
“For The Lord Was With Him”

1 SAMUEL 17:51B-18:16

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AT A GLANCE

Two men. Same battlefield. One cowers in fear, the other charges ahead in faith. The difference? The Lord was with him. In David’s rise and Saul’s fall, we see how God’s presence exposes hollow leadership, ignites courage in His people, and forges unshakable fellowship—ultimately pointing us to the greater King, Jesus Christ, who gives His Spirit to all who trust Him.

INTRODUCTION: THE DIFFERENCE THE LORD MAKES

Have you ever noticed how two people can face the exact same situation and respond in completely opposite ways? One person crumbles under the weight of fear, the other stands firm in courage. One leader becomes insecure and self-protective, the other inspires trust and action. The difference isn’t always found in talent, training, or resources.

That’s the contrast on display in our passage today. David is a young man with no royal pedigree, no military rank, and no formal leadership position. Yet everywhere he turns, there is success, favor, and love from the people—because *the Lord was with him*. Saul, on the other hand, is king, wealthy, battle-tested, and taller than anyone else in Israel. But the Lord had departed from him, and it showed in his jealousy, fear, and unraveling leadership.

This isn’t just a story about two men in ancient Israel—it’s a living picture of what happens when God’s presence is with a person, and what happens when He’s not. Our text will show us that the Lord’s presence exposes empty leadership, inspires bold faith, and builds deep fellowship among the faithful. It ultimately points us to Jesus Christ, who is not only filled with God’s presence, but is Himself the very presence of God in human flesh.

1 SAMUEL 18:14–16

And David had success in all his undertakings, for the LORD was with him. And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

DAVID’S VICTORY AND THE POWER OF GODLY LEADERSHIP

Let’s pick up where we left off last Sunday – **verse 17:51b** **When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.** The agreement that Goliath had been shouting was to be their slaves if they lost. They didn’t honor that promise.

But the **men of Israel and Judah** were now emboldened whereas before they were “much afraid.” (v. 24) ⁵² **And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron...**

That is the incredible power of godly leadership! David offered nothing but zeal for the glory of the living God. And it was contagious.

Verse 53 And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. In an instant the armies of Israel went from cowering to plundering! All because of the decisive and faithful action of a boy who saw as God sees.

Verse 54 And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent. It's debated why he took the head to **Jerusalem**. This was the first city David conquered as a king. (2 Sam. 5:6-10) Perhaps he was sending the message? Perhaps it was prophetic?

It's unlikely that David, having gone to deliver rations, had a **tent** there. It's more likely that David took Goliath's tent as well as his armor as his spoils of war. Remember how Jesse asked David to bring back a token? (17:18) Talk about a token of war: Goliath's head and his armor!

DAVID'S INTRODUCTION TO SAUL'S INNER CIRCLE

Verses 55-56 As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." ⁵⁶And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is."

Notice again that the author is not constrained to offer a blow-by-blow description of the timeline of David.

The events of verses 53-54 happen after the events of verses 55-56 as **verses 57-58** make clear. **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.**

This doesn't say Saul had no idea who David was. But as one of hundreds, or thousands, of servants, David just wasn't all that memorable to him. He couldn't possibly remember the names of every servant's father.

Why did it matter who David's father was anyway? If Saul's intent was to keep David in his service permanently, he'd need to know who to speak to. Additionally, the reward offered to anyone who defeated Goliath was to *"make his father's house free in Israel."* *1 Samuel 17:25* This in addition to the fact that this young man was about to become Saul's son-in-law, having been offered his daughter as reward for killing Goliath. Thus, Saul had several reasons to know more about David's family.

Verse 18:2 And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Chapter 16:21 describes David being brought into Saul's service as royal musician, but he was allowed to go back and forth to Bethlehem to tend his sheep. (17:15)

After he slayed Goliath, Saul made him his armor-bearer and would no longer permit David to leave. Thus, what we read in 18:2 is a reiteration of 16:22, *"And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight.'"* but with more context.

Let me turn your attention now to the twisting storyline, interweaving of Saul and David and Jonathan. You can almost observe the Lord's hand moving David deeper into Saul's circle of trust while simultaneously endearing him into the heart of the rightful heir.

Saul gets the answer to this question of whose son he is in **17:58** and then ^{18:1} **the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David...** ^{18:2} **And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house...** ^{18:3} **Then Jonathan made a covenant with David...** ^{18:4} **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.

The author is showing us that David was no usurper to the throne. It was handed to him, by God and by the heir. For Jonathan to give David his royal robe was essentially surrendering the throne.

SAUL'S INITIAL FAVOR TURNS TO JEALOUSY

At first everyone loved David: Jonathan, Saul's daughter, Saul's servants, and even Saul. **Verse 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.**

But soon Saul's attitude toward David turned. David's popularity and success evoked in Saul jealousy that soon gave way to violent outbursts, and ultimately ended in Saul's fear. Why?

The following verses help us understand why. Having broad-brushed David's military victories in verse 5, we're now about to flashback to the initial battlefield and David's victory over Goliath.

Verses 6-8 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.

We need to understand something about Hebrew poetic language. It was typical for the second stanza to step up in intensity, thus the 1000 to 10,000. It is not that the women were attempting to insult King Saul, nor that David had literally killed 10 times as many.

However, what we see here is prophetic and divine. By placing David in the second stanza, these women logically elevated him over the king. This enraged Saul. His response was actually a self-fulfilling prophecy: **what more can he have but the kingdom?**

THE TURNING POINT: SAUL'S FEAR OF DAVID

Verses 9-11 And Saul eyed David from that day on. 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.

What did we see in Goliath? Boasting, arrogance, and pride. This is the language of Satan. And now we hear it coming from Saul.

It's also noteworthy that Saul, like Goliath, had a **spear in his hand**. And like Goliath, it proves useless against God's man

It's ironic that the shepherd boy struck once and hit his target. Saul, the warrior king, struck twice and missed both times. But Saul's fear went beyond personal failure. It was deeper than that.

Verse 12 Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. This is the key to the story. Not only to David's victory over Goliath, but of Saul's reaction to him. Saul realized that David had something he didn't, and it wasn't anything money could buy. David had the Spirit of the Lord. And Saul feared him because it exposed his emptiness.

I remember when my mentor, Paul, was trying to get me to spend some time together early in the relationship, before my daughter died and before I was saved.

I invented the lamest excuses to avoid him. I knew that Paul had something I didn't – Paul walked with God. It's like he could see through me and into my soul and it made me terrified to be around him. When a godly man is near, those who do not desire to walk with God feel the disparity deep inside.

SAUL'S FAILED ATTEMPT TO UNDERMINE DAVID

Verse 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. This attempt was probably an attempt to make David more vulnerable by putting him in closer proximity to the fight. The smaller the unit, the closer the commander is to the combat. Saul's decision would have the opposite effect; as is typical of decisions made by those operating in the flesh.

DAVID'S SUCCESS IN EVERYTHING

Verse 14-16 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, for he went out and came in before them.

Once again we're reminded that David, in and of himself, was nothing but a forgotten shepherd boy. But because he was a young man with the Spirit of the Lord, he was successful in all he did.

Robert Bergen notes that "David was a man under the control and direction of the Lord's spirit - the same spirit who had brought into being the Sinai covenant and rewarded its adherents with prosperity." The author wants the reader to make this connection so that it will instruct our lives.

Also important to note is the language of coming in and going out is the language of leading soldiers in battle. The people loved David because he filled a leadership void left by Saul.

The last we saw Saul in command of an army he was standing in the Valley of Elah cowering in the face of a single soldier. David stepped up when Saul stepped down.

David, filled with the Spirit of the Lord, had success in all his military endeavors. Not because he was particularly qualified, but because the Lord was with him and because he was following the Lord.

What a difference the Lord's presence makes in our lives! Let's consider three points of application from today's passage.

APPLICATION: WHEN THE LORD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE...

1. Empty leadership is exposed

David was no usurper to the throne. Instead, he was a faithful and successful servant to the throne. So why was Saul so paranoid?! In the words of Thomas Constable, "He became a living civil war, miserable, possessed of an evil spirit, mentally breaking; a suspicious, angry, jealous man. As a result, he struck out against the most trusted and trustworthy servant in his camp—David."

Though his throne was intact, Saul's soul was in shambles. His insecurity, paranoia, and hostility toward David weren't just marks of a quirky personality—they were the unavoidable fruit of life in the flesh.

The apostle Paul exhorts us, *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other..." Galatians 5:16-17*

This is a sober warning: fleshly leadership becomes self-protective, suspicious, and destructive. It doesn't matter if you lead a nation, a church, a business, or your family—if you're leading from the flesh, your leadership will eventually crumble from the inside out.

You'll live in fear of those who walk in the Spirit and eventually you will be exposed, for “...no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”
Hebrews 4:13

2. Bold faith inspires others

Before David stepped forward in faith, the army of Israel was paralyzed by fear. But one young man, zealous for God's glory and confident in God's power, turned the tide. His courage spread like wildfire—what had been a *covering* army became a *pursuing* army.

Isn't that usually the case? There's a phenomenon called “bystander syndrome.” When others refuse to intervene, it creates a mental obstacle for most people. But when they see someone else courageously taking action, it inspires action on their part.

When you watch someone respond faithfully to God's move, doesn't that fill you with courage and faith? Observing bold faithfulness in others is a truly empowering thing.

This is one reason I believe the Lord unites His people together in the church. And it's a reason being an isolated Christian is so detrimental to your spiritual health.

Spirit-filled boldness awakens faith in others. Your courage to obey God, to take risks for His kingdom, and step into hard situations can spark the same courage in those around you.

We rob others of encouragement when we shrink back in fear; but when we walk in bold faith, God often multiplies that faith in His people. This leads me to the third and final point of application.

3. Fellowship flourishes among the faithful

Jonathan saw in David a kindred spirit—faith that looked like his own. Their souls became bound together in covenant loyalty, marked by mutual humility, sacrificial love, and shared devotion to God's purposes.

Spirit-filled fellowship isn't based on common interests, shared hobbies, or similar personalities; it's anchored in a mutual zeal for the Lord. It knits the hearts of those who share it together in a bond that surpasses nearly every other connection. It is a powerful connection and it stands firm even in the face of trial and opposition.

When God is with His people, empty leadership is exposed, bold faith inspires others, and fellowship flourishes among the faithful. And nothing says *God with us*, like Emmanuel, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. So, let's make the...

CHRIST CONNECTION

David's success, favor, and covenant relationships all pointed beyond himself to the true and greater King—Jesus. Like David, Jesus was sent by the Father, empowered by the Spirit, and opposed by jealous, empty leaders. Yet Jesus never acted out of self-interest.

Like Saul's insecurity led him to attack the very servant who blessed him, the religious leaders of Jesus' day rejected and crucified the One who came to save them.

Where David showed covenant faithfulness to Jonathan, Jesus offers covenant love to all who will trust in Him—at the cost of His own life.

David's victories brought temporary peace to Israel, but Jesus' victory over sin and death secures eternal peace for all who belong to Him.

The same Spirit who was with David is given to those who are in Christ, ensuring that the Lord is always with us.