

“The Fourth Deadly Sin”

August 20, 2017

1 Samuel 18:1-30

SI: Back in February I took a break from our study of book of 1 Samuel.

We're getting back into it today.

We stopped last time with the story of David and Goliath,

which is a good place to take a break

because that's when David stepped into public view for the first time.

But his success almost immediately brought him into conflict with King Saul.

The rest of the book of 1 Samuel is about that conflict.

Even though David was the Lord's anointed, the path to throne was hard.

In 1 Corinthians Paul says the events in the Old Testament happened as examples and were written down as warnings to Christians.

So let's look at the examples and warnings in this chapter and take them to heart.

INTRO: In my work as a pastor I've had people over the years ask me for biblical counsel on all sorts of temptations and weaknesses. People have asked me how to deal with anger, with fear and worry. With despondency. With bitterness. They've talked about struggles with alcohol, with sexual immorality, with debt from excessive spending, parenting problems, marriage problems. But I can't remember anyone ever talking to me about envy. Pastor, I've got terrible problem with envy, what should I do? I don't think anybody has ever said that.

That could mean we don't have a problem with envy.

But wise people through the ages have said—No, it's a common human problem. Aristotle devoted a whole chapter to envy.

He said envy is pain at the sight of the good fortunes of our peers. Erma Bombeck described envy this way:

“Lord, if you cannot make me thin, at least make my friends look fat.”

A famous English preacher said:

Envy! We find it in Cain, the first murderer, who killed his brother at the instigation of envy. We find it in the dark and gloomy and revengeful spirit of Saul, who, under the influence of envy, plotted for years the slaughter of David. We find it in King Ahab, when he pined for the vineyard of Naboth and shed his blood to gain it. Yea, it was envy that perpetrated that most atrocious crime ever planned in hell or executed on earth, on which the sun refused to look, and at which Nature gave signs of abhorrence by the rending of the rocks: I mean the crucifixion of Christ; for the evangelist tells us, that, for envy, the Jews delivered our Lord. Let us beware of envy!

So let's look at what we can learn about envy from the life of King Saul.

This is one of those warning stories Paul told us about.

And in doing this our goal is to get closer to Jesus Christ and love him more. We'll look at the chapter under three headings.

1. What envy is
2. What envy does
3. How to escape it

Before I go any farther, want to give credit where credit is due.

Sermon by Dr. Tim Keller on this passage was extremely helpful and I will be sharing many of his thoughts and observations.

MP#1 What envy is

Envy is a spiritual pathology with three elements—comparison, desire, resentment.
You compare your life with the lives of other people.
You want their life.
You resent them for the life they have.
You can see each of these three elements in Saul in verses 8 and 9

First, comparison.

“They have credited David with tens of thousands, but with me only thousands.”
Saul compares the praise David is getting with praise he is getting.
That’s the first element of envy.
Don’t just look at what other person has, immediately compare with what you have.
You can’t appreciate it for itself, immediately connect it.
David’s level of praise, my level of praise.
It’s never just: They have that without saying—and I don’t.
But that alone is not envy. Could just be a statement of fact.

Envy has a second component—desire. You want that other person’s life.

You’re not content with what you’ve got, you want what they’ve got.
Their looks, their popularity, their success, their house, their marriage.
So it’s impossible to really enjoy what you have anymore.
You see it in the comment that from that time on, Saul kept a jealous eye on David.
That’s how the NIV translates it, and that’s a good translation.
But the word jealous is not there in Hebrew. It literally says Saul eyed David.
Even in English, we know what that means. If you eye something, you want it.
Saul saw the admiration the commanders and the common soldiers had for David.
Saw the admiration of the people as David brought home victory after victory.
Didn’t just see it, he eyed it. The jealous look. The envious look.

So envy is first comparison, and then it’s wanting someone else’s life—
which makes it hard to really enjoy and appreciate your own life.

And then envy has a third component—you resent their life.

You begrudge them what they have. Don’t just want it, begrudge them having.
You feel like they don’t deserve it. Feel like you do deserve it.

So in a sense, envy is weeping when other people are rejoicing.

Bible says to rejoice with those who rejoice, envy weeps when others rejoice.
It actually pains you to see their success.

And there’s an even darker side, rejoicing when other people weep.

Why are stories about the downfall of other people so compelling?

Why are those the stories that sell, the ones you click on and read about—

whether it's the Hollywood rich and famous or even local news.
Because it makes the envious heart feel good to see them lose those things you
know you will never have.

Walker Percy was a Catholic novelist from Allison's hometown Covington, La.

He wrote a book of non-fiction called

Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self Help Book

It's really a satire of self-help books that tell people they are fundamentally good
and that they just have to believe in themselves.

One of these chapters is called "The Envious Self"

In the table of contents, here's how he summarizes that chapter.

Why it is that the Self—though it Professes to be Loving, Caring, to Prefer Peace to War,
Concord to Discord, Life to Death; to Wish Other Selves Well, not Ill—in fact Secretly Relishes
Wars and Rumors of War, News of Plane Crashes, Assassinations, Mass Murders, Obituaries, to
say nothing of Local News about Acquaintances Dropping Dead in the Street, Gossip about
Neighbors Getting in Fights or being Detected in Sexual Scandals, Embezzlements, and other
Disgraces

Being happy at other people's loss and misery,

being miserable at other people's happiness, begrudging them happiness.

That's envy. What does it do? Brings us to second point

MP#2 What envy does

As I mentioned at the beginning, most people don't think of envy as a big problem. If it came out it might be embarrassing.

But it usually operates in the background of our thinking. But look what does.

First, it robs you. Envy robs you of joy. I've already mentioned this.

It makes you less happy with what you've got.

You were fine with your house until you go and visit your friend's house, or maybe his lake house, which you don't have.

You were fine with your car until you ride in his new car.

The thing that makes it so tough is that you graduated from the same school.

You were in the same class. You're just as smart as he is. Grades just as good.

Why did he get all the breaks? You ought to have been the one with those things. You know exactly what I'm talking about. We've all done it.

If you got happier when you saw all the successes and possessions that your friends and peers and classmates have, well, you'd have lots to be happy for.

Because there are always some people you know who are doing well.

But instead you're discontent.

I titled this sermon The Fourth Deadly Sin.

You've probably heard the phrase: The Seven Deadly Sins.

That's a concept the Medieval Church developed that says there are particular sins that if you allow to take root, will lead to spiritual breakdown.

pride, greed, lust, envy (fourth), gluttony, wrath, and sloth

Interesting point about the deadly sins is that envy is unique.

All the other six feel good at first. Gluttony feels good at first.

Wrath feels good at first, venting your anger feels incredibly cathartic

Sloth feels good at first. You understand.

It's later after they get their hooks in you that they lose shine and you suffer.

But envy is the one deadly sin that makes you miserable from the start.

The very first time you are envious of that peer or classmate, it hurts, robs of joy.

Envy also grows. There's this description of Saul in his court and an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon him, he was prophesying in his house.

Your Bible version might say he was raving in his house. A better translation.

Word that can be translated prophesy. But has meaning of uncontrolled speech.

Saul is envious of David, afraid of him, watching him.

An evil spirit comes and Saul begins raving, tries to kill David. What's going on?

In Judges 9 there is a story where two groups of people who are under God's

judgment are suspicious and angry with each other.
It says an evil spirit from God came upon them, then they got really angry.
So angry they started fighting and killing each other, a terrible slaughter.

Here's the point:

Sometimes when God judges sin, does so by giving people more of what they want.

Saul was envious and afraid of David, evil spirit came and he got more envious.

It's the worst punishment for sin and it's the fairest.

When a person resists and resists the Holy Spirit, keeps sinning until God says—

Ok, here's your punishment. You get to do what you want. Romans 1.

Saul gets worse after this. Tries get David killed by giving dangerous assignments.

Uses his own daughter's love for David as a trap. We'll see this destroy him.

This doesn't just apply to envy.

Every time you are selfish instead of serving,
or when you pay back someone instead of forgiving,
or when you tell a half truth instead of the whole truth,
or when you worry instead of trust—here's the danger.

If you keep it up, it will grow. It will become a force.

At first you do envy, then envy does you.

Then there's one more thing envy does—it hides.

After Saul threw his spear at David, that should have been a wakeup call.

I knew a couple who had some conflict in their marriage and finally it got so bad
that one of them threw something. That was a wakeup call. We've got to change.

But Saul didn't say: This envy and fear and anger is killing me.

I've got to call Samuel, I've got to repent and get some godly counsel.

Instead he started hiding it.

He doesn't throw any more spears. Outwardly he appears to be ok with David.

Acts like he is glad to have him as a son-in-law. Instructs servants to say things.

But all that time he's plotting.

It eventually comes out. Why read first verse of chapter 19. Finally says: Kill him.

But all this time he tries to hide it.

When you move from being remorseful and ashamed of a sin to hiding it,
you're in a dangerous place. You think you're controlling the situation, but not.

It will come out in your behavior. With envy, it's usually throwing verbal spears.

Critical, hateful talk about people you envy. Why they are idiots, don't deserve.

I think I've covered that enough. Let's get to the good part.

MP#3 How you escape envy

We've looked at Saul, now let's look at his son, Jonathan.

This chapter starts right after David had killed Goliath.

Both Saul and Jonathan perceive that David is a special person—that God has anointed him and gifted him with abilities and leadership. They both expect that somehow David is going to be the next king.

We've seen how Saul responded to that realization.

Let's look again at how Jonathan responded.

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.⁴ Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

If David became the next king, who had most to lose, Saul or Jonathan?

Jonathan did. He was Saul's heir. He was next in line.

Clues in the story indicate that David was a good bit younger than Jonathan. Saul had experienced the kingship already for a number of years.

But if David became king, then Jonathan would never be king. So if anyone had a reason for envy, it was Jonathan.

He had the most to lose. He's the one really being overshadowed by David.

But in a stunning act he makes a covenant with David. Sworn personal relationship

And as a token of that covenant he gives him his robe, tunic, belt, bow, sword. The robe, the tunic—those were symbols of his position as crown prince.

He's saying: I recognize you are rightly next in line. Not me.

What about his weapons? His bow and sword?

I'm sure you've seen movies or read books with scenes like this.

When one man gives another man his weapons.

When hands over his sword hilt first, or in modern times his pistol—he saying: Command me.

There's a vulnerability in handing over your sword.

The man who takes it could kill you. He could take your life.

So when you do hand over your sword, not only saying: Command me.

Saying: I'll follow your orders even if I have to give my life.

In the ancient world crown princes didn't do this.

If you thought someone was a rival, you didn't put your sword in his hand.

You tried to put your sword into his hear.

Not Jonathan. He was believer. He was a follower of Yahweh.

He understood the Lord was bringing his salvation into the world through David.

And Jonathan knew that if he was going to participate in God's salvation

he would have to get off the throne. So he did it gladly.

So how do you apply this to yourself when it comes to envy? A few things. First, you have to love.

This is the most obvious thing the story tells us about how Jonathan triumphed over envy. He loved David. Twice says he loved him as his own self, own soul. A lot of time what we call love for a person is more love for the enhancement they give us.

You might see someone who is popular, wealthy, beautiful or connected and you're attracted to that person in terms of friendship or romance.

You think you love that person—but what you mostly love is being attached to him or to her for your own enhancement.

So you're not envious of your friend with the boat and the lake house because he's your friend and you get to hang out there and enjoy all those benefits.

But there's still an underlying envy. Sometimes, closer you get, more feel it.

True love doesn't envy. 1 Cor 13.

True love is finding your happiness in someone else's happiness.

You can't be happy unless that other person is happy and flourishing.

Tim Keller told a sweet story in his sermon from his first pastorate, Virginia.

Preached on this theme, a 16 year old girl came up to him after.

She had been in local beauty pageant, friend won, she came in third.

Let me get this straight. If I really loved my friend, I would be as happy for her winning as I would be if I myself won. He said: Yes. She said: That's hard.

So where's the power to love like this? Look at Jonathan one more time.

He emptied himself of his position, he took off his royal robe, he lowered himself in order to lift up someone he loved. Does that remind you of anybody?

Of course it does. That's what Jesus did.

We talk about Jesus being the true David. He's also the true Jonathan.

God the Son said to God the Father: I don't want to be the only Son of God in universe. I love them so much, I want them to know the happiness I have.

I want to save sinful, undeserving men and women and boys and girls so they can be sons of God and co-heirs with me in my eternal kingdom.

What did he do to accomplish that? He laid aside his majesty.

He put his sword into our hands and we killed him with it.

He accepted that gladly because he knew that only by his death could our sins be atoned for. Only by that could we inherit life.

And all those blessing come to us freely by God's grace through faith in Jesus.
We get forgiveness and family and happiness and life and inheritance.

To the degree that good new sinks down into your heart,
to that degree you'll be delivered from envy.

I've got great things I don't deserve.

When we envy someone we're always saying—he doesn't deserve that.

He doesn't deserve that promotion. He's incompetent. He kisses bosses rear end.
Maybe he doesn't. But you don't deserve God's forgiveness and love.

You don't deserve eternal life.

And when you think about that life and what you will inherit—

How can you envy the little bits of money and wealth and success the people
you know have for a short time here and now.

You're going to inherit a kingdom.

You're going to live and reign with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth.

You're going to have a glorified body that's strong and beautiful—
and mind that's sharp as a tack and that only thinks noble thoughts.

And you're going to enjoy, for all eternity the abundance of God's grace
that you don't deserve.

How did Jonathan do to participate in God's salvation.

He loved David. He entered into a covenant relationship with him.

He got off the throne and said, here's my life. Command me.

That's what you have to do.

You have to love the man from Bethlehem.

Enter into a covenant relationship with him.

And say: Jesus, here's my life. Command me.

Then trust him where he leads you, and be content with what he gives you.

That's the path to joy and freedom from envy.