

“The Folly of Being a Man-pleaser”
2 Samuel 1:1-16
(Preached a Trinity, July 8, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verse 1** opens with, “Now it came about after the death of Saul.” We are immediately told that this book is a continuation of the previous. Saul has died in battle and while Israel was at war with the Philistines, David was at war with the Amalekites who had attacked and burned Ziklag. David defeated the Amalekites and rescued those who had been carried off as plunder. After the victory David returned to Ziklag. This account begins after David had been at Ziklag for two days. Israel is now without a king, but at this point David did not know it.
2. On the third day an Amalekite man arrived at the city in haste. On one hand, you might expect him to be immediately killed. These were the people David had just defeated in war. But there were several things about him that caused David take notice.
His demeanor, his story, and the items in his possession.
3. He was obviously in deep grief and despair. His clothes were torn and dust had been tossed in his hair – classic signs of grief in the ancient world. He fell at the feet of David paying homage and respect. We are given little information about the Amalekite. Which side was he fighting on? He surely knew and recognized Saul and Jonathan, but was he fighting with them or against them? Most likely, he was a sojourner among the Israelites and was conscripted to fight with them. This implies he might have been a deserter.
4. David, of course, was interested in hearing what this man had to say. Remember the context of what has taken place. David had marched all the way to the front line with the Philistine king, Achish and the Philistine army, but the Philistine commanders insisted that David should not be allowed to march with them into battle against Israel. David then returned to Ziklag where he went to war with the Amalekites. David was sincerely interested in how the war between Israel and the Philistines had gone.
5. David inquires, “Where are you from?” The Amalekite claims to have come from the battlefield, from the camp of Israel.
Now David is really interested. “How did things go in the Philistine/Israeli war?”
The man began to spin a yarn about the battle with the Philistines. He told David Saul and Jonathan were dead and that he arrived at the side of Saul who was in agony from his wounds. Claiming to heed the plea of Saul and as a great act of mercy and compassion, he ended Saul's suffering.
6. There is little doubt the man had been there and had witnessed the death of Saul. But there is little truth in the account of his involvement in taking the life of Saul. The author wants to see the discrepancy. We are told in the previous chapter that Saul had taken his own life.
Seeing Saul dead, the Amalekite quickly removed his crown and bracelet and hid them away and pondered what he should do with them. That's when he came up with this bold idea of taking them to David for his personal gain.

7. The young man was a classic opportunist and man-pleaser. His heart was full of deceit and deception. His outer signs of grief and mourning in no way reflected his heart. He surmised the situation and considered how he might best gain the praise and approval of David. Perhaps he had thoughts of occupying a place of leadership in David's upcoming regime.
- a. He probably knew that David had been fleeing from Saul—this was common knowledge. Perhaps he presumed that Saul was David's enemy; that David would receive word of his death as good news.
2 Samuel 4:10 NAU - "when one told me, saying, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for *his* news."
 - b. And besides, what could be better than his claim of showing mercy to the fallen king and then at personal risk deliver Saul's crown and bracelet to David. It seemed like a flawless plan.
8. The young man would have expected praise from David for his kindness to Saul and gratitude for delivering the crown to David, perhaps an act of recognizing David's ascent to the throne. He had traveled over 80 miles, a journey lasting several days. He expected praise and appreciation from David and some form of reward. What he did not expect was what followed.
2 Samuel 1:14-16 NAU - "Then David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?" ¹⁵ And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, cut him down." So he struck him and he died. ¹⁶ David said to him, "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD'S anointed.'"
9. He expected the reward of praise from David. Instead he received the reward of death.
2 Samuel 4:10 NAU - "when one told me, saying, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for *his* news."
10. What we should see in this account is the folly of being a man-pleaser. It is an important subject for us because there is a bit of this in all of us. We naturally desire the approval of others, but it can quickly fall into the realm of sin. Tonight, I'll give some reasons why it foolish to be a man-pleaser and then I'll give the cure for such behavior.
- I. Why is it folly to be a man-pleaser?
- A. It is folly because it exposes sinful pride
 1. The man-pleaser is really out to please himself. He will say or do whatever necessary to gain control over others through deceit and manipulation. The ultimate cause is a selfish love of self.
 2. Social media can be a good way of interacting with others. But it can also be a means of attracting attention and gaining the favor of others. It can be a display of sinful pride—a sin that few people will own for themselves. People want others to see how great their life is. They want to write compelling posts; they want the most friends. They want others to hear their opinions. They want to get the most views and the most likes.
Galatians 5:26 ESV - "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."
κενόδοξος – “being proud without any good reason for it.

3. We all want others to hold us in high esteem. It is sinful when we focus inordinate attention upon gaining it.
We'll find ourselves saying and doing those things that will gain the greatest favor from others.
- B. It is folly because it is dishonest
1. The man-pleaser uses flattering lips to persuade and win the affections of men. But it is hypocritical. The man-pleaser is mostly interested in himself. He pretends to be concerned about others but it is mere pretense.
 - a. The flatterer is just using people for his own personal gain
 - b. This Amalekite cared little for Saul or Jonathan. His show of grief was only a show. And he cared little for David. What he cared about was what David could do for him. He would use any means to gain David's approval
Proverbs 26:28 NAU - "A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin."
 2. He never suspected that his flattery would bring upon him David's condemnation which would lead to his execution.
 3. In like manner, few man-pleasers imagine that their flattering lips are bringing them under God's condemnation
Psalms 12:2-4 NAU - "they speak falsehood to one another; With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak. ³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The tongue that speaks great things; ⁴ Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"
- C. It is folly because it presumes to know *how* to gain the approval of others
1. Being a man-pleaser rests upon subjective information. We can only presume to know what will impress the other person. It's based on the presumption that others think just like we do.
The Amalekite had to rely on presumptions about David. He presumed David would be pleased by his actions toward Saul and pleased with the delivery of Saul's crown.
 2. The Amalekite felt justified in taking Saul's life and he presumed David would be just as likely to set aside the Law of God if it rested upon a high principle. He presumed that David's thinking was just like his. He judged David wrongly.
 3. Being a man-pleaser rests upon the idea that every man has his price and every woman has her price. It only remains to determine what the price is. The man-pleaser sets out to buy the esteem of others.
But how can we know the price?
 4. Even if you know how to gain the favor of a particular individual, human beings are fickle and ever-changing. What may please us today may not meet our approval tomorrow. How can the man-pleaser know the proper course to gain approval when the price is ever-changing?

- II. What is the cure of being a man-pleaser?
- A. It demands a heart of honesty
1. We need to be what we are before all men. We must resist trying to be something we are not in order to gain the applause of men.
 2. This is wise counsel to pastors. There is always a temptation to imitate other preachers—to try to preach like the latest celebrity preacher rather than simply seeking to be who he is, remembering his chief audience is God. There is also the danger of allowing the fear of man to affect what we say.
 3. The Amalekite completely fabricated his story. There was little truth in it.
- B. It demands the desire to please God above all else
1. The Amalekite completely disregarded the Law of God. He had zero regard for the honor of God. Notice David's words:
2 Samuel 1:14 NAU - "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?"
 - a. To what was David referring? He was speaking of the fear of God.
 - b. The Amalekite had no fear of God.
 2. God is our audience – His opinions are ultimately the only ones that matter.
 4. If we are faithful to Christ and His Word then we can be at peace with both praise and criticism.
 5. Every Christian must guard against being a man pleaser
 We cannot depend upon the opinions of others. The only opinion that ultimately counts is God's.
Acts 5:29 NAU - "We must obey God rather than men."
1 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU - "But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. ⁴ For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord."
 6. What does God think of your life? It is good that men have a high opinion of you but this is not as important as what God thinks.
- C. Pleasing God does not rely upon subjective feelings
1. We don't have to guess what pleases God. His Word provides for us the perfect unchanging standard.
 2. The Amalekite failed to recognize that David did not function according to the ever-changing, subjective opinions of man but upon the unchanging law of God.
 - a. He was like many in our day that think God's Law is subject to our approval, that it can be twisted based upon our subjective reasoning. He felt that there are times the Law can be set aside. He admitted to killing Saul, but felt David would justify and praise him for doing it.
2 Samuel 1:10 NAU - "So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that he could not live after he had fallen."

- b. We must not fail to see also that the Amalekite's story was a lie. Saul fell upon his own sword. It was a deception designed to gain the respect and approval of David. The Amalekite saw deception as justified as long as it served a valid purpose.
- c. David saw him as a lying murderer. He claimed to be a murder and David judged him as a murderer.

2 Samuel 1:14-16 NAU - "Then David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?" ¹⁵ And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, cut him down." So he struck him and he died. ¹⁶ David said to him, "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD'S anointed.'"

Conclusion:

1. The actions of the man-pleaser are a vain delusion. To give priority to gaining the favor of man is to fail to recognize our greatest need – to have the pleasure of God.
2. We must understand, God's pleasure cannot be purchased. God is uninterested in vain attempts at gaining His favor.
3. We have no need to flatter God or pretend to be something we are not. God knows us better than we know ourselves.
4. The only way we can approach God is to humble ourselves under Christ.
5. One more important thing to consider. David was not taken in by the man-pleaser. As God's people we must be interested in truth and that which is genuine.

Paul exhorts us:

Philippians 4:8 NAU - "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

6. The heart of the wicked man can never understand the heart of God's people.
 - A. We are not interested in the ways of this world. We are not interested in gaining the approval of the people of this world.
 - B. The lost man can't understand why his off-color joke doesn't win our admiring laughter. The man-pleaser works from the false presumption that the things that please him will please others as well.
 - C. This would lead to the martyrdom of Faithful in Pilgrim's Progress

"The town itself was in a hubbub about them, and that for several reasons: First, the pilgrims were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any that traded in that fair. Secondly, And as they wondered at their apparel, so they did likewise at their speech; for few could understand what they said. Thirdly, but that which did not a little amuse the merchandisers was, that these pilgrims set very light by all their wares. They cared no so much as to look upon them; and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears and cry, Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and look upwards." ¹

¹ Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, a Division of Baker Book House, Page 82.