

“Revenge Reaps No Reward”
1 Samuel 26: 5-12
Series: Outlaws and Outcasts Week 3. David
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There have been books written about it. There are movies based on its premise. It's been used by television shows such as *The Andy Griffith Show*, *NCIS*, *Modern Family* and even by the cartoon family *The Flintstones*. There have been songs written about it. And there is a musical dinner theater that performs the story. What is it? One of the greatest or worst stories of long standing injustice and revenge: The story of the Hatfields and the McCoys.

Mere mention of their names stirs up visions of a lawless and unrelenting family feud. It brings to mind gun slinging vigilantes determined to defend their kinfolk. It ignited bitter grudges that would span generations. It essentially began in 1878 when Randolph McCoy accused one of the Hatfields of stealing a hog.

According to Wikipedia: The feud has entered American folklore as a metaphor for any bitterly feuding, rival parties. It has become synonymous with the perils of family honor, justice, and revenge.

More than a century later we are fascinated with it still. Maybe because we all have been wronged at some point in our lives haven't we? Maybe some of us have long standing family feuds. Maybe you have been, or are now, a victim of bullying. Or there are power plays happening in your office and the result is you're passed over for a promotion or maybe even passed along and you find yourself out of job. Maybe something you said was misinterpreted and now you find yourself in a misunderstanding with a friend or family member. Maybe you or someone you love has been injured or sadly even killed by another's behavior, whether purposeful or accidental.

We are all familiar with feelings of injustice like these. The question is: what do we do with those feelings of injustice. How do we respond?

Do we respond like Bob? Listen to the letter he writes to his neighbor:

Dear Frank. We've been neighbors for six tumultuous years. When you borrowed my tiller, you returned it in pieces. When I was sick, you blasted rap music. And when your dog went to the bathroom all over my lawn, you laughed. I could go on, but I'm certainly not one to hold grudges. So I am writing this letter to tell you that your house is on fire. Cordially, Bob

That's what the world tells us to do doesn't it? Don't get mad get even. According to Alfred Hitchcock "Revenge is sweet...and not fattening."

And there is some research behind the idea that we may be hard-wired for it. It's just human nature:

“A century of research in the social and biological sciences reveals a crucial truth: Though we might wish it were otherwise, the desire for revenge is normal—normal in the sense that every neurologically intact human being on the planet has the biological hardware for it.”

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/forgiveness_instinct

So if we're hard wired for it isn't it acceptable to respond in kind? Or do we respond like David. He is the man we are looking at this morning as we continue our series on Outlaws and Outcasts. We looked at Adam and Eve and how they succumbed to temptation and got themselves banished from the garden. We've looked at Moses and how, even though he felt burned out God refueled Moses to serve Him and his people and lead them to the Promised Land.

Probably most of us are familiar with the story of David and Goliath. We know David as the young shepherd boy who slew a giant with a one stone and a simple slingshot. We know that this brave shepherd boy grew up to be a great king of Israel. We also know that Jesus Christ descended from the house of David.

In Hebrew the name David means “beloved.” In 1 Samuel David is described as “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts. 13:22). He is described as handsome and ruddy with beautiful eyes. He was anointed as a boy to be God’s chosen king by the prophet Samuel. But we don’t know a lot about the time in between killing Goliath and becoming king. The time when David becomes an outcast – a fugitive on the run.

After killing the Giant he has been experiencing a time of glittering successes. He found favor with King Saul who chose David as a warrior and musician in his court. Saul even welcomed him into his family and Saul’s son Jonathan becomes David’s best friend. Saul gives David a wife.

All in all David’s life is pretty good. And he’s good at his job. In 1 Samuel we read: “Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul’s officers as well.”

So you would think that Saul would be pleased with himself for making a smart choice in David. But then Saul hears this:

“When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands.”

Wait a minute, what?

This did not please Saul. That little cheer sparks a hot ember of anger that begins to burn inside Saul. He takes this as a personal insult. The people are giving David credit Saul thinks he deserves and maybe even they will give David the kingdom.

1 Samuel 18:9 says: And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.” Not just a close eye, a jealous eye.

It won't be long before Saul let's this jealousy fan that ember into an inferno that begins to consume him. It doesn't take long for David to find himself out of Saul's favor and out of a job. He is misunderstood, loses his wife and his best friend. He is forced to live life on the run and afraid for his life because Saul, his one-time mentor and surrogate father wants him dead.

Saul is a hit man with one mission in his life: to take David's.

Jealousy. Of all the human emotions jealousy is one of the most common and unsettling and insidious. It tends to bring out the worst in us. It certainly brought out the worst in Saul.

“A popular misconception about jealousy is that it is the same as envy. In fact, the feeling of envy refers to wanting something that someone else has. Jealousy, however, is more aptly described as the fear of losing something (someone's affection, a promotion, a friend, etc.) to someone else. Jealousy can destroy your own mental health and your relationships if you allow it to create problems that don't actually exist.

Dr. Ralph Hupka,

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/life/inside-the-mind/emotions/jealousy.htm>

Did Saul even have cause for concern? Saul was also identified by Samuel as God's anointed King. He is described as a tall, handsome man of stalwart character. David has been anointed as Saul's replacement but David is leaving that up to God's timing. He gave no indication he wanted to over throw Saul and claim the throne. The perceived threat was all in Saul's head – he was insecure and now has allowed that insecurity to consume him. The writers of 1 Samuel call this a “Dark Mood” from God that settled over Saul. But I wonder if it is because Saul has turned away from God that a darkness settled over him. We know, because of Jesus Christ, that God will never leave us. He does however, allow us to walk away. And Saul did.

What can we do when we are faced with this kind of jealousy – this kind of injustice?

We could run. And that is exactly what David did, for a time. He fled, he escaped. He ran to Samuel. He ran to Jonathan. He hid in fields and caves. He tried to avoid the conflict. But even in all that time on the run David never ran away from God. 1 Samuel tells us he frequently went to God in prayer. And eventually David has a chance to face his would be assassin. Twice. He has a choice: he could respond with anger. He could seek retribution and retaliate. And we might say he has every right to seek revenge. He has been wronged – badly. And after all he is living in the time of an eye for an eye. Yet both times David does something unexpected. He refuses to stoop to Saul's level. First in the cave when he has a chance to ambush Saul but instead just cuts off a piece of his robe. And now here. 1 Samuel 26:5-12 reads

“Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him. David then asked (two of his soliders) ‘Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?’ ‘I'll go with you,’ one replied. So David and Abishai went to the

army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Abishai said to David, 'Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice.'

So there is Saul as vulnerable as he could be. Asleep. An easy target. There's a chance for David to put an end this ruthless pursuit once and for all. And he's even got an advisor with him saying: "Let's get him David. He deserves it. This is your moment!" And I will even be the hit-man on your behalf!"

"But David said to Abishai, 'Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the LORD lives,' he said, 'the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go.' So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up..." (1 Sam. 26:9-12)

David spares Saul's life again and he refuses to judge him. Notice however, David does take Saul's spear and water jug. Why? David may be a man after God's own heart. But he can't refuse a little "gotcha" here. I think this is the Old Testament version of "nana nana boo boo" The spear and water jug are proof that he had again been close enough to kill Saul.

The story continues with David returning the spear and water jug to Saul and essentially saying to him – it's finished and I'm leaving it up to the Lord to judge you. "The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. As surely as I valued your life today, so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble." (1 Sam. 26:23-24)

Don't miss the irony here. David's peace offering to Saul is the very spear that Saul would have used to kill him. David takes what could have been a chance to perpetuate pain to bring peace. He has been living in fight or flight mode for almost 10 years. Finally he says: enough.

In the end they go their separate ways. And David's compassion may have softened Saul's heart:

"Then Saul said to David, 'May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph.' So David went on his way, and Saul returned home." (1 Sam. 26:25)

The Hatfields and McCoys finally said enough is enough, officially in 2003, when sixty descendants of the original clans gathered on Saturday, June 14, in Pikefield, Kentucky, to sign a document declaring an end to what started as a dispute between 2 men over a hog, claimed 12 family members, and caused more than a century of hatred and bloodshed.

The treaty calling for peace reads: "We do hereby and formally declare an official end to all hostilities, implied, inferred, and real, between the families, now and forevermore. We ask by God's grace and love that we be forever remembered as those that bound together the hearts of two families to form a family of freedom in America."

Reo Hatfield, who first thought of the ceremony, said, "We're not saying you don't have to fight, because sometimes you do have to fight. But you don't have to fight forever."

Stephen Leon Alligood, "American Profile," CBS News.com (6-14-03); submitted by Greg Asimakoupoulos, Naperville, Illinois

David didn't not want to fight Saul. He knows revenge reaps no reward. He realized he had to forgive Saul, turn Saul's judgment over to God and rise above.

Forgiveness is kind of a loaded word. Maybe it's best to define it by what it is not:

Forgiveness isn't easy. Forgiveness is not saying you accept the person who wronged you. Forgiveness isn't weakness. Instead, forgiveness is choosing to accept what happened as it happened. It doesn't mean you forget. It does mean that you let go of it and give it to God.

And, there's an added health benefit. Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; and reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression and stress.

"There is an enormous physical burden to being hurt and disappointed," says Dr. Karen Swartz, Chronic anger puts you into a fight-or-flight mode, which results in numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure and immune response. Those changes, then, increase the risk of depression, heart disease and diabetes, among other conditions. Forgiveness, however, calms stress levels, leading to improved health.

http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/healthy_aging/healthy_connections/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it

Bud Welch knows about the healing power of forgiveness.

He lost his 23-year-old daughter, Julie, during the Oklahoma City bombing.

Bud had always opposed the death penalty but Julie's death prompted bouts of anger, pain, hatred and revenge.

"I lived with so much hate for the first four weeks after her death that I didn't even want a trial for Tim McVeigh or Terry Nichols. I wanted them fried," says Bud.

And it took a terrible toll on him

Bud grieved for more than a year with a bottle in his hand.

"Every muscle in my body ached from alcohol abuse."

By chance, Bud saw a television interview with Bill McVeigh, Tim's father. He says he saw a familiar pain in the man's eyes. "A pain I could recognize because I was living the same pain at the same moment. And I knew in spite of my feelings about his son at that point, I needed to tell that man I truly cared how he felt and did not blame him or his family for what his son had done."

Bud traveled to meet with Bill McVeigh and they cried together over the loss of their children. Bud says, "Bill McVeigh and I had one thing in common. We'd both buried our children. They both died in very different ways, but we both buried our children."

"All of a sudden it was like this weight had been lifted from my shoulders. And I never felt closer to God than I did at that moment."

There will come a time for all of us when we need to forgive. But that won't happen in a void. That happens with the power of God. If you are struggling with a broken relationship. With feelings of injustice. If you are hanging onto a grudge that's got a hold of your heart. I ask you to pray for the strength to turn it over to him. God knows our pain because he experienced it himself as he watched, with pain in his eyes, as his son died on the Cross for us.

Forgiveness, Bud Welch says, is a gift we give ourselves.

Forgiveness also, through his son Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, is a gift from God. Shouldn't we gift it to others?