

The Suffering of the King

1. Intro

- “Why?”
- That tiny word is always uttered with urgency and even desperation when it is about suffering
- When we suffer or we witness others suffer ... inevitably the we ask the question – “Why?”
- Not that we necessarily expect an answer
 - Some of us have asked this question often, but answers allude us
 - But still we ask – “Why?” – because we can’t escape the sense that life shouldn’t be like this
 - There shouldn’t be such suffering as there is in this life
 - Especially when the suffering we endure is innocent
 - When we’ve had nothing to do what we’re enduring
 - Whether it just seems to be random and what life throws you
 - Or the result of other people’s evil
- The book of 1 Samuel has much to say on suffering
 - At the centre of that suffering was David – the anointed king or messiah or Christ
 - And somewhat surprisingly, as we look at these chapters this morning
 - We see how David was strengthened and able to endure the suffering he was experiencing
 - And as we do, my prayer is that you and I will see how we can be strengthened and endure the suffering we experience

PRAY

2. Context

- Old Testament book of 1 Samuel
 - 1050 BC
 - Israel in Promised Land > still consolidating their position against enemy nations
 - Israel led by various charismatic leaders > Moses > Joshua > Judges like Samson and Gideon
 - Until recently they’d been led by Samuel > prophet, priest and judge
 - But ultimately they’d been under the leadership / kingship of God
 - He’s the one who has led them, protected them, and helped them fight their battles

- But elders of Israel turn their back on God and demand from Samuel a king like the other nations
 - This was a huge slap in the face to God
 - But God gave them the king they wanted > King Saul
 - Tall, good looking bloke who looked like the perfect guy to be king
 - But ultimately he was a failure because he refused to listen to God and obey his word
 - God rejected Saul

- In 1 Samuel 16 ... prophet Samuel is told to anoint David as the next king of Israel even though he is only a teenager
 - David, we're told, is a man after God's own heart
 - He loves the Lord and trusts him
 - From that moment on, the Spirit of God was with David and no longer with Saul
 - Because he is the anointed one ... David is God's Messiah
 - Messiah = Anointed one = Christ

- However it will be a number of years before David actually becomes the king because David was only a teenager

3. Suffering imposed by the rejected king

- Saul knows the kingship will be taken from him
- Back in Ch 13 the prophet Samuel bluntly told Saul
 - *"your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command".¹*

- In Ch 15 he said to Saul
 - *"Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king".²*
 - *"The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbours-- to one better than you"³*

- Along comes David
 - Teenager > defeats Goliath 9ft human wrecking ball
 - This was despite the fact that Saul had been the one chosen to lead Israel against Philistines
 - Head taller than all the rest

¹ 1 Samuel 13:14

² 1 Samuel 15:23

³ 1 Samuel 15:28

- Saul should've been the one to go out and fight Goliath ... but he didn't
- David comes along, does what Saul should've done
- In that moment, seeds of insecurity are sown

- As a result of David's victory over Goliath, David enters into Saul's service playing the harp and acting as his armour bearer
- It doesn't take long before he rises through the ranks to become commander of Saul's army
- Because the Lord is with David, everything he touches turns to gold
 - All the battles Saul sends David to fight he wins
 - The soldiers love him, the officers love him and people love him
- And this galled Saul
 - **1 Samuel 18:6-9** ⁶ *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. ⁷ As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." ⁸ 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?" ⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.*
- Saul knows his days as king are limited
 - He knows the Lord is with David
 - He sees David is
 - a better warrior than him
 - a better leader and is
 - more loved by the people ...
 - If he hasn't worked out that David is the one who is likely to take over his kingdom, he's no doubt suspicious that this is the case
 - And so his jealousy burns

- It doesn't take long before Saul's jealousy turns to anger and rage
- He's so insecure of there being someone better than him and likely to succeed him ... he can't stand to have him around
- And the only way Saul can deal with it is to kill and get rid of him
 - **1 Samuel 18:10-11** *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*

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- **1 Samuel 19:11-12** ¹¹ *Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed."* ¹² *So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped.*
 - **1 Samuel 19:15** ¹⁵ *Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him."*

 - From that time on was constantly on the run from Saul
 - Saul made it his personal mission to hunt down and kill David
 - Saul's determination to get rid of David became a nationwide manhunt

 - Brings us to 1 Sam 23
 - Saul finds out David is down at Keilah defeating the Philistines
 - And so what does Saul do?
 - Does he praise God for the deliverance of Keilah from the hands of the Philistines?
 - No! He praises God for giving David into his hand
 - Saul has become so wicked he claims God is working for him to get rid of David - God's messiah

 - And so we see in v8 - *Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.*
 - ALL his forces ... his entire army!
 - Instead of fighting the Philistines like he should've ... Saul is obsessed with killing David

 - As the story unfolds, it's like an ancient version of Bourne Identity
 - David hears that Saul and his army is coming for him so he flees Keilah and heads further south to the hill country around Ziph
 - Saul's men are scouring the region for him, but because he is God's messiah, God did not give David into Saul's hands
 - Then the Ziphites tell Saul where David's is hiding
 - Saul begins to close in on David
 - David hears about it so he's on the run yet again
 - Still Saul continues to chase down David

 - And we get this situation right at the end of the chapter where
 - *'Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them'*
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- And it was only by the divine intervention of God that Saul was unable to capture David as '*Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines.*'
- Phew!!
- This guy is a complete maniac!
 - He's so caught up in his own self importance and self preservation ... Saul is willing to do anything ... including killing God's messiah to get it
- **Application**
- This is what happens when your identity is bound up in things of this world
- You see Saul was seeing his kingship slip through his fingers
 - The love and affection of the people was no longer with him it was with David
 - He could see God was no longer with him
 - And it was destroying him
 - He couldn't handle it
 - His identity > his self worth > his value was all tied up in his position, his kingdom and the people's affection
 - And when he saw it was all slipping away ... it was crushing him
 - And as a result he was willing to do anything to keep it
- When there's something in your life that is
 - so intrinsic to defining who you are as a person; and
 - so important for you to have to make you happy and satisfied with life ... that's an idol
- Idol is not just a statue or false god that you worship
 - An idol is often a good thing that God gives us ... that we take and make it the ultimate thing
 - Could be
 - title or a position
 - approval of others
 - success at work
 - success as a parent
 - lifestyle
- The nature of idolatry is that like Saul ...
 - It drives our behaviour
 - And if you can't get it ... or if you feel like you're losing our grip on it and it's slipping through your fingers
 - Not only will it make you anxious and depressed

- It will make you angry
- And in time ... like Saul, you be willing to do anything ... including sin ... in order to get it

- **Illustration**
- My temptation is to tie my self-worth and identity to the success of this church
 - And so when we have a good week and there a lots of people ... I go home feeling good about myself
 - When lots of people are away, or the finances are lagging or there's some other issue might indicate church is failing ... I get anxious and stressed and angry
 - It's only a small step from there to start behaving in ways that are ungodly in order to maintain the 'success' of church like guilting people into giving or serving
 - That's ungodly, sinful behaviour that causes others to suffer because my identity / my idol is bound up in the success of C@P
 - And if I've done that to you, friends I apologise and repent

- Your idol will probably be different > your identity will probably be bound up in something else
- Whatever it is ... the only way you and I will ever break the grip your idol has over your heart is by reaffirming that your identity is found in Jesus Christ and that in him you are forgiven and deeply loved by your father in heaven
 - Either Jesus is enough for you or he's not
 - Either Jesus has blessed you in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing and therefore everything else is trivial ... or he hasn't
- Anything else will cause you to be anxious and obsessive and sin in order to get the thing that gives you your identity
 - It was obvious with Saul
 - If you look below the surface, you'll probably see it's true for you too
 - And if you're going to overcome it you need to find your identity and worth in Jesus and that in him you are more loved and valued than anything

4. Suffering endured by the innocent king

- So David is suffering at the hand of the rejected king Saul
 - His identity is so bound up in his kingship he's willing to sin wickedly and cause suffering on David and others in order to keep it

- Now what has David done to deserve this
 - Is he against Saul?
 - Is he undermining Saul and his authority?
 - Is he an enemy of Saul?
- No!
- David is the perfect servant of Saul
 - When Saul gets all abusive and irrational, David plays the harp for him to calm him down
 - When Saul's enemies attack Israel, David goes and fight his battles and brings him the victory
- David is innocent
- Even Saul's son, Jonathan could see David's innocence and how wicked and misguided his father was
 - **1 Samuel 19:4-5** ... *"Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly ... **Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"***
- Now as the man hunt for David gathers momentum ... the refrain of 'giving into his hands' is a recurring theme throughout Ch 23
 - v7 – Saul thought God had given David into his **hands**
 - v20 – Ziphites wanted to **hand** David over to Saul
- The 'hands' of the various characters represent the power struggle over David's life
 - And the question is ... who's hand will prevail?
- In v14 we read
 - *David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, **but God did not give David into his hands.***
 - Despite all he was suffering, despite all those who were against him ... God was acting to ensure his messiah would not fall into the hands of his enemy
- This is despite the fact that it looked the total opposite to David
 - ¹⁵ *While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life.*
- To David it seems like Saul will prevail > that his life is about to end
 - That Saul will stop at nothing to kill him and will not rest until he does

- But then we read how, in the midst of his suffering, God brings Jonathan to David to comfort and strengthen him
 - v16 – *And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and **helped him find strength in God.***
- How did he strengthen him in God?
 - He reminded him of God's promise
 - v17 – *"Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a **hand** on you. You will be king over Israel ...*
- But this is not what it looked like to David!
 - What David is seeing and experiencing is suffering, persecution, and abandonment
- However, God's promise to David since the day of his anointing by Samuel years earlier was that he would be king over Israel
 - And therefore, the hand of Saul would not prevail
 - It would be the hand of God
- And so for David, it's the promise of God that helps strengthen him and overcome the reality of his suffering in that moment
- And when it looked like David was about to perish at the hand of Saul ... it was the hand of God that prevailed
- **Implication**
- Even though David is God's messiah ... even though he's the anointed king ... it doesn't protect him from innocent suffering
- David's path to the throne would be a painful one
- He was a treated like a fugitive
 - Had nowhere to lay his head
 - His countrymen betrayed him
 - Those in power were seeking to kill him
- Despite his innocence, despite his faithfulness
 - His enthronement as king would only come after much innocent suffering
- And what sustained him through it?
 - What gave him strength to endure?
 - What was his hope in the midst of it all?

- The promise of God
- God's promise, that one day David would be king, reminded him that despite
 - how bad the situation seemed
 - how difficult the circumstances were
 - how much suffering he was enduring
 - God's plans and purposes will prevail ... even if David couldn't see it or experience it in that moment

- **Application**
- This account of David's suffering shows us that the existence of a loving God and the reality of innocent suffering are not mutually exclusive
- A lot of people ask the question
 - "How can a loving God allow such suffering in the world?"
- Often when we're suffering ... or we see loved ones around us suffering ... we'll cry out
 - "Why?! Why God are you letting this happen?"

- And you know what ... a lot of the time we will never know why God is allowing it to happen
- But what these chapters of 1 Samuel show us is that
 - if God's messiah
 - if the one God has chosen to be his king
 - if the one God has anointed to rescue his people
 - if even he can suffer innocently ...
 - then God must have good reason to allow it
- Clearly God is powerful enough to do something about it ...
 - But for some divine reason, he allowed David to suffer

- Now it might seem unsatisfactory not to know the reason for David's suffering
 - And it's many times worse when we don't know why we or our loved ones are suffering

- But just because you don't know the answer ... doesn't mean that God isn't good, or loving or powerful to do something about it
 - We see at the end of the chapter ... he rescued David just before Saul captured him

- And as you read through the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel ... you'll see how God does come good on his promise and David does become the king of Israel
- Despite the reality of suffering, God's plans prevail and he will uphold his chosen ones

- If you're not a Christian, then how do you understand suffering?
- Because if God doesn't exist then when we're faced with suffering then we're forced to conclude
 - "well that's just how it is. That's life"
- If that's the case then
 - There's no hope
 - There's no comfort
 - There's just despair

- Not so for the person who's trust in God
 - The reason is because of the innocent suffering of God's messiah

5. Suffering conquered by the anointed king

- Not don't get me wrong
 - I'm not suggesting that just because God rescued David ... if you have faith in God then God will rescue you
 - That would be way to simplistic and not the point
- But what 1 Samuel does is point us to another messiah who would also innocently suffer

- In Mark 8:29-31 Jesus said to his disciples
 - *"Who do you say I am?"*
 - *Peter answered, "You are the Christ."*
- After hanging out 24/7 with Jesus for three years and seeing and hearing all that Jesus did and taught ... the disciples were convinced Jesus was THE Christ / THE Messiah
 - He wasn't just another king anointed with oil ... but one anointed with the Holy Spirit and of whom God the Father said
 - "This is my son in whom I am well pleased"

- And after the disciples affirmed him as THE Christ ... Jesus began to teach them

- ... that the Son of Man must **suffer** many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.
- Like David, he
 - Had nowhere to lay his head
 - His countrymen betrayed him
 - Those in power were seeking to kill him
- And Jesus knew this would be the case because the OT scriptures said the Christ will suffer⁴
- And yet his suffering was undeserved – he was completely innocent
 - 1 Peter 2:22 - *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*
 - Even Pontius Pilate declared him innocent and said *"I find no basis for a charge against him."*
- Like David, Jesus' path to the throne would be a painful one marked by innocent suffering
- The thing with Jesus is his suffering as **not** without reason
 - Christ's suffering was to **conquer** suffering
 - Jesus suffered so that you and I don't have to suffer
 - On the cross Jesus cried out to the Father ... "Why"
 - He said ... *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*
 - He did it so that you and I won't be forsaken by the Father
 - When he faced the Father he suffered ... so that when you and I face the Father we won't suffer
- Just as the messiah David was not abandoned by God, the Messiah Jesus was not abandoned by his Father in heaven
 - He was raised to life proving he had **conquered** sin and death
 - Which means when Jesus returns he will usher in a world without suffering
 - Where there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain
- **Application**
- What this shows us ... it is perfectly possible for God to be a good, loving and powerful God ... AND at the same time ... allow innocent suffering

⁴ Luke 24:26, 46 C.f. Is 53:3ff

- Because God allowed his very own son to suffer
- And he did it because he loved us
- He allowed the Christ to innocently suffer ... in order to conquer suffering for us

- It doesn't mean he will take away the suffering we are enduring now
 - The innocent suffering of David and Jesus make that clear

- But what it does teach us is ... when you and I are suffering
 - Whether it is suffering like David
 - Whether it's suffering of
 - Sickness
 - Financial stress
 - Relationship breakdown
 - Persecution for being a Christian

- Like David you can look to the promise of God and know that he will not abandon his chosen one
 - He didn't abandon David
 - He didn't abandon Jesus
 - He will not abandon those whose trust in Christ

- Even though what you are seeing and experiencing is the complete opposite ...
 - It's God's promises that
 - He will not abandon those who are in Christ
 - Jesus has conquered suffering
 - He will bring an end to our suffering when he returns
 - You will be strengthened in your suffering as David was in his

- So even if you don't know why God allows particular suffering in your life ... you can know for certain what the answer isn't
 - It's not because he doesn't love you or care about you
 - Not that he's detached or indifferent about our suffering
 - No – rather he takes our pain and suffering so seriously ... he was willing to endure pain and suffering beyond what we will ever experience ... in order to conquer it and take it away

- Let me strengthen you with the promise of God for those who are suffering in Romans 8

- **Romans 8:31-39** ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ... ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **PRAY**