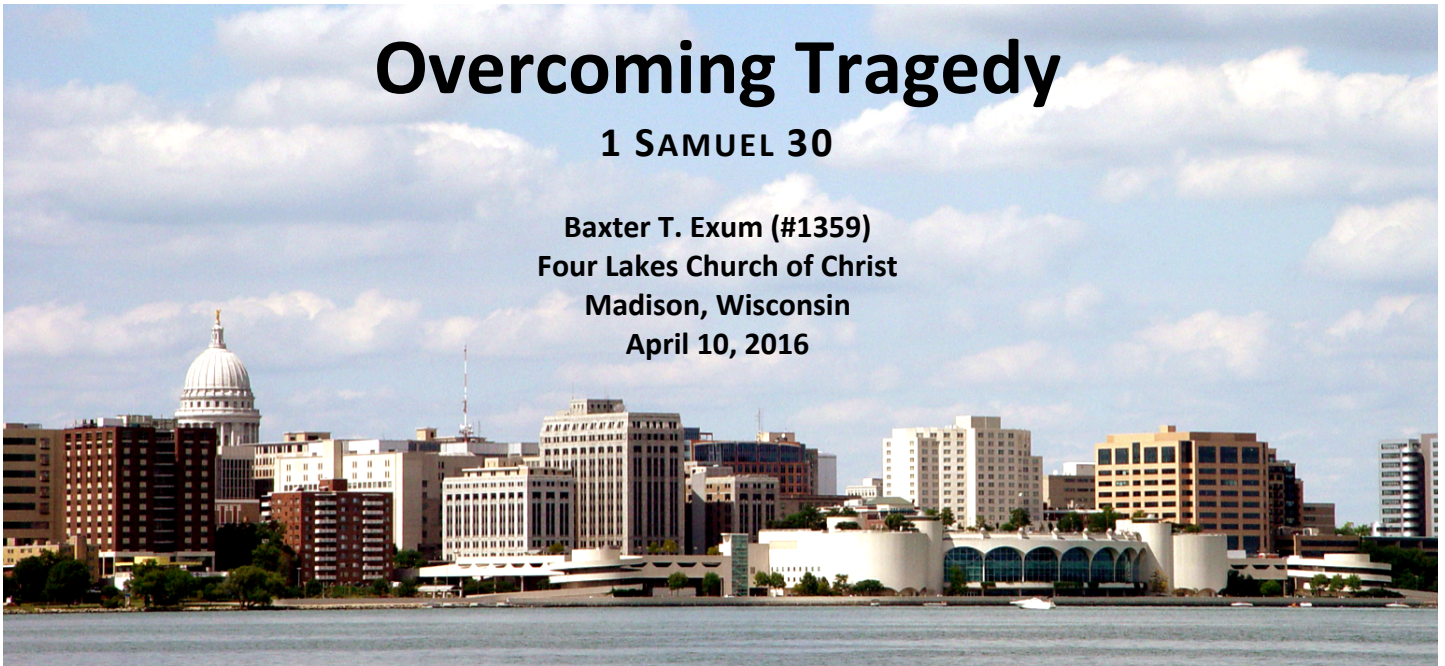


Overcoming Tragedy

1 SAMUEL 30

Baxter T. Exum (#1359)
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As we begin this morning, I want to share something that I would ask you to be praying about over the next several days. We have a friend in Minnesota, the daughter of the preacher (who is also one of the elders) of the South Twin Cities congregation. This is one of the two churches that sponsors the Minnesota Bible Lectures that I hope to attend this coming Saturday. Her name is Evie, her husband's name is Chris, and only four weeks ago, she gave birth to their fifth son. About a week ago, this young Christian woman started getting a headache. She couldn't shake it, so she went back to the hospital this past Wednesday, where doctors did a scan and discovered a racquetball size tumor on the front of her brain. She shared that news, and one of her friends, knowing that Evie loves the color green and loves all kinds of sea creatures, started the hashtag #gogreenforevie, where people have been drawing green sea creatures on their hands and posting those on social media as a reminder to pray for this Christian sister. Early on Friday morning, the day of the surgery, Evie posted on her Facebook account and this is what she said,

Today is the big day: brain surgery. Oy! Considering baby Elisha was just born, I thought I was kinda done with "big days" for a while. Yet, we never know what the Lord will allow (or bring to) our life's path. I'm so thankful my parents properly prepared their family for life. Ups and downs are normal, and making sure God remains #1 is most important. So today I'm feeling grateful. God has allowed a wonderful 32 years of life, 11 beautiful years of marriage, 5 healthy sons, jobs I love, and seriously no medical issues until now. Time to face a new challenge! ... Thanks to ... all the loved ones lifting up my situation in prayer in this special way. You all know how to make a girl feel loved. All glory and praise to our great God today! Psalm 118:24

Well, we waited through the day on Friday, the surgery went on for several hours, and late Friday night Chris posted this picture, explaining that the surgery went much better than expected. Evie was having some pain from the stitches and the IV's, but as soon as she woke up, the first thing she wanted was a chocolate shake from Culver's! At this point, they are now hoping and praying that the tumor is benign and that they can get back to as normal a life they can have with five boys, if there is such a thing!

I share all of this today in hopes, first of all, that you can remember Evie and Christopher Graber in your prayers. But secondly, I have shared this today as a reminder that all of us in this room will face our own challenges in this life. It might be a life or death health struggle that seemingly comes out of nowhere, as it did

for this young family, no more than four days ago. Your struggle might be a death in the family. It might be either you or a loved one struggling with some kind of addiction. It might be the breakup of what we thought was a solid relationship. It might be getting laid off. A crisis or tragedy might be any one of these things, or even a combination. Sometimes terrible things seem to happen all at once.

And we know that people handle adversity in different ways. We might get stronger and grow through the process, or we might go in the other direction. This morning, I want us to look at a crisis in the life of King David, a tragedy found in 1 Samuel 30 (p. 488). And our question this morning is: How did David react to this particular incident? And in particular, what can we learn from King David?

To give a little background: The incident in 1 Samuel 30 takes place as David is on the run from King Saul. David has been anointed king, but Saul is still in power, and David (God's anointed king) is actually living as a fugitive, along with several hundred of his most trusted men. In fact, just to survive, David and his men have actually joined forces with the Philistines for a bit. But, when the Philistines make plans to attack Israel, some of the Philistine commanders don't trust David. They think he might switch back over to fighting for Israel in the middle of the battle, so the Philistines send David and his men back home for this one. His home at this point is a town by the name of Ziklag. They travel three days to get home, they are looking forward to resting for a bit, they are looking forward to spending some well-deserved time with their wives and children, but as the town comes into view, David and his men suddenly realize that something terrible has happened – the city is a smoldering pile of rubble, and their wives and children are gone. This morning, then, I want us to take a look at what happens, and specifically, how David reacts to this tragedy. I will be making four observations. And I am not presenting this as some kind of a formula, but there is a value to observing how a leader like David, a man after God's own heart, reacts to this crisis.

I. With this as our goal, I want us to notice, first of all, that King David WEEPS over this tragedy.

Notice, please, 1 Samuel 30:1-6a,

¹ Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; ² and they took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried them off and went their way. ³ When David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. ⁴ Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. ⁵ Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. ⁶ Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters.

We will pick up with the rest of verse 6 in just a moment, but here at the beginning, we find the first thing David does is to weep. In fact, they wept until there was no strength in them to weep any more. In the training I've had in counseling, and in so much of the research that has been done concerning dealing with any kind of crisis or emotional trauma, the general consensus is that it is best not to make any rash decisions, but instead, it is healthy to grieve. There is a tremendous benefit in allowing ourselves some time to be sad over something. We face a crisis (whatever it is), and some may pretend it doesn't exist (I'm going to stick my head in the sand), some may blame others (which is what David's men do here as they threaten David's life), and some may suck it all in and present this hardened façade to the world, some may fly off the handle, some may

do any number of things, but David actually does what is healthy and normal here: He weeps; he weeps until he can weep no more. And by weeping, King David is acknowledging reality. As strong as he is, as much of a warrior as he is, even as spiritual as he is, King David openly weeps over what is happening here. And if this is okay for King David, then I'm thinking that it is also okay for us. In fact, as Paul would go on to say in Romans 12:15, we as Christians are to, ***"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."*** He has lost his wives and children, his city has been burned to the ground, his own men are turning against him, and King David takes a moment to grieve what is happening.

II. As we get back to 1 Samuel 30, I want us to notice what David goes on to do in the last part of verse 6 through verse 8 – He goes on to STRENGTHEN HIMSELF IN THE LORD.

Let's notice what this involves – 1 Samuel 30:6b-8,

^{6b} But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. ⁷ Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. ⁸ David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all."

David, therefore, when he is done weeping, he ***"strengthens himself in the Lord."*** As in so many of the Psalms, he takes his concern to God. He weeps, but then he takes it to the Lord. He goes to God for help. He goes to God for advice. So many times in the book of Judges and even through the Kings, the nation got themselves in trouble when they failed to consult God on various issues. There were times when even David failed to consult God, but this is not one of those times. He goes to Abiathar the priest who brings the ephod (a priestly garment used for discerning God's will), and David straight up asks the Lord: What do I do here? Do I pursue them? And if I do, will we win? And of course, the answer is, ***"Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all."***

David, then, strengthens himself in the Lord, and this is something we can do today. We remember how Paul said to the church in Ephesus, ***"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God..."*** (Ephesians 6:10-11). We remember how Paul himself found strength in the Lord near the end of his own life in 2 Timothy 4:16-17, ***"At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me... But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me..."*** Like David, Paul turned to God. He reminded himself that God is faithful, that God is always good, all the time.

I would also point out just briefly here that David's reaction is much different than the reaction of his men. David turns to God for strength. David's men turn on David. And there is the difference: When we face a crisis, we can lash out at those around us, or we can turn to God. David turns to God. Instead of just heading off in a rage, David has the clarity of mind to stop and ask God what to do. He strengthens himself in the Lord.

III. There is a third aspect of David's response here, and that is: King David OBEYS – in obedience to God, he goes, he pursues, he kills those who were responsible, and he recovers not only his family and the families of his men, but also all of the stuff that had been taken.

Notice, please, what happens next – 1 Samuel 30:9-20,

⁹ So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those left behind remained. ¹⁰ But David pursued, he and four hundred men, for

two hundred who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor remained behind. ¹¹ Now they found an Egyptian in the field and brought him to David, and gave him bread and he ate, and they provided him water to drink. ¹² They gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. ¹³ David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" And he said, "I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick three days ago. ¹⁴ We made a raid on the Negev of the Cherethites, and on that which belongs to Judah, and on the Negev of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." ¹⁵ Then David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this band."

¹⁶ When he had brought him down, behold, they were spread over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. ¹⁷ David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day; and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. ¹⁸ So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. ¹⁹ But nothing of theirs was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought it all back. ²⁰ So David had captured all the sheep and the cattle which the people drove ahead of the other livestock, and they said, "This is David's spoil."

So, instead of just sitting around waiting for God to do something, David obeys the Lord and makes this happen. He weeps, he goes to God for advice, and then he does what God tells him to do. And I would emphasize here that David has a few significant details working against him. First of all, David and his men are dead tired. They have been fighting their own battles, and then they just traveled roughly 60 miles – three days through the wilderness, only to get home to find nothing there. That’s like us walking back to Madison from Milwaukee and finding our homes destroyed and our families kidnapped. We’d be tired from that journey, and then there would be the mental and emotional strain on top of that. The fact that these men are tired is made even more clear in verses 9-10 where we find that David starts this mission with 600 men, but 200 are too exhausted to continue, so David moves forward with only 400. That’s how tired they are – 1/3 are not able to go any further! We will get back to them in just a minute!

But there’s something else we might overlook here, and that is: At the beginning, at least, these men have no idea where they are going! Imagine if we were to walk back to Madison from Milwaukee after days of fighting, only to find our homes in ruins and our families missing. But that is what happens here. They come home to their city in ruins and their families missing, and they have no idea who did this or where they are, until they run across this Egyptian. Now, what I find interesting is that David doesn’t go Jack Bauer on this guy. There is no torture; but instead, they treat the young man with kindness, and they start to learn what happened.

They find the enemy spread out in a field and start to attack, and this battle goes on for more than 24 hours – from twilight until the evening of the following day! And in all of this, David and his men are terribly outnumbered. We don’t have the exact number of Amalekites here, but we do know that after killing Amalekites for more than 24 hours, 400 were able to escape on camelback. 400 is an interesting number here! David starts with 400, and the enemy ends with 400. David, therefore, although terribly outnumbered, is obedient to God. I think of Gideon here, who in obedience to God led 300 men into battle against the Midianites, and tens of thousands were killed in that battle, up against overwhelming odds. But a main lesson

with Gideon (as with David) is the importance of obedience. When we obey, God can use us to do what would not normally be possible. And that ties in to our last lesson in this chapter.

IV. The final lesson comes in verses 21-31 as we find that **DAVID ESTABLISHES PEACE AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE.**

As they come out on the other side of this conflict, there is a break in fellowship, and David takes a bold and courageous stand to do what is right. Notice, please, 1 Samuel 30:21-31,

²¹ When David came to the two hundred men who were too exhausted to follow David, who had also been left at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him, then David approached the people and greeted them. ²² Then all the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart." ²³ Then David said, "You must not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us. ²⁴ And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." ²⁵ So it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.

²⁶ Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent some of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, "Behold, a gift for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord: ²⁷ to those who were in Bethel, and to those who were in Ramoth of the Negev, and to those who were in Jattir, ²⁸ and to those who were in Aroer, and to those who were in Siphmoth, and to those who were in Eshtemoa, ²⁹ and to those who were in Racal, and to those who were in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to those who were in the cities of the Kenites, ³⁰ and to those who were in Hormah, and to those who were in Bor-ashan, and to those who were in Athach, ³¹ and to those who were in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to go."

I want us to notice where the conflict starts. It starts in verse 22, where the ***"wicked and worthless men"*** get upset and argue that the 200 should not get to share in the spoil, and their reasoning is, ***"Because they did not go with us, we should not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered."*** And I would just point out how these men were emphasizing the fact that this conquest was something they had done. The argument is: We fought so hard for this, you do not deserve any part of it. But let's back up a little bit: Did these men really win this battle because they were such awesome warriors? Again, I am thinking back to Gideon. Remember what the Lord said as he whittled that army down to only 300 men, ***"The people who are with you are too many..., for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'"*** And yet with only 400, that seems to be exactly what has happened here. There was an outspoken whining minority who wanted to bully David into giving in to their demand.

Now at this point I want to draw a contrast between Saul and David, and it also involves the Amalekites. Do you remember when God commanded Saul to kill all of the Amalekites back in 1 Samuel 15? Saul failed to obey, and do you remember where he put the blame? When Samuel called him out on his disobedience, Saul responded and said, ***"But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal."*** Saul blamed the people! Now, in contrast,

David hears the people complain in verse 22, but in verse 23, David (unlike Saul) steps up with an actual backbone and says NO! ***“You must not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us.”*** You see what David does here? First of all, I love that he calls them ***“brothers.”*** I love this – so diplomatic! But the main idea here is: David shifts the focus – away from the men and what they thought they had accomplished on their own, and he puts the focus on God, where it belongs. This isn’t a matter of you people being such mighty warriors; but instead, this is a matter of God blessing us! And how dare we not share God’s blessings! As a leader, David does not allow the people to be governed by a small and grumpy minority, but he shifts the culture of the group from one of criticism and selfishness, to a culture of honoring God and sharing – even sharing with a number of other villages in the area. Also note: This is a permanent change! A new statue is established in Israel!

In reality, those 200 who were too exhausted to continue played just as important a role as the 400 who kept on going. The 200 who stayed behind in no way betrayed David. They didn’t discourage the others from fighting. Instead, the 200 who stayed behind actually played a role in this by staying with the baggage. As we know, any military is made up of much more than just those who serve on the front lines. I think of my own father-in-law who spent most of his adult life in the Air Force. He never flew a plane personally, but he made sure that others were able to. He made sure that others had the tools they needed to accomplish the work they were called to do. I think of military families as well – they may never go overseas, but they are a part of it, paying a price being away from their loved ones, offering support and encouragement. Everybody has a role to play.

We think of Paul’s words to the church in Corinth and his reminder that those in the church have a wide variety of special skills and abilities. The church is not just made up of apostles, the foot has no right to get upset that it is not a hand; but instead, everybody has a job to do. We work together just like a body. And so when the apostle Paul steps forward on the Day of Judgment, his efforts at preaching and teaching and establishing so many congregations will no doubt be called up as evidence. But I’m thinking of those hundreds if not thousands of others who will also be called forward – those who fasted and prayed as he was sent out on those journeys, those who sent financial support – men like Simon, Lucius, and Manaen, those men at the church in Antioch who helped send Paul out – and many others who we’ll never know about until this life is over. They might not have gone with Paul, but they made sure he could go. They are like those 200 who stayed behind with the baggage.

The same thing is true today. I think of those of you who have put labels on thousands of tracts and brochures over the past two weeks. As those are passed along to outsiders over the coming weeks and months, you have played a part in that, even though the work you did was done at your own kitchen table. I think of some of you who have offered in the past to cut out class material for our Vacation Bible School. You might not have taught a class, but you made sure that a teacher had the tools to teach. I think of some of you who have worked so hard proofreading our Bible correspondence courses. You may never go behind the walls of a maximum security prison to teach and preach, but you have played an important role in making sure that literally thousands of people are hearing the gospel message.

The point here at the end is that David helps establish peace among God’s people. He does not allow the group to be ruled by a grumpy minority, but he turns them back to God, and a new statute is made in Israel.

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of this incident, I would point out that David has won the battle, but he is still homeless. That, however, is about to change. If you turn over to the first two verses of the next book, you will notice that only three days later a soldier shows up with a message for David, that King Saul is dead. That, of course, allows David to step in as king. In hindsight, then, we start to see how important it was for David to obey during this particular crisis. He wept, he strengthened himself in the Lord by searching out a word from God in this matter, he obeyed, and then he got one last crash course in leadership before taking over as king of the entire nation. We have no idea what this coming week may hold for any of us in this room. Hopefully, though, whatever happens, we can face it head on, going to God for help, and honoring God with our faith and obedience in the process.

If you are not yet a Christian, we would love to see you obey the gospel this morning. Jesus died for our sins, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We react to his sacrifice by our obedience to the good news – we turn away from sin, we allow ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of sins, and we are raised up to live a new life. If you are ready, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com