

## RESPECTED

2 Samuel 1:22-27; 2:1-7

The ways we respond to losses and significant changes in life tell a lot about our views of life and where (or in whom) we put our confidence.

If we live long enough, we will experience losses that cause intense sorrow and grief. Understanding our grief is helpful. There are several phases that we pass through in the grief experience. Many times that first stage is shock. We are not usually prepared fully for the death of a loved one. Usually we will go through a period of denial – “this is just not happening.” Somewhere along the way we experience a release of the pent up emotions that we accumulated. There may be anger and/or guilt that we feel. If the grief is deep and intense, we may go through a struggle between reality and fantasy where we come around to actually accepting the loss that we are experiencing. We learn to live with our memories and then finally come around to the realization that life goes on in spite of the loss and that we can experience joy even after the sorrow.

Anytime we experience loss we touch our emotions and when our emotions are touched these usually find some kind of expression. Songs and poems are sometimes used to convey the expression of our emotions. Many ballads are sad songs that mourn the loss of youth, wealth, position or the death of a loved one. When the song is about a person that dies, the ideas usually attempt to capture the desirable and attractive feature about that person. We see this in a song of sorrow that David wrote concerning the deaths of Saul and Jonathan.

Commemoration – 1:22-27

<sup>22</sup> “From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, And the sword of Saul did not return empty. <sup>23</sup> “Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, And in their death they were not parted; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions. <sup>24</sup> “O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, Who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. <sup>25</sup> “How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. <sup>26</sup> “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful Than the love of women. <sup>27</sup> “How have the mighty fallen, And the weapons of war perished!” 2 Samuel 1:22–27 (NASB95)

As we know, Saul was the first king of Israel and the choice of the people; however, he allowed his pride or jealousy with regard to David to ruin his life. Because of the desperation he felt when someone else received attention or credit, he tried to take matters into his own hands and did not trust God but turned to witchcraft, instead. Because of this, the kingdom was removed from him and given to David. Saul was still king, but he was no longer God's choice for the job. He died in a battle with the Philistines. He had been seriously wounded and as the Philistines closed in, Saul chose to take his own life rather than be captured by them. When word of the death of Saul and Jonathan was brought to David, he was grief stricken and out of his grief came this song.

In Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*, Marc Anthony said “The evil that men do live after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.” This followed the death of Caesar and is a fairly accurate observation of the way the world “remembers” things. David took a different approach that showed he really was a “man after God’s own heart.”

The reaction of David to the deaths of Saul and Jonathan can help us discover how we can deal with losses in ways that honor God. The common response to the death of someone who was trying to kill you would be “rejoicing.” However, we see that David did not respond that way. In the early part of this chapter we see that David had torn his clothes (a common sign of grief), mourned, and wept, and fasted, for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, and did justice to

the Amalekite who had told David that he killed Saul. We might think he had made full payment of the debt of honor he owed to his memory of Saul. David went beyond the traditional acts of mourning and penned an elegy to Saul and Jonathan.

What are things we do in response to the loss of a person with whom we are closely related? David tore his clothes, mourned, wept, fasted, and wrote a song. One of the more obvious expressions is to gather around us other people who care. If there are tears, these are usually expressed in the presence of those with whom we feel safe. Otherwise we typically demonstrate what the British call a “stiff upper lip.” Most of us are very reserved in expressing our emotions. We may do memorials in honor of the person, and we typically spare no expense in the funeral and memorial service – somewhat of offering a “sacrifice” for the person. A lot is made of sending flowers, but that is mainly for the benefit of the others who are mourning.

What could we do in such situations that would honor God? One obvious act would be to give a memorial that would help advance the kingdom of God such as Gideon Bibles in honor of the person. Something that we could do that would be God honoring and would be helpful for others is to simply write down our thoughts. We may not be poets, but we can write a simple note that communicates how we feel about the person and to give credit for the good things we know. We might buy a sympathy greeting card and send that, but it lacks the personal touch of a simple handwritten note. The appropriate things to include in such a note would be an expression of our sorrow and recollection of the good things we know about the person. Charity teaches us to make the best we can of everybody and to say nothing of those of whom we can say nothing good, especially when they are gone. *Say nothing but good concerning the dead.* We must deny ourselves the satisfaction of making personal reflections upon those who have injured us. A quote from Matthew Henry is worth noting: “Let the corrupt part of the memory be buried with the corrupt part of the man—earth to earth, ashes to ashes; let the blemish be hidden and a veil drawn over the deformity.”

David’s elegy started with Saul and was primarily directed toward Saul until verse 25. He concentrated on the good things about Saul. Notice the eloquent words that were used. He referred to Saul as the “beauty or splendor of Israel.” The Hebrew term he used was “roebuck” or “gazelle” to describe Jonathan and Saul. Literally, this would read *The Roebuck, O Israel, On thy high places is wounded; How have the mighty fallen!*

This beginning may strike us as being overdone with superlatives. However, kings were always dressed with the finest and had the very best the nation could provide and in that sense he represented the glory or beauty of the nation. He was expected to be an expression of the best of everything for which they stood.

Every leader ought to conduct himself in such a way that he expresses the best of all the people. In that way the leader would lead the people to be their best at all times. We seem to be missing this in our nation today. Our heroes are not the good and the beautiful but the bad and the ugly. Beverly Sills is quoted as saying that “we are relentlessly and systematically desensitized to almost every form of disgusting behavior. Youngsters think that freedom means doing your own thing, and because we have no standards for them and have given them no proper sense of values, the lowest common denominator of human behavior doesn’t shock them. Their responsibilities and obligation to their fellow human beings simply are not being taught to them. A civilization rises on the strength of its values.” Those in leadership must realize their responsibility to set the right values.

The phrase “How are the mighty fallen!” is used even today. It is a reminder to us that no matter how **powerful** we as people may become, no matter how **important** we may be in our

own eyes and in the eyes of others, we are still vulnerable to dangers and problems that we are not able ourselves to overcome.

In the early parts of this psalm, David recognized that our true enemies rejoice when we have losses and because of that we don't need to share our loss and grief with the whole world but certainly with those who would want to minister comfort during difficult times. David was also careful to lead those who would read or sing this funeral dirge to remember the good qualities and deeds of those whose loss was being mourned.

David encouraged a time of mourning for all the people as he called upon the women of Israel to weep over the loss and reminded them of the prosperity they had enjoyed under the reign of Saul. (Prior to this time, the nation did struggle because of the attacks of their enemies.)

We see two types of respectful commemoration in this song David wrote. The first was the honor afforded to Saul and Jonathan because of their roles in the history of Israel. Saul was the first king and Jonathan was the son of the king and both had done beneficial things for the nation. While Saul had many issues that put him in opposition to what God wanted him to do, David still deemed it appropriate to focus on the positive things about his life. David recognized that God could use what Saul did to help the nation even though Saul's character was very flawed.

The second type of honor and respect that we see expressed here was that which resulted from the loss of a friend. We could argue that the preceding parts of the song were about Saul and Jonathan; however, the last three verses of this passage were definitely about Jonathan.

The feeling of loss for Saul caused David to be "saddened." The feeling of loss regarding Jonathan went much deeper than that. He was "distressed" or, as we might express it today, he was "crushed" by the loss. All of us have experienced the sadness when someone we know has passed away. The loss of a parent or other family member is felt more deeply than the loss of a neighbor or an acquaintance at work. The closer and more dependent we are on the relationship the deeper is the loss we feel. I was an adult and my parents were far along in years when they passed away. I had a lot of time to think about and come to terms with the inevitability of that loss. I was able to process the impact of the loss much better than if their loss had happened when I was a child living at home. I can remember several years ago when a close friend that I had known from work passed away. His death was unexpected and it was the first time I had lost a really good friend to death. It was hard to deal with.

The characterization of the love David and Jonathan had for each other speaks to a love that is on the highest plane. The Hebrew language did not have a lot of different words for "love" as we have seen in the Greek language that was used in the New Testament. The love that David and Jonathan had for each other is the equivalent of "agape" love used in the Greek. What David was saying was that their kind of love was on a higher plane than the romantic love that is between a man and a woman. Agape is a totally unselfish love, while romantic love has some expectation of a reciprocal response and some emotional satisfaction.

In our western, Christian culture we have developed an expectation that the kind of love that is between a husband and wife to be closer to (even identical with) the agape ideal. We also realize that there is an important element of romantic love that is perhaps predominate in the early years on the relationship. Many Christian marriage counselors point out that successful marriages are those where the agape love continues to increase in the relationship and grow to be the predominate element that sustains the relationship. This ideal was NOT prevalent during the time David penned this elegy. It is not the prevalent view even today in most cultures. It is becoming a more endangered concept today in our culture and has been ignored by many in the

church.

After the grieving and the pains are eased with the passing of time, the realization that life goes on causes us to look to “what’s next” in our lives. This is where we find David in the first part of Chapter 2.

#### Coronation – 2:1-4a

<sup>1</sup> Then it came about afterwards that David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?” And the LORD said to him, “Go up.” So David said, “Where shall I go up?” And He said, “To Hebron.”<sup>2</sup> So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite.<sup>3</sup> And David brought up his men who *were* with him, each with his household; and they lived in the cities of Hebron.<sup>4</sup> Then the men of Judah came and there anointed David king over the house of Judah. 2 Samuel 2:1-4a (NASB95)

It is amazing the restraint that David demonstrated. Even before the death of Saul, David (as well as most others in Israel) knew that he was anointed to be king; however, he left the timing up to God relative to removing the obstacle of Saul who was still acting as king. Now that Saul was dead, it would seem that the natural thing to do would be to send messengers to all parts of Israel to declare himself to be king and call upon the people to swear allegiance to him. He did not do that! David was still waiting upon the Lord. He inquired of the Lord as to what he was to do. Matthew Henry’s commentary has a couple of quotables related to this patience:

- *He who believes does not make haste, but waits God’s time for the accomplishment of God’s promises.*
- *He that will rule with meekness will not rise with violence.*

From a worldly point of view what David did in waiting more than seven years and being recognized as king only by the people of Judah could be interpreted as weakness. David certainly had the courage, skills and the military power to enforce his kingship on the rest of the nation. Such “power” moves do not usually end well. The other way open to David was “to wait upon the Lord” which David knew would end in “not lacking any good thing.” David put his confidence in the promises of the Lord and not in his own ability. This decision and the resulting eventual outcome should remind us of what the Lord told Paul regarding his thorn in the flesh: “My strength finds its completion in weakness.”

It would be a mistake to conclude that David did nothing relative to his ascendancy to the throne. He sought the Lord’s will. He did the right things in building relationships such as reaching out to the people of Jabesh-gilead.

#### Commendation – 2:4b-7

And they told David, saying, “It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul.”<sup>5</sup> David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said to them, “May you be blessed of the LORD because you have shown this kindness to Saul your lord, and have buried him.”<sup>6</sup> “Now may the LORD show lovingkindness and truth to you; and I also will show this goodness to you, because you have done this thing.”<sup>7</sup> “Now therefore, let your hands be strong and be valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.” 2 Samuel 2:4b-7 (NASB95)

Not only did David integrate himself into the community of the people in the Hebron area now that he did not need to be on the run from Saul, he also gradually moved into the position of becoming king of all Israel. Jabesh-gilead was located in an area that was under the control of Abner who had set up Saul’s surviving son as king of Israel (except for Judah). Saul had treated this town well during his reign and when the people heard about the Philistines desecrating the body of Saul, they went into a Philistine controlled area and took Saul’s body and gave it a descent burial. When David learned of this brave act, he sent a message to them which included

David's prayer that the Lord would bless them for their kindness. He also used this message to let them know that Judah had accepted him as their king.

It is interesting that David did not mention that the Lord had anointed David to be the king of Israel since most people already knew this, but his appeal to them was that all of Judah had accepted David as king. David's call for them to be "strong and valiant" was an encouragement for them to change their allegiance from the puppet king that Abner had set up to the king the Lord had chosen.

In a similar way, the Kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, is set up by degrees; he is Lord of all by divine designation, but *we see not yet all things put under him*, Heb. 2:8. There are many other parallels to David and the Son of David (Jesus) in the establishment of the kingdoms.

Alexander MacLaren stated "We have to take our sides in the age-long and worldwide warfare between God's King and the pretenders to His throne, and it often wants much courage to do so when surrounded by antagonists." We see evidence that the church today is "surrounded by antagonists." Secular humanism has set itself up as the "god of our nation" and it resists everything that the Lord wants to accomplish in His kingdom. We need to be careful that we don't withhold our allegiance from the true King of kings but we need to become active in His Kingdom. In 2 Corinthians 6:2 we read "For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."