
“His Name Was Highly Esteemed”

1 SAMUEL 18:17-30

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AT A GLANCE

In 1 Samuel 18:17–30, we see Saul’s jealousy drive him to schemes and traps, yet every plan only advances David closer to the throne. David’s humility and integrity stand in sharp contrast to Saul’s pride, pointing us to the greater Son of David—Jesus—who humbled Himself to the cross and is now exalted above every name. This message calls us to trust God’s hand, walk in integrity, and bow before King Jesus.

A JEALOUS KING AND A RISING NOBODY

Here’s the scene: a powerful and jealous man conspires to rid himself of the nobody who has suddenly become somebody. Despite his power and influence, he fails to deal with his problem. The harder he presses, the more influence the nobody gains. The more malicious the attempts of the powerful, the more endeared the nobody becomes in the heart of the people.

This has the makings of a great novel, or a movie, or TV drama. It’s full of conspiracy, jealousy, malice, deception, and ironic twists. But it’s not fiction, it’s the real story of Saul and David. What we’re going to read today is the stuff of box-office hit movies; proving that real life is often crazier than fiction!

Despite Saul’s attempts to kill David with his own hand, and then at the hands of the Philistines, the Lord continued to move David closer to the throne with Saul’s every malicious act. The harder Saul pressed, the more we see the Lord’s protective hand on David’s life. By the end of today’s story this nobody’s name was highly esteemed.

1 SAMUEL 18:27-30

²⁷ David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. ²⁸ But when Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, ²⁹ Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually. ³⁰ Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

SAUL’S SCHEMES WITH MERAB AND MICHAL

Verse 17 Then Saul said to David, “Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Saul appeared to be honoring the promise he made in 17:25, but there was an ulterior motive. Rather than Merab being a reward for slaying Goliath, Saul attached a few strings. He charged David...^{17b} **Only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles.”** Then we read Saul’s

true motives. **For Saul thought, “Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.”**

Marriage to Merab wasn't a reward for killing Goliath, then. It was quasi-reward, quasi-obligation, all wrapped in zealous patriotism and masking a malicious conspiracy to have him killed. What is spectacular to me is that Saul, aware that the Lord was with David, did not reason that the Lord would deliver him from Saul's plots and **the hands of the Philistines** as He did from the hand of Goliath.

But I wonder, what did giving his daughter, **Merab**, to David have to do with the **hand of the Philistines**? Skip down to **verse 25: Then Saul said, “Thus shall you say to David, ‘The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.’”**

This comes when Saul offered David his daughter, Michal. Saul once again conspired against David with her. There's something we would not understand as westerners – a dowry, pay a bride price to a father to marry his daughter.

LET THE PHILISTINES HANDLE THIS

Saul had concocted a scheme against David to require as dowry the price of 100 Philistine foreskins. Saul knew this bride price would put David into close combat with the Philistines. Thus, the author's comment in **verse 25, Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.**

Now it makes sense why Saul would think that giving his daughter, whether Merab or Michal, to David would present an occasion for David's demise at the hands of the Philistines. Saul was desperate to deal with David, but he had to be more cunning now.

He'd already failed at pinning him with his spear twice and David was growing in popularity with every military victory. Thus, Saul's solution had to be savvy if he was going to effectively remove David while avoiding political destruction.

Verses 18 And David said to Saul, “Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?” David humbly rejected the offer based on his social status and his family's. He had no right to enter the royal family.

Since David would not be convinced otherwise, Saul gave his daughter to another man. **Verse 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.**

A SNARE IN THE KING'S HOUSE

Although, Merab was given to Adriel, Saul saw another opportunity with Michal. **Verses 20-21 Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. ²¹Saul thought, “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.” Therefore Saul said to David a second time, “You shall now be my son-in-law.”**

A snare is a trap that uses a hidden tripwire to activate a large stone or net that crushes or entraps a small animal. Saul was willing to use his daughter, Michal, to ensnare David. The man had no moral compass. How exactly would Michal ensnare David?

It is recorded in 19:13 that Michal placed an “image” in a bed to fool the guards who came looking for David. That word “image” is the same word found in Genesis 31:19 translated “household gods.” Saul must have known that Michal had idols in her possession. Perhaps he reasoned that if David married her, she would lead him into idolatry. What a wicked and conniving man!

The situation dripped with the slime of a serpent. Saul had become just like the enemy of God – full of pride, fearful of God’s man, and seeking to trap him.

Verse 22 And Saul commanded his servants, “Speak to David in private and say, ‘Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law.’” If Saul is willing to reject the word of the Lord and disobey His commands, we should not be surprised that he is willing to use people and deceive.

DAVID’S HUMILITY AMID HONOR

Verse 23 And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, “Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?”

Hear the humility in David’s response. **I am a poor man and have no reputation.** David literally described himself as a ‘nobody.’ Yet the women sang about him, *“David [struck down] his ten thousands.”* (18:7) His favor among the people was skyrocketing because of his military success. But David didn’t let it go to his head.

Verses 24 & 25 And the servants of Saul told him, “Thus and so did David speak.” ²⁵ **Then Saul said, “Thus shall you say to David, ‘The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.’”** Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

Once again, Saul cloaks the offer with an appeal to David’s zealous patriotism. He would need to fight the Lord’s battles for Merab and now he’d need to kill Israel’s enemies for Michal. From David’s perspective, all he’d need to do to come up with the bride price is kill a hundred Philistines. It was a steal of a deal to a poor man commanding 1000 troops. But from our perspective, we know it’s a set-up. Nevertheless, the hand of the Lord was on David’s life. Once again Saul’s conniving plan would be turned against him.

THE LORD’S HAND OVERRULES SAUL’S PLOTS

Verses 26-27a And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, ^{27a} **David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law.**

David, young and ignorant of the motives of Saul that we are privy to, jumped at the chance to get into the royal family for such a price. He’s got an army of 1000 men. Seems like an achievable goal. In fact, being so zealous for the Lord, he doubled it, killing **two hundred of the Philistines.**

He delivered the goods **in full number to the king.** One, two, three...199...200. Yet another example of the superiority of David over Saul. Not only militarily, but also in character.

Verse 27b And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. And once he did, he realized he had welcomed his enemy into his own home. **Verses 28-29 But when Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him,** ²⁹ **Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.**

FROM NOBODY TO HIGHLY ESTEEMED

This chapter opens with Jonathan’s covenant love for David and ends with Michal’s romantic love for him. Both of Saul’s children have formed a connection with his enemy. If there was ever any doubt, there is no more. Saul now fully understands the truth of the situation. He **saw and knew that the LORD was with David.** And it made him even more terrified.

Saul became the **enemy** of the man he knew had the Lord with him. If that doesn’t reveal to you the heart of Saul, I don’t know what does. By opposing David, Saul was indeed opposing God.

This bride-price didn't come without consequence to the nation. As one would suspect, it sparked yet another wave of battles with the Philistines. **Verse 30 Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.**

Ultimately, David prevailed over Saul's conspiracy, over the 200 Philistines, and now over the armies of the Philistines such that the **name** of this nobody **was highly esteemed**.

David, who didn't even get the invite to the sacrificial meal has now become the royal musician, Israel's most beloved hero, owner of the best armor in the land, commander of 1000 men, best friend to the crown prince, and husband to the king's daughter. From nobody to highly esteemed! Hannah, the mother of Samuel, said it best, *"The Lord...brings low and he exalts."* 1 Samuel 2:7

David's exaltation from a place of utter humility points to the greater exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's make the...

CHRIST CONNECTION

David was a humble servant from Bethlehem. Despite his military success, he didn't make a big deal of himself. He called himself **a poor man with no reputation**; initially refusing entry into the royal family.

Jesus, too, humbled himself. In the greatest condescension known to man, Christ made Himself as low as one can possibly go. The eternal Son of God was born in a stable and laid in a feed trough as a helpless infant. He, too, was born in the insignificant town of Bethlehem. No royal court, no royal reception, no royal family. Jesus refused to enter humanity as royalty. Instead, He came as a nobody.

Though David was a man with no reputation, literally no name for himself, because of his faithful obedience to the Lord, his name was highly esteemed. Likewise, we read that Jesus...

"...being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philippians 2:8-11

APPLICATION: IF YOU DESIRE THE LORD'S EXALTATION

1. Live with integrity even when people scheme against you

Saul was a man who constantly operated with hidden motives—manipulating, deceiving, and using people. David, by contrast, walked in humility and integrity, even when he was the target of Saul's traps. The Lord honored that. How sweet it must have been for David to later write, *"By this I know that you delighted in me: my enemy will not shout in triumph over me. But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever."* Psalm 41:11-12

Don't fear when schemers scheme, and don't resort to their tactics. God sees it all. Instead, walk uprightly before Him and trust in His deliverance. Your integrity may cost you dearly. Deliverance may take longer than you anticipated. But God delights to establish those who live with integrity.

"Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out." Proverbs 10:9

2. Beware the foolishness of resisting God's will

Saul knew the Lord was with David, but instead of surrendering, he hardened his heart and opposed David continually. In reality, he was fighting against God Himself. Pride kept him from bowing to the Lord's plan, and it destroyed him.

When God's purposes become clear—even if they frustrate *our* plans—the only wise response is humble submission. Opposition to God's will is always self-destructive. Better to bend the knee before the Lord early than to break under His hand later. This brings us to our third and final point.

3. Bow before the exalted name of Jesus today

David's path from nobody to exaltation foreshadows the greater Son of David, who humbled Himself even to death on a cross, and was therefore exalted in Heaven (Philippians 2:8–11). David's name eventually faded, but Christ's name endures forever.

"We often treat Jesus the way Saul treated David. We want him to slay giants and sing evil spirits away, but we don't want him to be king." A.W. Tozer

No one gets to worship a Christ of their own making or in their own terms. We come to Christ as He is, as He revealed Himself in the scriptures. We come to Him on His terms – in humble contrition, confessing that He alone is Lord.

"because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Romans 10:9-10

Don't just admire David's story—bow before King Jesus. To resist Him, like Saul, means destruction; not just in this life but in the life to come. To humble yourself before Him, like David, is life forevermore. Every knee will bow—better to bow now in worship than later in judgment.

"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Matthew 23:12