

Sermon

True and False Repentance

1 Samuel 19:9-24; 2 Corinthians 7:8-10; Mark 6:14-29

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David's success on the battlefield had resulted in jealousy. Saul has only just made peace with David after his last angry outburst and attempt to skewer David. Saul's son pleaded with his father to trust David and Saul had sworn an oath, "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death."¹

Yet it is not long before Saul's hatred and jealousy again erupts against David and he tries to kill him.

Saul is not good at repentance. He has not long since sworn that David would not be put to death and he is trying again. Repentance is a change of heart - of will – and therefore action. Actually Saul has not changed at all. That is the track he has been following. He was called to be a king under the Lord's authority but he failed to obey the commands he was given. When he was challenged he made excuses. He showed remorse but not repentance. Remorse is being sorry you are found out. Remorse is being sorrow you are caught- not grief at your sins because of their offence to God.

We have seen Saul's son Jonathan had made covenant with David. David has married Saul's second daughter, Michal. She also protects him from her father – warning him to flee and covering his escape, then lying to her father to protect herself from his insane wrath.

This is just the beginning of David's time of being on the run. It will continue for some years as he moves from place to place, hiding here, taking refuge there, evading Saul's pursuit, tricks and false promises.

His first bolt hole is to go to Samuel – the former ruler, the one who anointed both Saul and David as king. The one who had a hotline to God. Surely he could advise and protect him. You can imagine the conversation! ...

Saul soon learns where David is and sends soldiers to arrest him. But not just Michal and Samuel are sheltering David – there is divine protection too. On this occasion there is direct intervention. Samuel is a great seer, a great prophet. Furthermore, he has a considerable school of prophets training in spiritual exercises to be prophets of God. When the soldiers come near they are overcome by the presence of the God. They find themselves prophesying as well.

I have said before of this incident that it seems that by prophesying they mean an outpouring of praise for God, such as I had when I was saved. Such as my father most improbably had when newly saved and all that very reserved army man could say was, "Praise God. Thank you, Jesus, etc."

Saul, sends another troop of men and the same thing happened. Yet another detachment, they too are incapacitated with praise of God. All the men he sends are falling around, praying and praising God instead of getting on with the task. It's all rather comic – unless you are an angry king.

So finally Saul goes himself. "It impossible to get good staff officers these days! If you want a job done – do it yourself!"

Then blow me down it happened to him too. And that is just what did happen. The Lord blew (with His Spirit) and laid him out for a full day. I have heard of that sort of thing happening at Toronto when there was that strong move of the Spirit and a gang member angrily stormed up to the front to attack the speaker. He

¹ 1 Samuel 19:6

cussed and swore that he would knock his head off. As he approached the front, he suddenly fell backwards on the floor and lay there for a lengthy period (an hour or so). When he regained his feet, he wondered who had knocked him out! He was so amazed by this experience that he stayed and in time was converted to Christ.

In Saul's case, he was laid out for a day – incapacitated by God. In this way, God allowed David to make good his escape.

“Is Saul also among the prophets?” This was asked first when Saul had just been anointed as king and the same overflow of praise occurred. Then he was full of the Holy Spirit; he was in tune with God; it was a serious question. Now he is overcome but his heart is not after God's. He is like an instrument out of tune. It does not resonate with the master's tones. That instrument is useless to please the maestro. Is Saul also among the prophets? Only physically. He is present with them but not in heart. He could not repent effectively.

In the Gospel account, we also hear of repentance. Jesus has just sent the twelve disciples out to preach repentance and heal the sick. They are to announce the rule of God. They are to call people to obey God. The message goes to poor and to the rich. The disciples go to the country villages; while John the Baptist had even addressed the ruler of the land.

Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, had taken Herodias as his wife. She was his niece and even more shocking he had seduced her while she was married to his half-brother and married her. So he had married his niece and sister-in-law. It was incest and adultery. John without fear or favour said it was wrong.

Herod seems to have been fascinated by John. He liked to hear him, but was puzzled by him. Herodias wanted John dead. How dare he criticise her! How dare anyone deny her what she wanted! So Herod placed John under arrest to protect him from his wife.

You've heard the story, Herodias finds a way to manipulate the king through still more debauchery as he lusts after his step-daughter and great niece.

Again we see examples of a failure to repent. These two have had a clear warning of God's ways and have resisted God and rebelled.

When we realise our actions or desires are wrong, we have a choice. We can agree with God, submit to him and change our lives. This is the way that leads to life. It brings us acceptance with God; it is a step on the way to healing of our souls.

That realisation that something is wrong may come through something someone says to us in the ordinary run of events. It may be that we are reading the Bible and a passage speaks strongly to us and we know that God is addressing our circumstances. Perhaps God speaks through a sermon, or a sentence in the liturgy or through some circumstance in life. When he speaks you know it.

I remember wanting to buy a particular electronic organ which was on sale. I took it home on approval but over the weekend I started to think God was saying not to buy it. I argued with him; I wrestled; I tried to suppress that idea, but it wouldn't go away and I could not get peace over it. Then I turned to the Bible on the Sunday and read a verse that it was better to have peace than strife and I knew God was confirming that I really was resisting him. Somewhat sadly I took the organ back to the shop on the Monday.

There was a positive outcome. Firstly, I had peace with God – that was very good. Secondly, about a month later, my music teacher offered to sell me his instrument which was far more suitable for my purposes and lighter to transport as well.

When we discover we are in opposition to God will we resist or submit? Saul resisted. Herod resisted. Herodias resisted.

When we turn to the epistle reading, we find Paul refers to a previous letter he had written to them. It is not First Corinthians, but appears to be another one in between. Obviously he had to write sternly about some issue. It appears that they had been seduced away from his teaching by some other visiting teacher and he was calling them back to the faith of Jesus Christ. How would they respond? He is pleased that they had chosen to repent. They had changed their minds and wills.

It wasn't a pleasant task for him to write sternly. It was not pleasant for them to deal with it. But he says, “...now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.”

When we are out of the truth, when we are failing to obey God; when we are believing another gospel (which seduces us away from the salvation available in Jesus) we need to be called back to the truth. It is too important to fool around.

Remember I said before that remorse, mere worldly sorrow is being sorry that you have been caught or stopped. It is about what have I lost for my selfish ends. Godly sorrow is about what have done to God. How does this affect my relationship with God. What has Jesus paid on the cross because of this sin of mine? That sort of response leads to salvation, it leads to life. But worldly sorrow leads to death.

Saul had worldly sorrow – “cover up for me; I won’t do it again.” It led to a steady disintegration of his soul and death.

Herod and Herodias did not even have sorrow – they just didn’t like being told, “No.” And that leads to spiritual death. God says in the New Testament:

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:27-30 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

I am afraid that Herod & Herodias did not have a promising future! The Bible is deadly serious about warnings of judgement. If there were no judgement to come, then Jesus wasted his dreadful suffering on the cross – there would be nothing to save us from.

Repentance is important. It is important how we respond to the call to change and align ourselves with God’s ways – the ways of righteousness.

When we hear by whatever means, God’s whisper, God’s call, God’s shout to change – let’s make sure we agree with him quickly while there is still time. It is not God’s will that anyone should perish but he grants us the freewill to decide for ourselves.