joseph and his brothers, of the Hebrew slaves and Egypt, of the 3 Hebrew boys and Nebuchadnezzar, of Daniel and his adversaries and the church and the world. The more the people of God are opposed the more his cause is advanced. This is ultimately the story of Christ.

Christ died on the cross as the apparent victim of the Satanic plot to rid Satan of his rival. The betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot was described as being entered by Satan (John 13.27). But the plot failed. Christ died, but he rose again. There is no stopping this King. He will reign. But, the pretend king refuses to accept that his days are numbered. But, no matter what he does, he cannot stop the ascent of Christ. And every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The One who gave away his power to die for his own, now has all power. Sinful power and fear or Godly power and love. Praise God, his eternal kingdom is one of love.