

## TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS  
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### **Sunday Scriptures: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

#### **2 Samuel 1:1-16** *David learns of the death of Saul and Jonathan*

<sup>1</sup>After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. <sup>2</sup>On the third day, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground and did obeisance. <sup>3</sup>David said to him, "Where have you come from?" He said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." <sup>4</sup>David said to him, "How did things go? Tell me!" He answered, "The army fled from the battle, but also many of the army fell and died; and Saul and his son Jonathan also died." <sup>5</sup>Then David asked the young man who was reporting to him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan died?" <sup>6</sup>The young man reporting to him said, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa; and there was Saul leaning on his spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him. <sup>7</sup>When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, 'Here sir'. <sup>8</sup>And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' <sup>9</sup>He said to me, 'Come, stand over me and kill me; for convulsions have seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' <sup>10</sup>So I stood over him, and killed him, for I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord." <sup>11</sup>Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them; all the men who were with him did the same. <sup>12</sup>They mourned and wept, and fasted until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. <sup>13</sup>David said to the young man who had reported to him, "Where do you come from?" He answered, "I am the son of a resident alien, an Amalekite." <sup>14</sup>David said to him, "Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" <sup>15</sup>Then David called one of the young men and said, "Come here and strike him down." So he struck him down and he died. <sup>16</sup>David said to him, "Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'"

#### **2 Samuel 1:17-27** *David laments over the death of Saul and Jonathan*

<sup>17</sup>David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. <sup>18</sup>(He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said:

<sup>19</sup>Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon Your high places! How the mighty have fallen! <sup>20</sup>Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. <sup>21</sup>You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. <sup>22</sup>From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. <sup>23</sup>Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. <sup>24</sup>O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. <sup>25</sup>How the mighty have fallen in the midst of battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. <sup>26</sup>I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. <sup>27</sup>How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

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#### **Reflection:**

The subject of life is a constant source of hopes and aspirations but the subject of death is a source of speculation and fear bringing an overbearing sense of finality. Yet as Christians our trust in Jesus and our faith in God should rid us of all doubt. But it is not just of physical death that God speaks, He also warns of spiritual death because one cannot be separated from the other. It is in this context that we explore David's response to the death

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of God's anointed. David had just returned from defeating the Amalekite army in battle when a man comes to him in a dishevelled state. At this point he is unaware of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, but resting from the battle and rejoicing in victory. It is good to feel joy and take rest in the midst of working for the Lord. However, as this man falls at David's feet in homage, he informs him of the death of Saul and Jonathan. This is distressing news indeed and David first establishes who this man is and then rightly asks for proof of what he is saying. *How often do we establish who is speaking and question what we are told for proof? When we hear false testimony do we challenge it or keep quiet? Have we ever acted on someone's story only to discover it was a pack of lies?*

The man reveals he is an Amalekite and he has killed Saul by his own hand. Furthermore, he has taken Saul's crown and armlet as trophies and brought them to David. This man is an enemy, who has fought against the people of God, yet here he is placating himself before David; we would do well to ask why? There are those who join the battle for their own purposes and not the cause. These can be found in all walks of life, both inside and outside the church. They cannot be trusted or relied upon because they will change their allegiance to save themselves. People like this will often band together in secret to manipulate shared desires. However, when those desires have been met they revert to personal power seeking, often turning against each other. To achieve power, they will look to those who already have it seeking to gain their trust and attention by whatever means works. *Can we discern the turncoat amongst us today? Where can we see power play in operation for personal gain instead of God's Kingdom? Who might we discern as presenting a false front?*

David is distraught with grief and mourns their passing along with all his people. The whole community weeps and fasts together for a day over the violent death of those called to serve God. David acknowledges the anointing of God upon Saul as His chosen leader, even though Saul has often acted against God's Word. After mourning their deaths, David reprimands the man for having no fear of God in destroying the life of one chosen by God to lead the people. The man's contempt for the life of Saul as one of God's anointed warrants his death. David has the man struck down because the blood of Saul's death is on his hands. God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. Whilst this is pre-Jesus, God remains the ultimate authority and will deal with those who turn against Him and seek to destroy those He has anointed to serve His Kingdom. Jesus said:..."Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?" ([Matthew 7:15-16](#); [Luke 13:23-24](#)). *Who are the false prophets among us? Who are God's prophets among us? Can we tell the difference?*

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to show respect for those in authority; who God anoints let no-one cast down. It is not for us to decide the fate of another even if they are doing wrong, God alone is judge. That does not mean we follow blindly or support what we know to be wrong, quite the opposite! We are called to stand for Christ on the Word of God, speak out against wrongdoing and warn of God's reprimand lest the blood of the sin falls on our own head. David knew his destiny and he knew Saul was wrong but when Saul refused to accept God's way of things David would neither fight him nor support him. Instead, David withdrew from what he knew to be against God, continually handing the matter over by lifting it up in prayer, and leaving Saul to divine judgement and discipline. As the saying

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goes, 'If you give people enough rope they will hang themselves! *How much respect do we demonstrate for those anointed to lead God's people? Do we challenge what we know to be wrong speech or behaviour in those claiming to be Christian? Do we have the spiritual maturity to discern God's anointed, challenge wrongdoing and then withdraw to allow God to act, as David demonstrated?*

Saul's jealousy denied him God's blessing! His selfish actions came out of personal desire and succeeded in rejecting God's chosen, which destroyed the lives of innocent people in the process. Not exactly what God had in mind! Saul's blinkered self-righteousness not only brought about his own physical death but the spiritual death of his people as well. Such is the responsibility of those anointed by God to lead His people. They hold the spiritual welfare of those over whom they have been placed to feed and protect. The choices our leaders make will affect those who feel obliged to follow their authority for life or death. Saul allowed himself to be corrupted by the evil of possessive power and control. Instead of trusting God for his position he feared being dispossessed. He listened to gossip and turned against the very person that God had sent to help and support him. Saul even usurped the right of God to decide the time and nature of his death by persuading an enemy passing by to take his life and then lie that he was killed in battle. This fraudulent action caused yet another premature death, for it was forbidden to harm one of God's anointed. *Has jealousy got the better of us and corrupted our choices? Have we caused harm to any of God's anointed? Do we allow the enemy to use us as an instrument against those He sends to lead us in the ways of righteousness?*

David had every right to hate Saul for the years of persecution he suffered by his hand, but did he? No! David demonstrates genuine love for those he had to withdraw from because of their sinful behaviour. Sometimes we have to withdraw from those continuing to speak and act in a way that dishonours God. David sings a great lament over the death of his persecutor and mourns his passing by the sword. Often we do not appreciate what we have until it is gone and then it is too late! However, David loved Saul and Jonathan without fear or favour, which demonstrates true love. To fear someone makes us vulnerable to bullying; to favour someone makes us vulnerable to domination; both lead to victimisation of one sort or another. David neither feared nor favoured but stood, in faith and obedience, for the Word and will of God Almighty. He knew that His relationship with God was all important and his faithfulness would gain God's grace and blessing. *Are we, or have we been persecuted by someone claiming to be Christian? How are we, or have we been dealing with the hurt that ensues? Can we find the strength of faith to neither fear nor favour but respond in genuine love?*

Grief is a strange creature which produces anger, anguish, romanticism and irrational behaviour of all kinds, not necessarily in that order. Loss of any kind can cause us to hit out at those around us, whether they deserve it or not! Whether that be loss of a job, status, wealth, power, or loved one. But faith can help us rise above the trappings of grief and pitfalls of loss, as David reveals. His trust in God blessed him with discernment of Truth to see through the false pretences of those serving themselves; wisdom to know God's will and wait for His hand, and strength to follow through with justice as God's anointed leader. What we say can maim or heal; what we do can destroy or build; the witness that we demonstrate will either deter or attract others to join the House of God and become part of

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the Body of Christ. *How does our witness line up with that of David? How does our behaviour line up with that of Jesus? Are we killing God's people, physically and spiritually or raising them up to new life?* May God answer us in Truth. **Amen!**

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**Hymn/Song: Beauty for Brokenness** (SF 664) *By* Graham Kendrick

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair.  
Lord, in the suffering, this is our prayer.  
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,  
Sunrise to sunset your kingdom increase.

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,  
Work for the craftsmen, trade for their skills.  
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,  
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.

*CHORUS: God of the poor, friend of the weak,  
Give us compassion, we pray,  
Melt out cold hearts, let tears fall like rain,  
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,  
Cities for sanctu'ry, freedoms to share.  
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to green,  
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,  
Plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams.  
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;  
Make us content with the things that we need.

*Chorus:...*

Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame,  
Until your justice burns brightly again;  
Until the nations learn of your ways,  
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise.

*Chorus:...*

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**Poem: Cleanse Me from My Sin, Lord** ©Janice Morgan-2018

Cleanse me from my sin, Lord,  
Wash me thoroughly to the core  
Search every nook and cranny  
Cleansing each and every sore  
Shine Your light into every corner  
Till the darkness is no more  
Then shall I work in service  
For Your Kingdom evermore.

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**Prayer:** Father God, help us in our grief to look to You for guidance and find love even in sorrow. **Amen!**