

2 Samuel 1:17-27

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[0 : 0 0] And then we're going to read 2 Samuel chapter 1, verse 17 to 27, which is on page 304. You should have found it in your Bible. And Vanessa is going to come and read for us in a moment.

David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bone. It is written in the book of Jasher.

A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel. How the mighty have fallen. Tell it not in Gath.

Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon. Lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad. Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice. Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain.

May no showers fall on your terraced fields. For there the shield of the mighty one was despised. The shield of Saul no longer rubbed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back.

[1 : 0 9] The sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. Saul and Jonathan. In life they were loved and admired. And in death they were not parted.

They were swifter than eagles. They were stronger than lions. Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul. Who clothed you in scarlet and finery.

Who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. How the mighty have fallen in battle. Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother.

You were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women. How the mighty have fallen. The weapons of war have perished.

Thanks, Vanessa. Now, like I mentioned with the children, we were looking last week at the narrative of that story of David receiving news from the Amalekite escapee that Saul and Jonathan were dead.

[2 : 1 5] And we looked at how Jesus is really the fallen Messiah King who forgives our sins. Now, this week's passage is set at exactly the same time.

And here it is David writing a sad song as he hears the news of Saul and Jonathan's death. If you look down at verse 17, you'll see that there is a special word that the Bible uses for sad song.

It's the word lament. Lament. In the Hebrew, the word lament comes twice in that verse. It literally reads, David lamented with his lamentation or David was sad with his sad song, you might say.

But the important thing to notice for us as we set out this morning is that this sad song that David is singing is not just a sad song for him in this situation.

If you look down at verse 18, you'll see this sad song is to be taught to the people so that they could sing along too. David orders it, you notice. He ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the birth.

[3 : 17] He even includes it in a special book, the book of Jashar for future generations as well. Now, I suggest to you that that's really important as we set out this morning, because it means that this is not only a lament for David at this particular point in history, but it is also, if you like, a model lament.

A model sad song for the people of Judah at that time, but also for them to sing at different points in their future.

David's assumption here, which is a right one, isn't it? And we know it's right. David's assumption here is that Saul dying is not going to be the only sad thing that God's people face.

And God's people need sad songs to sing. Now, when it comes to learning the song, it's actually quite easy because the theme of the song is summarized in a catchy line, which gets repeated three times.

It's there in verse 19, in verse 25 and in verse 27. So that if you're too young to pick up the rest of the song, you might have at least been able to pick up this line, how the mighty have fallen.

[4 : 25] That's the lament, how the mighty have fallen. Now, I know that it's not always the case that you follow sermons all the way through.

I know this is a big revelation to you. You may not know that I know this, but I know that your attention sometimes drifts off. So in order just to make sure that you are following along this morning, I want us together, every time we see that on the screen, that we read it aloud together.

How the mighty have fallen. So you fell at the first hurdle. How the mighty have fallen. And it gets repeated in this song, and it's going to get repeated through our sermon, and so that you can say it with me, and I can know that you're still listening, and we can learn that line.

Now, if the mighty falling is the repeated theme, then the title is there in verse 19. Look down at verse 19. A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel.

Now, it's a clever line to title the song, because the word gazelle here is really also the word for glory. Some translations actually put, your glory lies slain. And David's image here is like Saul being like a stag, looking strong on a hill in the distance, a mighty stag, glorious, impressive even, who has now been shot down, lying dead.

[5 : 47] And David sings, how the mighty have fallen. Now, what David does in the rest of the song is essentially give us five falls, if you like, five pictures of the mighty falling.

And I'm just going to go through them briefly with you, and then come to consider about how this might apply for us. So the first fall is sin winning. Sin winning.

This is what David means in verse 20 when he sings, tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon. Gath and Ashkelon were Philistine cities, and David knows, doesn't he, because Saul is dead, there's going to be singing in Gath and Ashkelon.

The daughters of the Philistines will be rejoicing, he says. And in case you haven't got the message, in the last line of verse 20, he calls the Philistines the uncircumcised. Here's the picture.

It is that sin pictured by God's enemies have won. The wicked are the winners. See, it's difficult for us to see the force of this, but for Saul and Jonathan to die in battle, it's not just a kind of strategic loss for God's people, but it is seemingly a defeat for God and his covenant people.

[7 : 00] God has promised to be with his people, to rule with them and reign with them. And here, Saul and Jonathan are cut down dead. Israel are God's special people, living in the land that he's given them, where he promised he would bless them, where he met with them in the tabernacle while offerings for forgiveness were made.

And the Philistines were opposed to all of that. And they win. They hated God. They hated his people. They wanted them out of the land and they won the battle.

And David is just repulsed by that thought that in Gath and Ashkelon, they're going to be singing songs of victory. Don't tell them, says David. Don't tell them.

Don't publish it there. We don't want them singing because sin is one, he says. Instead, he sings this sad song. Lament with me, he says. Weep with me.

Because the wicked have won. Let me tell you, I think it's really important that we learn to sing that kind of song together. You know, we live in a part of the world, don't we, where church buildings are getting turned into mosques or temples, where Islam seems to be advancing, the Christian church is retreating.

[8 : 12] And actually, the truth is that that sort of news should make you lament. We should sing a sad song about it. We shouldn't ignore it. We shouldn't get frustrated by it. We shouldn't presume that God has somehow lost the plot because of it.

We shouldn't assume that. But we should lament it. Tell it not in Gath. Sing it not in Ashkelon. We live also, don't we, in a world where people shoot the innocent and take them captive, where retaliation leads to hospitals being bombed and innocent people dying.

We live in a world where nations go to war with one another, where people are treated appallingly just because of the color of their skin or the country they're from or even just their social class. And we should lament that as well.

We look at our world and we say, well, do you know what? It seems like sin is winning. Tell it not in Gath. Sing it not in Ashkelon. Actually, it's much more personal than that, isn't it? I think if we're really honest, it often seems to me that sin wins not only out there, but often in here too.

Doesn't it seem like that to you? So often sin seems to win in my day to day. Angry outbursts, lustful thoughts, cold-heartedness towards the needs of others, lovelessness in my relationship with the Lord.

[9 : 26] We need sad songs, don't we? Because at times sin seems to win. And if we don't learn how to lament at that, we won't really know how to live the Christian life because the truth is there will be times in your Christian life when you shock yourself.

You'll be shocked at what you're capable of. You'll be shocked at the thoughts that go through your mind. You'll be shocked at the actions that you do. You'll be surprised that sins that you thought you'd moved past long ago still draw you in.

Things that you judged others for doing, you find yourself doing. Our sin is won. At times the Philistines will win. Even if in the end you know they're going to be defeated, you and I better learn how to lament it.

Because if all the songs that we know are ones of big promises and great victories, then we'll get lost in life. We won't know how to turn to the Lord when it seems like sin is winning.

Sin has won today, says David, and so he laments. The Philistines are partying about it. So he says, how the mighty have fallen. And then you go, almost.

[10 : 30] How the mighty have fallen. Secondly, strong places breaking. Strong places breaking. If you're going to fight a battle, the best place to go do it is up a hill, right?

That way your enemies have to walk up the hill in order to fight you. And they're going to be out of breath, even before they get a chance to wave their sword at you. And in 1 Samuel 31, we are told that when the Philistines started to win the battle against the Israelites, they fled up Mount Gilboa.

And that's a pretty good place to run to. It should have been easy to defend. But it wasn't. And Saul and Jonathan were killed there. In the place where they should have found refuge, instead, they were killed.

It should have been a place to wash down his shield and to oil it. But instead, he was there defeated. And so David sings in verse 21 that Mount Gilboa shouldn't get the rain anymore. Don't rain on Gilboa anymore.

In the footnote, it shouldn't be a place where the fields of offerings are grown. Because it let the king down. He ran there for safety and it didn't work. Strong things broke, says David.

[11 : 34] Again, it's not hard to see how we can sing that too as well. You know, we're not fighting a war with the Philistines, are we? But still life is hard. And like Saul, often the places that we run to for safety let us down, don't they?

Healthcare, financial investments, a good education, a uni place, a strong family, a good job, a new country even. All of those high grounds can and will eventually let you down.

And you and I have to learn to lament that. Because sometimes Mount Gilboa will let you down. Sometimes the family will break up. Sometimes parents will separate. Sometimes redundancy will come.

Sometimes health will fail. And we will have to learn to sing how the mighty have fallen. The third fall in the song is human strength failing.

In verses 22 to 23, David tells you how strong Saul and Jonathan were. From the blood of the slain and from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back.

[12 : 36] The sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and admired. And in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles. They were stronger than lions.

We're told that Jonathan was a master archer, fearless, even in the face of the mighty. In 1 Samuel chapter 14, there's a story of Jonathan single-handedly taking on the Philistines and winning.

Saul is no wimp either. His sword has done a lot of damage. Besides, they are stronger than lions and swifter than eagles, says David in verse 23. But still, for all of that power and might, they are killed.

In death they were not parted, we are told. Human strength was just not enough and they died. And again, it's not hard, is it, for us to see that that is still true.

That you and I must face the fact. In fact, more than just facing the fact, we need to learn to lament the fact that our strength will not be enough for us.

[13 : 36] Even if you're young and strong like Jonathan, still you need to know a sad song. Because there will be a time when your strength will run out. If you've not already found it, then one day it will find you, all of us.

If your hope for the future is in your fitness or in your brains or your skill or any other human strength, you are doomed because David will tell you that human strength in the end fails.

Let me give you an amazing example in some ways. This is the bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger in his prime. Some of you might remember Arnold Schwarzenegger and his movies. This is him in his prime.

This is him more recently. And we say, how the mighty have fallen. Human strength gives way. The fourth fall here is the fact that riches are vanishing.

Riches are vanishing. In verse 24, David turns his attention specifically to the daughters of Israel. Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.

[14 : 42] His point is that particularly the daughters of Israel should weep because the life of easy money is over. It's gone. While Saul was king, the nation prospered and they could wear fine scarlet clothes and ornaments of gold.

But now Saul is dead. Jonathan is dead. There's no promise of that anymore. The flow of money will stop. Their husbands weren't returning from battle. Their king was not returning.

So the flow of money will stop and they should weep instead. Apparently in 1929, the Wall Street financial crash started what became the Great Depression. In the years before, people had thought that the economy would just continue to grow and grow and grow.

Confidence was really high. People borrowed lots of money, traded lots of money on the stock market, and pretty much in two days, they lost everything. Unemployment soared. The rich became poor.

And the only event in history that's come anywhere near that is what? The economic slump caused by COVID-19. We should know this, right?

[15 : 46] Riches vanish. Money lets you down. And the truth is, how the mighty have fallen.

The final fall in the song, I think is probably the saddest. It's friendship's end. Friendship's end. Look down at verse 26. I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother. For you were very dear to me.

Your love for me was wonderful. More wonderful than that of women. Well, Samuel tells us the story of David and Jonathan's friendship. And here, David laments that it is over. Noting that the companionship of Jonathan was better than that of any of his wives.

Not because Jonathan and David were in a comparable relationship. This is not a plug for gay relationships. Don't read that into it at all. That's not what's going on. Rather, the point is that David's marriages, I think, largely were for accomplishing power and influence.

And the friendship of Jonathan stood out against all of that. Here was my soulmate, my closest friend, my dear companion, who lies dead.

[16 : 51] It's gone. David is distressed by that. Death has ended his friendship. And it still does, doesn't it? And many of us in this room know exactly what that feels like.

So much so that while friendships are a great blessing, something that we should treasure and make time for, Well, still in the end, they will let us down. They will come to nothing. Even the strongest friendships fail.

Why? Well, because how the mighty have fallen. Now, that's where David's song ends. Sin winning, strong places breaking, human strength failing, riches vanishing, and friendships ending.

Now, this is a proper sad song. There's no last minute key change in David's song. There's no way. Woo! Don't worry. It's all going to be okay in the end. Instead, this is a proper lament.

This is a proper sad song from beginning to end. David stares the darkness of the situation right in the face, and he sings about it, realizing that everything that he leans on, whoever or whatever it is, will at some point let him down.

[17 : 58] And that time is now, says David. Now, let me ask you, before we go any further this morning, do you know what it's like to feel that?

To sing a song like this? To sing a song like this. I think perhaps most of us do, don't we? We know what it's like to fall into sin. We know what it's like when a friend dies.

We know what it's like when our health fails. We know what it's like when our hopes and our dreams for the future evaporate. We know what it's like when life takes an unexpected turn for the worst. And the truth is, like we started with this morning, you and I need to know some sad songs.

Because there will be times when a sad song is the most appropriate thing for us to sing. But there's more to say than just that. Because if you take another look at that list with me, just imagine for a moment what the opposite of each of those things would be.

You know, if this is, if you like, if this is the sort of the archetype sad song, this is the sad song of what we should learn because this is what sadness looks like. Then what does the opposite of these five falls look like?

[19 : 03] Well, instead of sin winning, sin would be defeated. Wickedness would lose. It would be taken away and destroyed. There's no singing in the streets of Gath, not because they haven't heard that sin's won, but because sin has been defeated.

It's been crushed. The opposite of strong places breaking would be a fortress being built. Some that we could turn to and rely on that wouldn't be taken away from us.

Something better than Gilboa. A place with a shield that won't let you down. Protection that will hold us in the face of death and sin. What's the opposite of human strength failing?

Divine strength prevailing. That's what it is. Where someone stronger than us, God himself with a power that doesn't fail, keeps going where we give up. Where our strength goes, his might continues.

What's the opposite of riches vanishing? Well, could you imagine a treasure that lasts? Lasting treasure. Something of such great value that it will outlast stock market crashes, global pandemics.

[20 : 07] Something more solid than a bank. Somewhere where moths can't eat it. Where rust doesn't destroy it. Where thieves can't break in and steal it. That would be lasting treasure, wouldn't it? The opposite of friendships that end would be some kind of eternal friend.

Can you imagine that? An eternal, close, unbreakable friendship. Someone who won't abandon you even in death. Someone who would stick closer to you than a brother.

Even when you're at your worst and your weakest. Now, of course, if that is the archetype of a sad song, the opposite is joy, right?

True joy. Deep, lasting joy. You know, the opposite of the template of sadness is the template of joy itself. And you know what I've done, don't you?

You can see what I've done. I've painted for you a picture of who? Jesus Christ. You know, you've seen already, but if you jump forward in history, a thousand years after King David, you meet King Jesus.

[21 : 10] King of God's heavenly kingdom, mightier and greater than either Saul or David. He enters this sad world, and he too dies on a hill. But not on Mount Gilboa, where the mighty have fallen, but at Calvary.

Where it looked for a moment like sin had won again. But when human strength was failing, it turned out that divine strength was prevailing. Jesus was victorious over death and sin, bearing all the judgment and wrath that our sins deserved, and freeing us from its power and its penalty.

There on the cross, Jesus builds a fortress, a place where anyone at any time can run to. A place where you'll find hope and security. Where you'll not be treated by your moral performance.

Or your religiosity. But where God and his grace and his mercy will meet you with forgiveness and shelter and hope and a future. Then again, divine strength prevails as the Spirit raises Jesus from the dead and promises eternal life with him.

Amazingly, death, which spelt the fall of Saul, spells victory for Jesus Christ. Now let me tell you that the point of this is not trust in Jesus and all your sadness will be over.

[22 : 27] That is not the point. If you hear someone telling you, trust in Jesus and just claim victory over all the sadness. All the sadness will go away when you trust in Jesus.

If you hear someone preaching like that, let me tell you, you're listening to a liar. Because it's not true. It's not true. Jesus knew sadness. Sadness.

David knew sadness. The Bible in your hands on your lap is full of sad songs to sing. Because sadness will be part of life. It's not come to Jesus and all your sadness will be over.

In fact, if anything, it is the opposite of that. The truth is that trusting in Jesus allows you to be properly sad. Appropriately sad.

It allows you to lament deeply. To confront the darkness and the sadness of life. Honestly, trusting in Jesus allows you to face sin. Not pretend that it doesn't matter.

[23 : 24] But to see it and know it and lament it. Because you know that in Jesus, everything sad and lamentable about this life will one day be undone forever. So I don't have to turn down the volume on my lament.

Because I'm not afraid of hopelessness or despair. Let me try and give you an illustration of what I mean. Imagine this, right? It was Elise's 17th birthday yesterday and she learned to drive.

So this is on my mind. Okay. Imagine that you crashed a car. Okay. Elise didn't crash a car. Don't worry. Imagine that you crash a car. We know what that's like, don't we?

A few of us have probably done that. I've done that. You crash a car and you take your crashed car to a friend and you show a friend. What does the friend say when they see your crashed car?

Well, they say, listen, don't worry about it. It's not that bad, is it? I can still open and close the door. I reckon probably that scratch there, it will polish out. Don't worry about it.

[24 : 21] It's all right. I know you're okay. It probably wasn't your fault. Everything's going to be fine. Give the car a good wash. You'll never notice it. You know, approach the car from the other side and you won't notice that there's a big dent in that side.

It'll be fine. Don't worry. Don't worry. Don't worry. Now, that's what friends do, isn't it? Why do friends talk to you like that about a crashed car? Let me tell you. I'll let you into a secret. This is why they tell you that.

It's because they have no hope of fixing it. No hope of fixing it. Your friend is useless at fixing your car when it's been crashed. They have no hope of fixing it.

So the best they can do is just pretend that it's not really that bad. That's all they can do for you. They can just pretend. Now, imagine that you take the same car to the menders, right?

What does the mender do? Well, she walks around your car, doesn't she? And she says, that is really bad. We're going to have to have that car in for a week. We're going to have to strip that door down.

[25 : 17] We're going to have to put a new side on the car here, a new wing here. We're going to have to put it in the jig and pull it straight again because you've twisted this car. It's really bad. We're going to have to re-spray the whole of this because otherwise you'll see the scratches and, you know, you'll notice the dents and they won't wash out.

Why can they talk to you like that? Let me let you into a secret. They can talk like that because they can fix it for you. Now, that's the same with the sadness and the sin in our world.

If you're a Christian this morning, you can sing a sad song. Why? Because you know who can fix it, Jesus Christ. The only hope that anyone else can offer you is just to pretend that things are not really as bad as they really are because they have no hope of fixing it.

So in Christ, I can lament the loss of things because I know in Christ Jesus, the sin-crushing, fortress-building, divinely strong, lasting treasure, faithful friend. So I lament, not in hopelessness, but in hope.

You see, let me end with this. Here's the double invitation of 2 Samuel chapter 1 for us this morning. Firstly, it's this. Don't be afraid of sadness. Don't be afraid of sadness. Let me encourage you this morning. Don't be afraid to cry.

[26 : 34] Don't be afraid to face how bad things really are. Don't think that to be a godly Christian, you have to pretend that things are better than they really are.

Don't think that to be a Christian, a godly Christian, you have to cover over your weakness. You don't. Don't think that to be a Christian, you have to fake it, that you're perfect. Don't live like your problems will polish out or if you approach the car from the other side, you won't notice it.

You don't have to live like that anymore. Because Jesus is not threatened by our sin or by our suffering or our injustice that we're facing.

And to show us that God allows suffering in our lives and our world, not as a contradiction of his existence, but that we might see who he really is in all his glory and majesty.

You see, the Christian can cry freely, can't they? The atheist has no explanation for their tears. Because they can't account for the sadness.

[27 : 35] And they have no hope in the sadness. But you're Christian, you can cry freely. You can sing, can't you? Something like this. Dark, dark, dark is the valley. Faint the light at my feet.

But whatever may face me, my God is all I need. He is my strength when I cannot go on. Peace when all my power is gone. Hope although the night is long and deep.

He is my song for he has rescued me. Brief, brief are my days here. Soon my journey complete. But I look to my saviour where God has met my need.

Yes, he has met my need. He is my strength when I cannot go on. Peace when all my power is gone. Hope although the night is long and deep. He is my song for he has rescued me.

The second invitation is this though. Don't settle for less than true joy. See, this is the point. If I won't learn the sad song, I won't really understand the joyful news.

[28 : 40] If I won't stare the temporary victory of sin in the face, I won't know the joy of Jesus' ultimate victory. If I won't see the weakness of my strength or the strength of others, then I'll settle for something less than the mighty fortress of Jesus Christ.

If I won't be honest about my weakness, I can't go to him for strength. If I won't admit that I'm at the end of myself, I have nothing to offer, then I will not know the true joy of divine strength.

Listen, if you're not a Christian this morning, or maybe you're just not quite sure where you stand. Or actually maybe, to be honest, if you're a Christian and you've been a Christian for a long time, but you're just a bit wobbly.

Or even if you're going great guns, let me tell you this morning, being a Christian is about being honest. That's what it's about. Being a Christian is about being honest. Islam will pretend to you that your wickedness will polish out.

That you could fix it with a bit of obedience. Just pray regularly and fast and everything will be okay. But you know that it's worse than that, don't you? And Jesus invites you to be honest.

[29 : 48] Buddhism asks you to pretend that all the answers lie within yourself. If you only go and look for them, please just go and look for them. But again, you know it's worse than that. Secularism will pretend to you that you're just a lump of meat, that the suffering is an illusion.

It has no meaning. But you know that's not right, don't you? You can't live like that. Only Jesus Christ, only Jesus Christ invites you, me, to be honest.

I'm a sinner. I'm weak. I have nowhere to run. I have nowhere to turn. My friends die and leave me. Lord Jesus, I need you.

I have no other hope. So Jesus invites us in the midst of the sad song to come to him. And whoever you are this morning, whatever situation you find yourself in, can I invite you to come to Jesus?

To hear that he can defeat your sin. He can give you a fortress to run to you. He can be lasting treasure in glory. He can be a friend for eternity. And you can sing in Jesus Christ.

[30 : 51] Though I may not see what the future brings. I'll watch and wait for the Savior King. Then my joy complete, standing face to face in the presence of the ancient of days.

None above him. None before him. All of time in his hands. For his throne it shall remain and ever stand. All the power. All the glory. I will trust in his name.

For my God is the ancient of days. Let's pray and then we'll sing that song together. Let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning.

We can't pretend. We don't want to pretend that our lives are any better than they really are. That our morality is any better than it really is. That our strength is any stronger than its great weakness.

Lord, we are weak. We are sinful. Our world is sad. Our lives at times are sad. And we lament that sometimes sin wins.

[31 : 57] Our strength does not prevail. It gives way. Strong places turn out not to be the fortresses that we hope. Money, riches vanish.

Friends leave us. And so, Lord, we lament and turn to the Lord Jesus. The sin-crushing, faithful friend, mighty fortress, risen saviour.

And we turn to him, none above him, none before him. All the power and the glory belong to him. And we will trust in his name. For my God is the ancient of days.

Amen. Amen.