

AN ALL CONSUMING JEALOUSY

1 SAMUEL 18:5-9

6 March 2022

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In 1937 Walt Disney released the first full-length animated feature movie. It's a classic called *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. It tells the story of a beautiful young woman who becomes the victim of her stepmother's jealousy. Remember that famous scene where the wicked stepmother steps in front of her magic mirror and asks, "Whose the fairest one of all?" The mirror replies, "Snow White." Without hesitation the wicked stepmother plots the demise of Snow White by offering her a poisoned apple. As a consequence, the seven dwarfs with whom she has lived mourn her loss by placing her in a casket made of glass. Jealousy is a vicious and cruel emotion. It has tremendous destructive power. Nothing is safe from its fury. It consumes everything, even the one who possesses it.

That's what happened to King Saul when he allowed jealousy to take hold of his life. As we discovered last week, Saul had some major self-esteem issues. He always felt that he had to impress others so that they would honor him as their king. You might say that he "sat a bit unsteadily upon his throne." That's why he was not at all pleased when, after returning from the great victory over the Philistines, women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet the victors dancing and singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). Hearing this refrain being sung over and over again, Saul became very angry. I can almost hear him saying to himself, "Here this kid kills one Philistine, even though he was a great big tall one, and everyone is falling over themselves to praise him. Maybe they would rather have him as their king instead of me." From that moment on, the Scriptures tell us that "Saul kept a jealous eye on David" (1 Samuel 18:9). In other words, an all consuming jealousy took hold of Saul's life, and things began to spiral downward towards a disastrous conclusion.

Here's a brief summary of what took place. The evil spirit which had afflicted him, probably in the form of an uncontrollable rage, began to assert itself with ever increasing frequency. David, his new champion on the battlefield and the sweet singer who played his harp to soothe Saul's troubled mind, now became the object of his wrath. On two occasions he tried to pin him to the wall with a spear. Then Saul sent David into battle in the hopes that he would be killed by the enemy. When that didn't happen, he sent soldiers to have him arrested, and eventually he ended up chasing David and his companions all over the countryside. There were also some other unfortunate consequences that came to pass. His relationship with his son, Jonathan, was fractured, because he befriended and protected David. The Philistines who had been briefly subdued, began to reassert themselves, because they saw that Israel was now a nation divided against itself. And worst of all, Saul became a demented murderer. Eighty-five priests in the town of Nob were killed along with all of the women and children in that place, because they had innocently given David bread to eat. They had thought David was on a mission for the king. They didn't know he was

fleeing for his life. Saul even went so far as to visit a witch to conjure up the ghost of the long dead Samuel, so that he might know what would happen when he faced the Philistines in battle the next day. And when that day came, Saul's army was routed and three of his sons, including Jonathan, were killed. Wounded and alone on the battlefield, Saul fell upon his sword and died. Both he and many of his fellow countrymen had become the victims of an all consuming jealousy.

So, how does this tragic story of King Saul apply to you and me? First of all, let's examine the word "jealousy," and see if we can discover what it really means. In the Greek language the word means "to boil." In the ancient Hebrew the meaning is "to become red in the face." Both meanings point to the same thing. Jealousy is a strong passionate response which makes us angry. We "boil over" so to speak, and in terms of our appearance, blood rushes to our extremities and we get "red in the face." That's what happened to Saul. He got angry enough to become violent, and it can happen to people today as well. Have you heard this phrase when referring to a criminal investigation? The prosecutor says, "It was a crime of passion." In other words, it was a crime that was most likely motivated by jealousy.

But let me take this investigation of jealousy to an even deeper level. Jealousy, a passionate response to something that has happened, has two synonyms, two words that give it an either positive or a negative connotation. The first word is "envy" and the second is "zeal." Let's take a look at the second and then the first. When Jesus ran the money changers out of the temple in Jerusalem, He declared, "My house will be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of thieves" (Luke 19:46). Remembering what He had said and done, His disciples quoted an Old Testament passage of Scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (John 2:17). In other words, Jesus felt very strongly about what was happening in that place and decided that something must be done to correct this injustice. His jealousy was directed outwardly by providing a place where people could pray without being taken advantage of by unscrupulous merchants. We might say that He was filled with "righteous indignation." When we stand up against that which is wrong and evil, that which demeans and hurts others, we are taking hold of the positive side of jealousy, and right now we need a lot of that with regards to what is happening in Eastern Europe.

There is, however, another synonym for jealousy, and that word is "envy." Basically, it means "I want what you have and I'll do whatever I can to possess it." Remember how King Saul responded when he heard the women singing, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands?" He was bitter and angry, and he kept a jealous eye on David, or using the negative synonym for jealousy, he kept an "envious" eye on David. He wanted what David had. He wanted the praise that was being so generously bestowed upon this young champion. He had to be number one in the eyes of the people. He demanded their admiration and when it was given to another, it filled his heart with envy. How different the response of John the Baptist? When Jesus' fame began to outshine his reputation, John did not become angry or

envious. He simply stated, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). Had Saul followed in his footsteps the final outcome of his life could have been quite different. People would have said, "Saul was a great king because he knew when to step aside and let someone else take hold of the reigns of leadership for the nation." That didn't happen. His envious jealousy destroyed him.

And the same thing can happen to any of us. A brief survey of the New Testament asserts that envy, self-seeking jealousy, has no place in the life of a Christian. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul instructed the Christians of that region, "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Galatians 5:26). In a letter to Titus, a fellow missionary, he admitted, "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy" (Titus 3:3). Peter told his fellow believers, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind" (1 Peter 2:1). These Scriptural warnings along with many others were given for a reason. Envy can become a very dangerous pursuit.

It can decimate a friendship. It can ruin a young romance. It can destroy a marriage. It can generate bitterness among family members. It can create havoc in a business firm. It can bring physical and emotional distress to those against whom it is directed. What is not so immediately discernable, however, is that those who harbor this kind of jealousy not only harm others, they also harm themselves. This is what the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament declares, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). And that my friends is why we must never let it take hold of our lives. It's a heinous sin that must be recognized and confessed. Otherwise it will destroy us just as it did King Saul.

As we prepare in a few moments to partake of the Lord's Supper, there is one final thought that I would like to share with you. Why did the religious leaders want to crucify Jesus? In the Gospel of Matthew we are provided with the answer. We are told, "Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, 'Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Christ?' For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him" (Matthew 27:15-18). In other words, they were jealous. They wanted what Jesus possessed, the admiration and support of the people, as evidenced by His triumphant entry on Palm Sunday and the crowds who had gathered around Him, right there in their own temple. They were afraid of being diminished by His popularity and they were filled with hatred. They would never acknowledge His greatness nor His messiahship. Instead they would destroy Him and in so doing remove themselves from the opportunity to experience his salvation.

May it never be said of us, that for the sake of jealousy, an envious disregard for the well-being of others, that we should find ourselves like Saul, totally alone cut off from everything, even the God who loves us.