

23. Closer and further

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As followers of Jesus Christ, the Lord provides the paths we need to walk, however we can choose which direction we want to go each and every day. Our all-powerful and all-knowing God would never, ever force His way onto us. He honors our decisions – good or bad. Our enemy satan and his cohort demons would do anything for us to deviate from the walk with God by using temptations, threats, manipulations, deceptions, depressions, and much more. But he cannot make us do anything. With our own decisions, either we get closer to the Lord or we get further away from Him.

Again, we see 2 main characters in our study – king Saul who strays away from the Lord each passing day and David who is after God’s own heart and chooses to draw closer to the Lord each day. I believe that the Lord is going to speak to all of us to understand His desires that we should honor.

A. MARRY MY DAUGHTER

1 Samuel 18:17-19 Then Saul said to David, “Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord’s battles.” For Saul thought, “Let my hand not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” 18 So David said to Saul, “Who am I, and what is my life or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?” 19 But it happened at the time when Merab, Saul’s daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife.

Who has an interpretation of this section for me?

It has been said, “Faith is living without scheming,” but Saul was better at scheming than trusting God. If Saul disobeyed the Lord, he always had a ready excuse to get himself out of trouble. And if he felt any challenge from people to his throne, he could figure out ways to eliminate them. Possessed by anger and envy, and determined to hold on to his crown, Saul decided that young David had to be killed.

Saul had promised to give one of his daughters in marriage to the man who killed Goliath, but this promise had not yet been fulfilled. The fact that David had killed Goliath wasn’t enough, because Saul now expected David to “fight the battles of the Lord” in order to gain his wife, Saul’s eldest daughter, Merab. Of course, the king was hoping that David would be killed during one of those battles, and then Saul would lose his enemy but still have his daughter.

This plan might be smart for the carnal minded people, but God would not honor Saul’s manipulation. Manipulation uses hidden agendas and concealed motives. It is sneaky and secretive. Manipulation tries to maneuver people and events to accomplish a hidden agenda that is completely selfish to oneself. The Lord will never bless it.

The Bible talks a lot about manipulation. Of course, the ultimate manipulator is satan himself. He was the worship archangel in heaven before the fall.

Isaiah 14:12-15 “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! 13 For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will

exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' 15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.

Then, he manipulated 1/3 of the angels in heaven according to Revelation 12:
Revelation 12:3-4a And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

Though this is recorded in the middle of the Book of Revelation, the rebellion of the fallen angels had to happen between day 1 and before day 6 of the Creation Week.

After that, he manipulated Eve and Adam. He unsuccessfully tried to manipulate the Son of the Living God Jesus while He was in the wilderness 40 days and nights. In my opinion, all the unbelievers in history and future are deceived and manipulated by him and they choose to believe satan over God. Satan will be locked up in the bottomless pit for 1000 years during the Millennium period. After that 1000 years, he will be released so that he can deceive and manipulate mankind one last time, then, he will be thrown into the lake of fire once and for all.

Revelation 20:7-10 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. 9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. 10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

As long as we try to manipulate others to do what we want, we are not following the will of God, even in the ministries. Nothing wrong with letting people know the needs of the ministry, but using guilt and gimmicks doesn't please the Lord. Many crooked Bible teachers and pastors are accountable to the Lord for what they have done on earth.

1 Thessalonians 4:6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

On the contrary to this manipulative king Saul, the question "Who am I?" shows David's humble heart. He was nationally famous. All Israel loved him. All Saul's staff loved him. The crown prince Jonathan loved him. All over Israel, women sang and danced in his honor. Yet when the hand of Merab is offered to David, he doesn't think, "Well, this is about time. I'm glad someone noticed."

B. MARRY MY ANOTHER DAUGHTER WHO WILL SNARE YOU

1 Samuel 18:20-25 Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. 21 So Saul said, "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall be my son-in-law today." 22 And Saul commanded his servants, "Communicate with

David secretly, and say, 'Look, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now therefore, become the king's son-in-law.' " 23 So Saul's servants spoke those words in the hearing of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing I am a poor and lightly esteemed man?" 24 And the servants of Saul told him, saying, "In this manner David spoke." 25 Then Saul said, "Thus you shall say to David: 'The king does not desire any dowry but one hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king's enemies.' " But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

Michal must have been quite a daughter to Saul. He was glad that she wanted to marry David, because she would be a snare to him.

In that day, a dowry was required whenever a man married. The dowry would be paid to the bride's father, and the more important and prestigious the bride and her family, the higher the dowry price would be. The purpose of the dowry was twofold. First, it compensated the bride's family for the loss of a family "worker." Second, the father held a dowry as life insurance or "alimony in advance." That is, if the husband died or divorced his wife, and she had to go back to her father's household, there would be something to support her. Too bad we didn't have this custom before our daughter got married.

Getting Philistines' foreskins was designed to be difficult, because the Philistines would obviously have to be dead. And it was designed to make the Philistines completely outraged at David, because from their perspective, not only were their men killed, but their dead bodies were desecrated.

To Saul, this is a perfect way to go against David. If he gets killed by the Philistines, that is great. If he comes back with the foreskins of the Philistines, David would have a wife who would be a snare to him. Another manipulation from Saul.

C. KING'S NEW SON-IN-LAW

1 Samuel 18:26-30 So when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to become the king's son-in-law. Now the days had not expired; 27 therefore David arose and went, he and his men, and killed two hundred men of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full count to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife. 28 Thus Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him; 29 and Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul became David's enemy continually. 30 Then the princes of the Philistines went out to war. And so it was, whenever they went out, that David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

How tragic! So Saul became David's enemy continually. He knew that the Lord was with David, yet because Saul was making himself the enemy of the Lord, he was also the enemy of David. It didn't have to be like this, but Saul's heart was set on this destructive course.

While Saul was going further and further away from the Lord, David was getting closer to the Lord by being obedient to Him and behaving wisely in front of others so that God alone gets the glory.

With that in mind, we need to think about drawing near to the Lord like David did: *James 4:8-10 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.* James 4:8-10 is often called the NT “2 Chronicles 7:14 promise for the church,” because it echoes the OT promise that God revives believers who come to Him in humility, prayer, and repentance.

The vast majority of believers have settled for what they thought is a happy medium between sold-out commitment to God and a worldly lifestyle. In reality, they have become lukewarm Christians. I see this pattern happening more and more among the 21st century church congregation unfortunately.

James makes the choice clear: Believers who have traded their closeness to God for friendship with the world must lay aside their sin and humbly plead for grace. The Spirit of God jealously desires our deepest affections. Our wicked ways must be completely abandoned in order for Him to bless us with revival.

Drawing near to God involves 2 things: Seeking expresses the action, while drawing near expresses the heart attitude. Jesus taught that coming close to God is life’s top priority – the one thing that undergirds everything else: “*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” in Matthew 6:33.

Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, God yearns to be reunited with His wayward children. God loves us beyond description, and He wants our relationship to be restored. The Scriptures teach that this is why God the Father waits so patiently for our response – He does not want anyone to perish, so instead He waits for more of us to draw near.

James 4 suggests that God is ready to open His arms and restore those who return to Him. Drawing near is the decision to come back into the life of God. It is a restoration of what we were designed to enjoy forever.

Even now, despite the darkness of human sin all around us, God is never far away. And the experience of God’s nearness is not out of reach. He is present right here and now, ready to revive us again. Our responsibility is to draw near to Him in humility, prayer, and repentance, and God will respond to our move to Him.

To draw near to our God, I see 3 things we must have:

1) A True Heart – We must first draw near “with a sincere heart.” The word “sincere” means true or dependable. It is more than simple sincerity, though it includes this. Many religious people come to God in sincerity, but not in truth. Our God demands both.

2) A Confident Faith – The second condition of drawing near to God is full confidence of faith, because without faith it is impossible to please Him.

3) A Clean Conscience – We can only come to God in sincerity of faith if our hearts have been sprinkled clean. The word “sprinkle” speaks of the purging of our hearts from an evil conscience. In Christ, the believer’s conscience has already been cleansed of guilt. When a sinner comes to Jesus and receives salvation, guilt is removed.

Sometimes we as believers still experience guilty feelings over our past because we do not fully realize the extent of our cleansing. But we must believe that He who died on the cross on our behalf has wiped away our sins.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) If you have to manipulate others to get things done, it is NOT of God. Wait upon Him and He will show you the way for you to lead others with honesty and truth.

2) We should be closer to the Lord each day. If we haven't, we have backslidden.