

(2 Samuel) Free From Bitterness

by David Guzik

David Guzik's sermon explores how David's response to Saul's death exemplifies freedom from bitterness and the importance of forgiveness.

Duration: 34:11

Topics: "Overcoming Bitterness", "Spiritual Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of David and the message he receives from a messenger in the city of Ziklag. The speaker emphasizes that the characters in the Bible are real people and that God has something to teach us through their lives. The speaker highlights the importance of applying spiritual principles to real-life situations, using the example of letting go of bitterness and resentment. The sermon concludes with a prayer for God to speak to the hearts of the listeners.

Transcript

The book of Second Samuel, you'll notice that it's a book marked by three great themes. The beginning of it is the great theme of David's triumph. The middle of it is the great theme of David's tragedy.

And then the end part is the great theme of David's trouble. It's about this great man of God, King David. And you're going to see this morning just what a great man of God he was.

Let's begin with it now. Second Samuel, chapter one, beginning at verse one. Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites and David had stayed two days in Ziklag.

Then on the third day, behold, it happened that a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. So it was that when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself. And David said to him, where have you come from? And so I said to him, I have escaped from the camp of Israel.

David was in Ziklag. We're talking here about a real person coming from a real place at a real time in history. Just already we had mentioned here in these verses, you have David, you have his men, you have a real place.

You have an Amalekite messenger coming to David. I just want to stress with you, we're not talking about Goldilocks and the three bears. You know, this isn't Hansel and Gretel.

These are real people. And God has something to say to our lives through these real people. You might say that what we're going to find as we go through Second Samuel together is a lot of case studies.

God likes using case studies. They're very effective for our learning. Right.

I could tell you a lot about a principle of the Christian life, and it's good. And oftentimes we can grab a hold of principles. But when we see it worked out in somebody's life, when we see how they took that spiritual principle and applied it to something real in their life, that's a very powerful thing that happens in us, isn't it? I've heard it said that the Harvard Business School only uses case studies as its curriculum and instruction.

That's what they spend all their time on, talking about what happened in this business and what happened in this corporate structure. Well, God likes using case studies in our life. You're going to find a lot of them.

King David is a great example for us right here. First of all, he started out in a difficult place in Ziklag. You say, well, where's Ziklag? It's not in Israel.

It's in the land of the Philistines. So I thought David was an Israelite. What's he doing in the land of the Philistines? Because David is just coming out of a time of spiritual decline in his life.

You know, the story of David may be in brief outline, you know, the whole David and Goliath thing. Well, after David killed that giant Goliath, he became instantly famous. Literally hit songs were written about him and they went all throughout Israel.

You couldn't walk anywhere without hearing people sing that hit song. Saul has slain his thousands and David, his ten thousands. I know it doesn't sound too catchy to us.

It must have had a great beat or something because it was popular back then. And as it went all throughout the land, David became very famous and his boss, King Saul, became very jealous of David. And Saul, in the twisted envy of his mind, convinced himself that David, who was actually a great and loyal friend to Saul.

Saul's twisted, insane jealousy took David's loyalty and somehow he told himself that it was animosity. And Saul began to regard David as a great enemy, and he decided, well, David's going to kill me one day, so I need to take the strike first and kill him first. And Saul sent out on an extended campaign to murder David.

He took away David's family. He took away David's career. He took away David's livelihood.

He took away David's security. He took away everything that he could take away from David, except his life, because God wouldn't let him take away David's life. And after 10 or 15 years of that, David got pretty discouraged.

And one day he said, there's nothing better for me than to just go up and live among the Philistines. I guess there's no future for me here in Israel. And so David moved to a city named Ziklag and lived there with the three or four hundred men who followed him there in Ziklag.

And as David hung out with the Philistines, he began to think more like a Philistine and act more like a Philistine. Till the day came when the Philistines were going to go in a significant battle against the Israelites. And David said, well, I'll battle with the Philistines against the Israelites.

Can you imagine that? You know, the Bible tells us that we should not be deceived that bad company corrupts good morals. Your mother told you that, didn't she? This is Mother's Day. Let's remind ourselves of some of the things mom would remind us of.

She would tell you bad company corrupts good morals. It happened to David, the man who is after God's own heart. You don't think it'll happen to you or I? Well, God was merciful to David and he put it on the hearts of the Philistines to reject him.

Oh, it hurts when the bad company rejects us, doesn't it? But sometimes that's the sweetest gift God can give us. And that's what happened to David, the Philistines rejected him and he came back to his city, Ziklag, dejected after offering him and his men as an army on behalf of the Philistines. He comes back to Ziklag and finds that the Amalekites had come and taken everything that he had and every one that he loved from that city.

They had plundered it and carried everything and everybody away captive. And David broke down before God. It was the kind of thing that he needed to break himself before God.

And he wept and he cried. And the Bible says it's a beautiful verse in First Samuel. It says, and David strengthened himself and the Lord, his God.

And it turned it around. He won a great victory over the Amalekites, and now he is back here in Ziklag, sort of rebuilding, wondering where the Lord has for him next. But it's on his mind.

The Philistines were going to go to war against the Israelites. David would pace back and forth. I wonder what's happening in this battle between the Israelites and the Philistines.

What's happening? Who won the battle? What happened to Saul? What happened to my good friend Jonathan? And then finally, a messenger is coming. They can see the dust coming from down the road, the dust that the messenger is kicking up. And he's trotting.

He's going many, many miles. And so he's keeping a gate that he can sustain over many miles. And he comes into the city of Ziklag and he asks, where's David? I've got a message for David.

And David looks at him. And David's a compassionate man. He probably first said, bringing something to drink, get the man off his feet.

Let him rest for a moment. But as soon as the man is able to, David says, tell me what's your message? That's where we pick it up in verse four. It says that then David said to him, how did the matter go? Please tell me.

And he answered. And here's the news. The people have fled from the battle.

Many of the people are fallen and dead. And Saul and Jonathan, his son, are dead also. David, the battle was a calamity.

Israel's defeated. David, the king of Israel is dead on the field of battle. The crown prince of Israel, the man next in line for the throne.

He's dead on the field of battle. The armies are routed. They're in full retreat.

David, his heart's beating faster now. Verse five. So David said to the young man who told him, how do you know that Saul and Jonathan, his son, are dead? The young man who told him said, as I happened by chance to be on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul leaning on his spear.

And indeed, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. Now, when he looked behind him, he saw me and he called to me and I answered, here I am. And he said to me, who are you? And so I answered him, I'm an Amalekite.

And he said to me again, please stand over me and kill me for anguish has come upon me. But my life still remains in me. So I stood over him and killed him because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen.

And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm. And I brought them here to my Lord. Now, there's some things that we can gather from comparing scripture with scripture.

And by taking a close look at first Samuel, chapter thirty one. And at the whole character of this situation in chapter one, it leads me to a conclusion. This Amalekite was probably lying.

He's not telling the truth. Now, he is telling the truth that Saul and Jonathan were dead. He is telling the truth that Israel was routed on the field of battle.

He is telling the truth that he really did have the crown of Saul and the bracelet of Saul. He's not telling the truth when he said that he delivered the final blow to Saul. That's not true because first Samuel chapter thirty one tells us that Saul killed himself after being wounded on the field of battle.

And after being afraid that the Philistines would come and torture him and catching him alive, Saul said, I'm going to end my own life. I'm wounded already. I'm not going to live through this.

So so instead of enduring the torture and the mocking, I'll kill myself. Saul fell on his own sword. We say, well, how do you know that he, you know, didn't die and maybe he stayed alive for a few hours.

And then the Amalekite came along. I know that because in first Samuel thirty one, it says that the armor bearer of Saul, his assistant on the field of battle, he saw that Saul was dead and then he killed himself. So if he saw that Saul was dead, there was nothing for the Amalekites to kill.

I think the Amalekites lying. Well, why would he lie? Because he thought this would be good news to David. You see, again, Saul was David's bitter enemy.

Saul was the man trying to kill David, who put pressure on David. And David responded to that pressure by leaving the land of Israel, by aligning himself with the Philistines. Everybody knew that Saul had it out for David.

And when you hear that the guy who had it out for you is dead, how do you feel? I'm going to Disneyland is how most people feel. I mean, that's how you would have thought David would feel. The Amalekites saying when I show David this crown, when I show David this bracelet, which he undoubtedly took off the dead body of Saul.

And when I tell David that I delivered the death blow, that's going to be like winning the lottery. David's going to reward me with riches. I'm going to be David's new best friend because I finished off the man who was his enemy.

Now, we'll come back to that in a moment, but I just want you to consider something. That here is this Amalekite. Now, I don't believe that the Amalekite actually killed Saul.

I believe that Saul was already dead. But there's something distasteful about this Amalekite stripping the treasure off the dead body of the king of Israel as he lies on the field of battle. And he was an Amalekite.

I say, so what? Well, you know, some 15, 20, maybe it was even 25 years earlier, God gave a command to King Saul that God wanted Israel to carry out a unique war of judgment against the Amalekites and to wipe them out completely. And Saul didn't do it. Oh, he dealt with some of them, but he didn't do it completely.

Now, who is it stripping his dead body of the royal treasure? It's an Amalekite. Doesn't that teach you something, friends? It teaches us that our disobedience will come back to haunt us. If you don't deal with the Amalekite when God tells you to deal with it, you'll find that Amalekite later on robbing you, taking from you, thieving from you.

Your disobedience will come back to hurt you. Isn't that strange? The first time that you committed that sin, you felt, oh, I feel terrible about this. But, you know, lightning didn't come down from heaven and kill you.

The whole world didn't fall apart when you when you resisted the Lord on that matter. And so you figured, well, maybe God doesn't care all that much. But friends, here's the point.

You know why God told you no on that thing? Because he loves you and he knows that what you're doing is self-destructive. How many times have you seen it? Your kids want to do something and boy, it's a lot of fun for them, but it's just self-destructive. It's going to end in ruin for them.

The kids who love candy, candy, candy, candy all the time, nothing but candy, man, they could just eat at breakfast, lunch and dinner. Why doesn't mom and dad love me and let me eat what I want to eat? And, you know, they binge for a day on candy and nothing serious seems to happen. It seems to be OK, but you know very well you continue in that and it's going to have very, very bad effect on the same way.

That's sin that you're clinging on to. It hasn't wrecked your life yet, but it's like that with Amalekites, isn't it? You don't deal with it when God tells you to deal with it. And later on, it'll come and spoil you.

That's what the Amalekite did to David, excuse me, did to Saul. Now, let's look at how David reacted. We anticipated that the Amalekite thought that David would be happy that Saul was dead.

Look at how he reacts in verse 11. And David took hold of his own clothes and tore them. And so did all the men who were with him.

And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan, his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. You know, we might have expected that David would celebrate at the news of his great enemy. I mean, after all, when we consider who Saul was to David, here's a man who out of pure jealousy, hatred, spite and ungodliness, Saul took away David's family, David's home, David's career, David's security.

I just thought about it this week, you know, probably the worst thing that Saul took away from David was the years. David lived from the time he was 20 to the time he was about 35 or 40. That's a pretty important 15 or so years in your life, isn't it? A lot of people would call those the best years of your life.

Now that I'm kind of getting out of that range, I wonder about it. I hope it's not the best years. But, you know, those can be some pretty good years in your life, right? Saul took those years away from David.

And, you know, you can get back your career, you can get back your family, you can get back your home, you can get back your security. You're never going to get those years back. And David could have been so embittered towards Saul for all that he stole from him, all that he took from him.

But friends, the mere fact that David responds with sincere grief and mourning when he hears of Saul's death, friends, that shows. It shows that David was free from bitterness. David's reaction shows that he was free from bitterness towards Saul.

That's no small accomplishment, friends. Saul gave David every reason to be bitter. And might I add, on top of all of those reasons, when you think about all that Saul took away from David, let me add one more thing.

Saul was utterly unrepentant. Saul went to his grave thinking that he was in the right against David. And with all of that, when David hears that Saul is dead, he mourns, he rips his clothes, he puts dust upon his head, he bows down in the dust before God.

Now, let me tell you something. This demonstrates something very powerful to us. It shows us and I have to lay this right out on the line, friends.

It shows us that our hatred, that our bitterness, that our unforgiveness towards others, friends, it's chosen. You choose it. We don't want to feel like that.

We want to feel like it's imposed upon us, like it's something that we caught, like a disease or something. And, you know, you're not responsible for catching the disease. You just caught it.

You're just there. You're a victim of your bitterness. You're a victim of your own.

You're not. You've chosen it. I don't think that there's a single person here in this room who has greater reason to feel bitter than David did towards Saul.

Oh, not that you don't have your own experiences. You know, in your career, there's the person who stabbed you in the back. They're trying to climb over you in the corporate ladder.

And you know what? By every outward appearance, they've succeeded. They lied to other people about you. They defamed your character.

They tried to undercut your projects. And all the time they've done it with a false, silly smile on their face towards you. Oh, they wanted you to think that they were your best friend, but they stabbed you in the back.

I don't think they did to you what they did to David. Did they make you a fugitive? Make you run all around the country and put wanted signs in every community and wanted that there's a price on your head? Did they hire assassins to go out and kill you? That's what Saul did to David. I think David had great reason to feel bitter, but he didn't.

Because he chose not to. I guess I want us to be real about this, folks. If you're bitter against somebody today, if you're harboring unforgiveness towards somebody today, it's because you're choosing to.

At least come that far and be honest about it. Let's not pretend about it anymore. Let's not act as if we really don't have a choice in the matter and it's just been dumped upon us.

No, you're choosing to hold on to it. And I pray that before we're done this morning, you'll choose to let go of it. Now, in any regard, it wasn't just David.

It was all the men who were with him. Did you notice that? Verse 11. Then David took hold of his own clothes and tore them.

And so did all the men who were with them. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan, his son, and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. I want you to know there's not a mention of David thinking about himself in all of this.

Now, I don't know about you, but this was life changing news to David. He had been anointed to take the throne of Israel some 20 years before that. And now it seemed like the royal anointing that he had received some 20 years before was now going to be fulfilled.

The crown was going to be put on his head. He couldn't help but think about himself. But he did.

He did help it. He was thinking about Israel, he was thinking about Jonathan, he was thinking about Saul, he was thinking about their family, he was thinking about the glory of God. You see the point here? The point is simply this, that like Jesus, David was an others centered person.

How often do you see it in your own life when something happens? The first grid that you read it through is how does it affect me? I, me, mine. What's it to me? Friends, that's a miserable way to live. You're great people, you're wonderful folks, but you're not great enough to make the center of your life.

Only God is, and then others beyond that. God first, others second, me third, that's how it should be. So David had this great others centered mentality.

And. Well, we see how seriously the Amalekite had misread David. I'm sure when he saw David mourning and weeping and all of this, he's starting to think, maybe I got this wrong.

Then maybe he's clinging to the hope. Oh, I get it. This is the public business.

You know, David's a politician and he has to pander to the crowd. This is the public business. But really, you know, back behind the tent, David's going to pat me on the back and, you know, slip me a thick wad of bills and say, oh, good job.

Amalekite, I'm glad you did it. No, not at all. Look at your verse 13.

Then David said to the young man who told him, where are you from? And Amalekite said, yeah, well, this is great. Wants to know where I'm from. Wants to know where to send the check.

Where are you from? And he answered, I'm the son of an alien. I'm an Amalekite. So David said to him, how was it that you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? And hearing that, the smile leaves the face of the Amalekite.

Maybe it flashed in his mind because I'm convinced that these stories were well known throughout the kingdom. Maybe it flashed on his mind on the many opportunities that David had to kill Saul and nobody

would have blamed him. It would have been self-defense.

Nobody could have convicted David in the court of law. You're just defending yourself against a man who wanted to kill you. But David knew something that we have to grab a hold of is that when God puts somebody in authority, then let God bring them down.

It's up to you, Lord. Lord, you put the crown on his head. You're going to have to take it off.

I'm not going to push the crown off his head. I'm not going to play king of the hill. Lord, you put him up.

You bring him down. I'm not going to put my hand to it. And so he asked the question, the Amalekite, how come you weren't afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? And if the smile wasn't off the face of the Amalekite yet, it is here in verse 15.

Then David called one of the young men and said, go near and execute him. And he struck him so that he died. So David said to him, your blood is on your own head for your own mouth and testified against you, saying, I have killed the Lord's anointed.

There's a lesson there for us, isn't it? The Amalekite was probably lying and promoting yourself through lies ends badly. You know what, if he would have just come to David and said, I discovered Saul slain on the field of battle and here's his crown and here's his bracelet, let me tell you how the battle went. He probably would have been rewarded by David, but he just had to throw in the lie, didn't he? The lie that he had killed Saul and promoting yourself through lies ends badly.

It did for the Amalekite. It'll end badly for us as well. Well, let's go on here.

Verse 17. Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan, his son, and he told them to teach the children of Judah the song of the bow. Indeed, as it is written in the book of Jasher, don't go thrumming through your Bible looking for the book of Jasher.

You won't find it now. This upsets some people. They say, well, then there's a book missing from my Bible.

There's a lost book of the Bible. I wonder what secret mysteries the lost book of Jasher holds for us. Friends, it's a complete leap into wrong thinking to say that just because the Bible mentions a book that it must be inspired.

Yes, there was a book of Jasher, maybe it was a bestseller. But it was an inspired scripture. Otherwise it would be contained in the great writings from the old and the New Testament.

Anyway, verse 19. Here's the song. The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places.

How the mighty have fallen. Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon. Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

Oh, mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, nor let there be rain on you, nor fields of offerings for the shield of the mighty is cast away there. The shield of Saul not anointed with oil from the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty. The bow of Jonathan did not turn back and the sword of Saul did not return empty.

Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives and in their death. They were not divided. They were swifter than eagles.

They were stronger than lions. Oh, daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet with luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle.

Jonathan was slain on your high places. I'm distressed for you, my brother, Jonathan. You've been very pleasant to me.

Your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen and the weapons of war have perished. Now, ask yourself, is there a difference between that song of the bow? And ding dong, the witch is dead.

Pretty big contrast, right? This is not a song of celebration that a rival or an enemy has been vanquished by the way that David speaks about Saul. You can tell something very powerful here. It shows that David didn't kill Saul with a sword, but he also didn't kill him in his heart.

I don't know of anybody in this room suffering under a murder rap, but if we could be tried and convicted for murder that we commit in our heart, there wouldn't be enough jail cells to hold us all, would there? But David didn't kill Saul in his heart. He kept a heart of love and compassion towards him. Do you see all the good that he saw in Saul? Isn't it amazing that David found the good to say about Saul? He saw beauty in him.

He wanted no one to rejoice over the death of Saul. He wanted everyone to mourn, even the mountains and fields. He praised Saul as a mighty warrior.

He complimented the personality and the loyalty of Saul. He wanted everybody to mourn that the fact that this man was dead. Not one word of bitterness, not one word of he got what he deserved, even though it was true, David found good to say about Saul, just like the Bible says we should.

First Corinthians 13, 5 says, love thinks no evil. Funny, we find bad to say about our friends and David could only find good to say about his enemy. Striking.

Well, we look at this and. We would almost want to tell ourselves that it's beyond us. This is one of those things that Bible characters have to do, not us.

No, we do, too, don't we? So how did David do it? How did David stay free from that bondage of bitterness that so easily infects our hearts? I would suggest to you one thing, although I think there are probably many reasons. But the main point I would touch on to conclude with this morning is that David was free from bitterness because he really trusted God. You see, when there's a soul in your life screwing up everything for you.

It's very easy for you to think that your life is in their hands. That they're in control. That whether or not you get the promotion is due to the soul, that whether or not you succeed in this endeavor, whether or not you're happy, whether or not you have this or don't have that, you tend to think it's all in the hands of other people.

And when those other people stab you in the back or pull the rug out from under you, you're bitter against them. But when you understand that God is Lord overall. You say, Lord, you're bigger than this person,

you're bigger than the circumstance, and I believe your word when it says that promotion comes neither from the East or the West, but from the hand of God.

You understand that and you understand that even the evil or the trouble that God allows in our life, he can work a glorious purpose through. So, God, I'm in your hands, I'm not in the hands of the souls of this world. You know, when you get that not just in the head, but work it down about 18 inches to the heart, suddenly you're just not so bitter against other people.

You can pray for them, you can love them and friends, I know. I know from my own life how how enslaving bitterness and unforgiveness can be, but you know, from your life, too. This is one of those ones that's easy to apply because every one of us deals with it.

It's just not that every one of us deals with it in the right way. So I wonder, I wonder how much of the great free and full work of the Lord is hindered in your life because you're clinging to bitterness, because you're clinging to unforgiveness. And my simple question for you is, how long are you going to hold on to it? How long are you going to take it to your grave? Now, there's some satisfaction.

I took the bitterness all the way to my grave. What what kind of accomplishment is that? You say, OK, well, I'm not going to take it to the grave. All right, well, then when are you going to let go of it? What, five years, I'll let go of it.

Well, that just sounds silly to say, doesn't it? If you can put it away five years from now, why not put it away today? A woman came up to me after first service and she had a wonderful testimony, she said how much of what we talked about this morning really resonated with her own heart, and she said just at the last women's retreat, God spoke to her in a powerful way about these things, and she let the Lord just take some bitterness and resentment away from her that she had been harboring towards other people, and she said, life is so much different since then. It's just a different day for her. What can be a different day for you today? I think I've said all I can say about this.

You've seen all you can see in the life of David. Nothing more for me to say. Now I just have to pray.

So, Father, won't you speak to hearts right now? That person, Lord, that we swore we would never forgive. And honestly, Lord, maybe they don't deserve our forgiveness. They're hard, they're unrepentant.

They don't deserve it, Lord. Lord, neither did we deserve your forgiveness. So if we're going to receive your forgiveness when we don't deserve it, Lord, I suppose that we should grant it to others when they don't.

That's what your word tells us, God, and I. Lord, I pray that you would speak to hearts and give hearts the courage to lay aside every hindrance, every obstacle that's in the way of their deeper walk with you. Help us all know, Lord, to know the freedom of a short account with everybody in our life, not a big ledger filled with grievances that they've done against us, but a short account, God. Do this work, Lord.

It has to be by an outpouring of your Holy Spirit, because, Lord, there are hearts out here this morning that are so hard or so cold that, God, it can only be by your spirit. I or anybody else can't talk them into it, but your Holy Spirit can touch them. So do it, Lord.

We ask that you would do something great among us with this work. We pray it in Jesus' name and all those who agree. Amen.

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