

INTRODUCTION

Today is going to be a different kind of message than I usually preach. I want to introduce a couple of scriptures to serve as posts upon which we get our bearings. Then I want to tell you a story that covers so much scripture and so much time we really can't read all the passages. After I have told the story, I'll come back and make some applications to our lives.

Today's message is “A Tale of Three Kings,” loosely based on a book I read a number of years ago written by Gene Edwards. It was written to people who had been “burned” in churches, who have gone overboard in this authoritarian, submission idea but it also has some great applications for our personal lives. The three kings are Saul, David and Absalom.

1 Samuel 18:6-11. “When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. As they danced, they sang: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.’ Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. ‘They have credited David with tens of thousands,’ he thought, ‘but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?’ And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, ‘I'll pin David to the wall.’ But David eluded him twice.”

That gives you a little insight into Saul and David's relationship. These are two posts that are miles apart, which will just give us a bearing to follow. Now let's learn a little bit about Absalom.

2 Samuel 14:25. “In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for this handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair from time to time when it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.” [Two hundred shekels = 5 pounds]

I think in the Old Testament, when they didn't have access to the written scriptures as we do, these stories were often shared in families orally. True stories but stories indeed. Let's go back 3,000 years ago to a little village outside of Jerusalem, a little town called Bethlehem, which a thousand years after that would have another significance but in this little town of Bethlehem was a man named Jesse and he had eight boys. His seven eldest sons stayed there and helped him locally and the youngest boy, David, was given the tedious job of tending the sheep out in the field. But even though it was a job for the runt of the litter, he did it with excellence. Isn't it true of most last-borns you don't expect them to be leaders, because they spend all of their lives following everybody else? So David stayed out with the sheep. He kept two things by his side all the time: In one hand he had a leather sling and was always practicing. He would find rocks and look at a tree twenty yards away and would throw that rock at the tree and miss it a mile and then

try it again, and try it again, and try it again until each time he got a little better. Then he would move back about thirty yards from the tree. Then he would try it again and sling the rock. Before long all you saw was a tree with all the bark busted off of it because David got pretty good with that sling. The other thing he didn't keep too far away from his hand was his guitar (his harp) he would tune it and he would plunk on it and he would look up at the starlit skies at night and think about the wonders of God's heavens. He began to sing songs to God. So, he watched the sheep practiced with his sling and sang songs to God. That's a pretty good existence for most of us.

One day he was watching one of the little lambs and suddenly out of the corner of his eye he caught a flash of brown and there was bear rushing toward that little, defenseless lamb. David yelled to get the attention of the bear. The bear rose up and started toward David. With the precision developed from many, many months of practice, he quickly put a rock in his sling and let it fly! And the rock thudded into the head of the bear and it fell down dead. David rushed over and picked up the lamb and held it in his arms and said, “I'm a shepherd to you just like God is a shepherd to me.” He started thinking about that and that night he sat down and said, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” And he began to sing beautiful songs to God. Well, you've all heard the story of how Samuel came and chose David, because he learned that God doesn't look on the outward appearance but on the heart. There was something about David's heart that got God's attention. It was a heart directed toward God. It was a heart that loved God. It was a heart that thought about God. It was a heart that longed to obey God. Little David probably really didn't understand the impact when Samuel, the old prophet, poured oil on his hand and on his head and said, “You are the Lord's anointed.”

David was just carrying some food to his brothers at the battle line when this ignoramus Philistine, this huge giant of a man began making threats and accusations against God and all of his people and nobody wanted to challenge the giant. But David went out to the giant and with the same sling and the same precision and the same trust in God that caused him to kill the bear and kill the lion—he killed the giant. He began to attract the attention of some of the people in Israel. Although he was a young man, he had great potential so he became a great warrior. He went with Saul into battle and after the battle was over, they would walk back into the city and the women would line the streets and say, “Saul, Saul he's our hero. Saul is so wonderful! Saul has killed thousands of people!” and Saul would rise up, because he was head and shoulders above anybody as it was. He would look around with great pride until he heard the next refrain, which said, “David, David he's even better because he's killed tens of thousands.” There became in his gut a gnawing, bitterness and resentment. David galled him. Sometimes Saul just went crazy. He was eaten up with envy, disappointment and bitterness. David sometimes played his harp and sang to him and it seemed to make him better, but sometimes even that wouldn't help him. One day they were in the throne room and David was playing and Saul looked at him and his anger blinded him. Saul grabbed a nearby spear and said, “I'll get rid of this usurper in a second!” and he threw a spear at David. Can you imagine the thought in David's mind when he saw the spear coming at him? But being young and agile David dodged the spear.

You know what most of us would do when somebody throws a spear at us? You would have thought David would have gotten out his sling and his rock “done a Goliath” on Saul. Instead, David dodged it and kept playing and singing. That made Saul even angrier. So, Saul picked up another spear and hurled it at David but David just jumps aside. How many times this went on

we really don't know, but I imagine David became very adept at playing “dodge spear,” because Saul was a man eaten up with envy, jealousy and hatred towards David. Finally, it got so bad that Saul—this mad king, yet the king who had been anointed by God—said, “We're going to kill David.” And he enlisted some of his soldiers to kill David. He said, “We're going to hunt him down like a dog until we put him to death! He's my greatest enemy!” When David heard this he decided it was time to leave. So without making a big fuss or confronting Saul, he turned and left. He went out into the wilderness. He knew if he went home, Saul would find him there. Basically, David became a wanderer. Saul's anger and his hatred made him such a mad king that more and more people began to feel alienated from him. Before long there was a band of men who had joined David, two hundred, then four hundred and then six hundred men. David really wasn't their leader because they were all failures. They were all outcasts. They were all men on the run. Saul would hear David was in a certain village and would gather his soldiers, rush to that village to try to find David and kill him. One time Saul went to a place where David had been and some priests there said, “Well, he was here, but he's not here anymore.” That made Saul so angry that Saul and his soldiers murdered 85 of those priests. That's how angry and blinded with hatred Saul was.

David became a cave dweller, because caves are dark, damp, quiet and somewhat cool in that part of the world. One day David and his men were in one of the caves in the hills of Judea and they heard some noise outside. They looked out into the sunrise and it was Saul. Saul had been riding on that horse all day long and drinking water all day long so he needed to make a rest stop. Saul walked into the dark cave for a restroom break. While he was taking care of his business, David was just a spear's distance away. One of his men whispered to David. “This is your chance! This is what you've been waiting for. Kill him now.” I imagine David was tempted but instead he crept over in the darkness and cut off a part of Saul's robe. Saul went out into the sunlight. David even got convicted about that and went out in broad daylight and bowed down before Saul and said, “I bow before the Lord's anointed. I have wronged you, Saul. Please forgive me.” He showed him the piece of robe he had cut off and for an instant Saul came to his senses and realized he should be dead but David had spared his life. So they split up. You would like to think that was the end of the story but it wasn't, because once again Saul became so consumed with anger and hatred and bitterness for David he just intensified his efforts and his attempts to try to kill David. It was the same story all over again: Saul chasing, David running, Saul chasing, David running

Once Saul and his men were camping overnight in another cave near En Gedi. In the middle of the night, David crept into the cave when everybody was sound asleep and walked right up to Saul. Once again one of his men whispered, “Don't miss this chance again! Put him to death quickly!” Saul was reclined on the floor of the cave and his spear was stuck into the ground, and beside it was his water bottle. Once again David looked at the opportunity to kill God's anointed but he said, “I will not touch God's anointed.” Instead he removed Saul's spear and the water bottle and left. Once again he submitted to Saul as the Lord's anointed and said, “Saul, here please forgive me these are yours.” Once again Saul parted from David. There wasn't a chance for a third encounter, because not too long after that, Saul went into battle against the Philistines and when he was surrounded and realized he was about to be killed, Saul fell his own sword and took his life. When David heard Saul had died, there was no joy no celebration, no victory dance. There was only sadness he had died in such a way.

Then, of course, the people said, “We want David to be king!” They had been saying that for years and years and years but David had been waiting and biding his time; waiting on God’s timing and God’s opportunity. Finally, with Saul dead David allowed them to make him king and what a great king he was! For many years he served faithfully. David has a wonderful record except for one terrible mistake—but that’s another story for another night.

Fast-forward about forty years. David was now an old king about the same age perhaps, Saul was when David was a young man. He has many children and his third son is Absalom, whom by all accounts is the most charismatic, the most handsome, and the most gifted leader in the entire kingdom. People say he is even more handsome than David was. He’s even smarter than David. He’s even more of a leader than David. Absalom is probably about the same age David was when he went into the palace and began to sing for Saul. David looks at Absalom and there is this thing called “selfish ambition.” Absalom is not in line to become king, but David can see he wants to be king as an old king David waits and watches it happen. Many of his advisers say, “David, you had better watch out for Absalom, because he is going all throughout the kingdom and giving people deals—he is playing to their emotions, trying to win their favor. Down in Horah they are even saying, ‘Let’s make Absalom king!’ What are you going to do about it, David?!” And David was tempted to be “a Saul.” He was tempted to nip it in the bud, to take a spear and snuff out Absalom, which would have been so easy at the beginning but he said, “No I’m not going to be a Saul to him!” His advisors said, “But, David, Absalom will be no David to you! He’s nothing but a young Saul himself!” David said, “But I refuse to harm him!”

Finally it came to a head the multitudes were saying, “Let’s make Absalom king! Long live Absalom, the king!” They began moving toward Jerusalem. Instead of gathering his armies and going out and fighting against Absalom, David did a very unusual thing for a king. He said, “Because I love my son so much, I do not want to hurt him! I would rather preserve my son than preserve my kingdom! So I’m just going to walk away!” And he did. He walked away from Jerusalem. Once again he’s a man on the run for the second time in his life. He goes out into the wilderness again. This time he has an army with him. His advisors say, “David, now we have to do something because Absalom is following us. You cannot run forever!” Finally David consents. “We will fight, but I give you this word. Treat my son, Absalom, with kindness for my sake! Do not hurt him!”

As we have already determined, Absalom was a handsome man but he was also very vain. Who else do you know would weigh their hair when they cut it? Absalom was leading his soldiers into battle and he wanted to fight out on the field but instead they fought in the thicket of Ephraim where there are a lot of trees. Absalom was leading his soldiers into this thicket and apparently he had not cut his hair for a while because it was blowing in the breeze. As he rode under one of these trees, his hair got caught in the branches. His mule kept on going and he was left there hanging. “What are you doing there, Absalom?” “I’m just hanging around.” David’s soldiers surrounded Absalom but they remembered what the king had said. “Do not harm him! Show him kindness for my sake!” It sounds so much like what a man would say almost two thousand years later when he said, “If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek.” But Joab, one of David’s greatest generals said, “I’m going to do my boss a favor. I know what he said, but I’m not going to do what he said.” So he took not one, not two, but *three* javelins and thrust them

through the heart of Absalom! Then they took his body down from the tree and buried it under a bunch of stones. Finally, they told David what had happened. Once again there was no celebration, no joy. There was nothing but a broken-hearted old king who said, “Oh, Absalom. Oh, Absalom, my son. Would that I had died instead of you.”

I. WE EACH HAVE THREE KINGS FIGHTING FOR CONTROL OF OUR LIVES

- 1. King Saul = Envy**
- 2. King David = Submission**
- 3. King Absalom = Rebellion**

Well that’s the story. Now, let’s apply it to our lives. First, each of us has three kings fighting for control. There are probably a lot more, but let’s name three. In each one of us there is a King Saul. You can recognize King Saul because he is a spirit of jealousy, a spirit of envy, a spirit of anger that becomes so blinded that this is a true “rage-a-holic.” If you are not careful, that King Saul will rise to the surface in each one of us and will throw spears at other people. Thank God I think in each one of us there is the potential for a King David. I call this, “The spirit of submission.” It is the spirit of Christ of submitting to God’s given authority. I also think in each one of us there is a “king-to-be” Absalom and he is the spirit of rebellion, the spirit of selfish ambition. Who I can become? What I could do if I were in charge? I could do a whole lot better if I was in charge of this outfit! Be careful, because those three kings are usually fighting for control of your life.

II. WHEN YOU ARE THE TARGET OF OTHERS, DON’T RETALIATE—DODGE!

Here’s the second lesson I learned from this little story. When you are the target of others, don’t retaliate just dodge! If you are going to be like Jesus Christ, you had better become adept at dodging attacks the way David did when Saul attacked him. What do all of us want to do when somebody throws a spear at us? We want to pick it up and throw it back at them. “Same to you and more of it!” “You do it to me and I’ll do it to you!” But the spirit of Jesus Christ is not a spirit of retaliation it is a spirit of submission. I Peter 2:21 says, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” We talk about “in his steps,” but the only time in the Bible it says you are to walk “in his steps” is when people attack you, when they throw spears at you. This is what it says. “He committed no sin. No deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” Has anybody been throwing any spears at you lately? Verbal spears, emotional spears? There are a lot of Sauls out there who are going to attack you for no other reason than the fact that you love God. The easiest thing to do would be to throw the spears back but just get into the habit of dodging. Stop the cycle of hostility.

III. WHEN GOD ENROLLS YOU IN THE UNIVERSITY OF AFFLICTION, DON’T FLUNK—JUST LEARN!

- 1. Patience**

Here’s the third lesson. When God enrolls you in the University of Affliction don’t flunk, just learn! Did you know there is a University of Affliction out there? The tuition is pretty high but sometimes God enrolls us on scholarship. There are some courses you take in this University of Affliction. When you are in college, the freshman courses are “101.” Usually the sophomore courses are “201;” Junior courses are “301,” and Senior courses are “401.” If I can look at the life of David in this experience, I think we see some of the classes that are prerequisites to graduating from God’s University of Affliction. The 101 course is what I call “Patience.” God is trying to make us patient to wait on him and his time. David probably could have been king 20 years earlier had he killed Saul. He had two opportunities to kill Saul and probably other opportunities we don’t know about. But David waited on God! You have a test on it every single day: Patience 101.

2. Submission to Authority

I call the 201 course “Submission to Authority.” You don’t really learn it until you learn patience. You learn to submit to those God has placed in authority over you. It is not some kind of relationship, like a general to a private—it is a relationship of a friend to a friend. Did you notice how David had so much respect for God’s authority, he said, “I won’t hurt the Lord’s anointed.” even though Saul was a mad, deranged king in whom an evil spirit often took control? That’s a powerful lesson we all need to learn.

3. Brokenness

The 301 course is what I call “Broken-ness.” Most people drop out when they are freshmen because they don’t want to go on to the 201 course and they *certainly* don’t want to be in that 301 course, because brokenness carries such a heavy cost. It never comes without a lot of pain, tears and a lot of homework assignments. Brokenness is a very valuable character quality to God. David, himself, later said in one of the Psalms, “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you do not despise.” When we have a broken item in our home we throw it away, but God only uses broken things. It wasn’t until Jesus took the bread the little boy gave him and broke it that it was multiplied. It wasn’t until Mary had the alabaster box and broke it that the fragrance filled the room. It wasn’t until Jesus said, “This is my body which is broken for you.” that it became valuable enough to forgive us of our sins. God is looking for broken people. Saul was never broken. Absalom was never broken. But David learned something about brokenness.

4. Usefulness

Have you noticed the 401 courses sometimes get a little easier when you are a senior? I call the 401 course “Usefulness.” The problem is most of us say, “Use me, Lord!” We think it’s the first course we take. But God is not in the process of using us until he has broken us until we have learned submission until we have learned patience.

Let’s pray: “Lord, at times in our lives, we’ve tried to act like Saul. We’ve been so angry at someone we wanted to lash out and hurt them. But we see Saul’s and many others’ examples and we know that’s not your plan for our lives. There are times we’ve tried to act like Absalom. We try to get ourselves in charge; move to the top of the heap; climb the ladder, Lord we know

you’ve got a plan for each one of us and we just want to submit to that plan. So tonight just teach us about ourselves and teach us about who you are. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

OUTLINE

I. WE EACH HAVE THREE KINGS FIGHTING FOR CONTROL OF OUR LIVES

1. King Saul = Envy
2. King David = Submission
3. “King” Absalom = Rebellion

II. WHEN YOU ARE THE TARGET OF OTHERS, DON'T RETALIATE—DODGE!

III. WHEN GOD ENROLLS YOU IN THE UNIVERSITY OF AFFLICTION, DON'T FLUNK—JUST LEARN!

Courses:

1. Patience
2. Submission to Authority
3. Brokenness
4. Usefulness



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes