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July 30th: 1 Samuel 19 & 2 Corinthians 12:14–13:14

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David flees from Saul. Preparing for Paul's third visit.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Samuel 19 And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David. And Jonathan told David, Saul my father seeks to kill you.

Therefore be on your guard in the morning, stay in a secret place and hide yourself, and I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything, I will tell you. And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you.

For he took his life in his hand, and he struck down the Philistine, and the Lord worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause? And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan.

Saul swore, As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death. And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

And there was war again. And David went out and fought with the Philistines, and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him. Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand.

And David was playing the liar, and Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear. But he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall, and David fled and escaped that night. Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning.

But Michael, David's wife, told him, If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed. So Michael let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped. Michael took an image, and laid it on the bed, and put a pillow of goat's hair at its head, and covered it with the clothes.

And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick. Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him. And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goat's hair at its head.

Saul said to Michael, Why have you deceived me thus, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped? And Michael answered Saul, He said to me, Let me go, why should I kill you? Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and lived at Niath. And it was told Saul, Behold, David is at Niath in Ramah.

Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied.

And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. Then he himself went to Ramah, and came to the great well that is in Seku. And he asked, Where are Samuel and David? And one said, Behold, they are in Niath in Ramah.

And he went there to Niath in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also. And as he went, he prophesied until he came to Niath in Ramah.

And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel, and lay naked all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, Is Saul also among the prophets? In 1st Samuel chapter 19, Saul's violent hostility to David rises to a level that forces David to flee from him and his house. He is assisted by Saul's son Jonathan, and Saul's daughter

Michael.

The chapter begins with Saul either telling Jonathan and his servants to kill David, or according to other commentators, informing them of his personal intention to do so. Saul is gradually descending into the most violent folly, while David is growing in strength and wisdom. Jonathan tells David that Saul seeks to kill him, and instructs him to hide in a place where he could witness Jonathan talking with his father concerning him.

Jonathan wants to assure David that he need fear no betrayal from his quarter, so he wants to give him the opportunity to witness the conversation. Jonathan emphasises the blood guilt that Saul would incur by killing David. Not only was David innocent, he was also someone through whom God had brought about a great deliverance for his people.

Jonathan's life had previously been saved from Saul under different circumstances by just such an appeal, when Saul was going to kill him, even though he had been part of a great deliverance for God's people. Saul swears that he won't proceed with his intentions, and then David returns. However, after David wins another great victory over the Philistines, Saul tries to pin David to the wall with his spear for a third time.

Saul's military skill seems to be forsaking him. The other important thing to observe is what occasions Saul's assaults upon David. It is David's heroic deeds and deliverances of Israel that occasion Saul's violence.

Saul is angry with David for his saving of Israel. It is envy and fear that drives him. As James Jordan observes, the contrast between David and Saul at this point is also striking.

There is no evidence that Saul goes out to fight. However, while sitting in his house, where he should be at rest, he is clutching his spear. Saul's relationship with his weapon reveals truths about his character.

It associates him with Goliath, as we have already seen. Also, his seeming inability to let go of his spear is probably a sign of his increasingly perverse relationship with power. Saul gradually ceases to wield his spear and becomes defined by it, as if it were glued to his hand.

By contrast, David is a man who is remarkably versatile and able to be at rest. One moment he is carrying food, the next he is using a slingshot, the next he is wielding a sword, the next he is playing a liar. He defends people, provides food for them, shepherds.

He brings delight, glory and joy. He is very clearly royal material. After David escapes, Saul sends men to David's house to watch him so that he might be killed in the morning.

However, Michael, David's wife and Saul's daughter, lets David down through a window and uses cunning to cover up the fact. She delays the pursuit of David by telling the

messengers sent to take him that David was sick. By the time her deception was discovered, it was too late and David had made his getaway.

David speaks of this particular event in Psalm 59. Laban comparisons continue here. Like Jacob escaped from Laban, David escaped from Saul.

Like Jacob, he is pursued by his father-in-law. Rachel lied to her father Laban about the teraphim in Genesis 31, 33-35. Michael lied to her father using the teraphim in this chapter.

Both of the fathers-in-law ask why they were deceived. If we have been paying attention to this particular story, it should remind us of a number of other stories from elsewhere in the scripture. Saul is like Isaac.

Even though God has made clear that he wants the kingdom to be established through David rather than Jonathan, Saul is determined to resist this. Much as Isaac resisted God's word that his oldest son Esau would serve his youngest son Jacob. Like Rebecca, Michael is a righteous and shrewd woman who uses goat's hair to create a disguise so that Saul would be deceived about identities and God's will might be established.

Saul is like Laban. Saul takes a new son into his house. As Laban treated Jacob unjustly by giving him Leah rather than Rachel, Saul gave David Michael instead of Merab.

Like Laban, Saul finds himself steadily dispossessed as God gives his household into the hands of his son-in-law. Like Laban, Saul responds with hostility and his son-in-law has to flee from him. Like Rachel who sat on Laban's household guards during her period when escaping, Michael deceives her father, exposing his idolatry and humiliating the household guard by treating it in an inappropriate way.

Saul is also like Pharaoh. He tries to kill the promised seed. Michael is like Pharaoh's daughter who resists the evil will of her father, protects and delivers the one who will deliver the people and establish the nation.

Saul is also like the king of Jericho who sent men to the house of Rahab to capture the spies. Michael is like Rahab who deceived the wicked men of her people, hid the spies, let them down through a window and aided and abetted their escape. Saul is clearly in bad company then.

His court has become like the house of Laban, Egypt and Jericho. And there are Passover themes here as well. There is a threat to the sun at the doorway and a night time escape from a pursuing king.

As he flees from Saul's house, we have the beginning of David's wilderness wanderings which only come to an end after the death of Saul. Behind all of these figures, once again, we see the shadowy agency of the serpent. King Saul is a new Goliath-like figure,

someone who acts as the seed of the serpent.

The tyrant is outwitted by the woman, his daughter, as once again Eve gets poetic justice against the one who first deceived her. David fled to Samuel at Ramah and informed him of what Saul had done. Saul sent three successive groups to capture David but the Spirit of God came upon each group in succession and they ended up prophesying with the prophets rather than fulfilling their missions.

Eventually Saul himself goes to do for himself what all of his messengers had failed to do. Back in chapter 10 verses 10-13 we read, When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them. And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets? And a man of the place answered, And who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets? When he had finished prophesying, he came to the high place.

Here that saying that we first heard in chapter 10 is repeated again but with a rather more ironic sense. Saul is now alienated from Samuel. He presumably doesn't have any personal audience with Samuel here as we were told at the end of chapter 15 that he didn't see Samuel again until the day of Samuel's death.

In this incident Saul replays the story of his call but in a very tragic way. He goes to Ramah searching for the prophet. He is directed by people at a well.

The Spirit of God comes upon him and he prophesies. And the saying concerning his relationship to the prophets is related. However at the end of the chapter Saul is left naked, symbolically stripped of his office by the Spirit of God.

Meanwhile David is with the prophet Samuel. He is counted among the prophets now. A question to consider.

What cautionary lessons about the ways of sin might we learn from the occasions of Saul's anger towards David? What might Saul's relationship with his spear reveal about the effects of sin in people's lives? 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 14 to chapter 13 verse 14. But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus to go and sent the brother with him.

Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish, that perhaps there may be quarrelling,

jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier, and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

This is the third time that I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before, and all the others, and I warn them now, while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them, since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me.

He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but in dealing with you we will live with Him by the power of God.

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail to meet the test? I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

But we pray to God that you may not do wrong, not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak, and you are strong.

Your restoration is what we pray for. For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. Finally, brothers, rejoice.

Aim for restoration. Comfort one another. Agree with one another.

Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. In the second half of 2 Corinthians chapter 12, and the final chapter of the epistle, Paul speaks of his third visit to Corinth again. His first visit was the one narrated in Acts chapter 18, the second was the painful visit he wrote of earlier in this epistle.

Continuing from his statement in verse 13 about his imagined wronging of the Corinthians in not taking support from them, not granting them the honour of being his patrons, Paul expresses his determination to continue that policy of not taking support in his forthcoming visit. What Paul wants is not the Corinthians' resources, but the Corinthians themselves, their joyful response to his teaching and fellowship with them in the gospel. He is their father in the faith and it is not the task of offspring to store up support and inheritance for their parents, but vice versa.

Paul is clearly not averse to asking for resources from the Corinthians, but not for himself, rather he requests them for the Jerusalem collection. Paul's self-giving service of the Corinthians is entirely willing and not grudging, it proceeds from his love for them. Which is why the strange notion that the super-apostles have given the Corinthians that Paul loves them less because he doesn't take support from them is so bewildering to Paul.

As he has earlier expressed in this letter, Paul is dismayed by the fact that his love for the Corinthians is not truly requited. In fact, it seems as if a really shameful accusation has been made, a claim that the Jerusalem collection is a duplicitous ruse to take money from the Corinthians, without doing so directly. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the fact that other associates of his were involved in organising the collection.

If Paul were defrauding them, these parties must presumably be in on the scheme. Yet Titus, for whom the Corinthians seem to have some genuine affection, and the other parties all behave themselves in the same scrupulously consistent and transparent fashion. At this point, Paul steps back from his argument.

He wishes to address a potential misconception. It might appear to some that his epistle is largely an attempt on Paul's part to defend himself, an epistle driven by his own personal interests. However, Paul's authority has never been an end in itself, as if Paul were chiefly concerned about some status that he personally enjoyed on account of it.

No, Paul's authority exists for the purpose of their protection and edification. These are the things that have concerned Paul throughout. Paul's worry is that, when he comes to them, he may find that they have not set things in order, and that he will have another painful and tense visit, with lingering hostilities from some of the Corinthians towards him, and another visit in which he will have to cause the Corinthians grief by sharp rebuke.

It seems as if Paul has gotten wind of the fact that some of the issues that he addressed in Corinth in 1 Corinthians are still causing problems there, and that some of those who were originally causing the problems haven't repented. If matters of sexual immorality are still causing issues in Corinth, Paul's use of the illustration of a father jealously protecting his betrothed daughter from seduction at the beginning of chapter 11 might well have been a more apt one than we might have originally supposed. Preparing the Corinthians for his third visit, Paul refers to the ways that matters of contention must be resolved, with the evidence provided by two or three witnesses.

There are various ways that the witnesses to which Paul refers might be understood. Some take them to refer to literal witnesses that Paul would summon when he deals with matters more formally upon his return to them. For others, the witnesses are the visits themselves.

Yet others see the witnesses as referring to the warnings that he has given to them, in person and by letter. Behind Paul's statement here we might hear Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 18, verses 15-17. Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

The logic of two or three witnesses may be at work in Matthew 18's instructions, not only in the accompanying parties in the second confrontation, but also in the two or three confrontations of the sinning brother taken together. The bringing of witnesses does suggest a more formal procedure that Paul is going to adopt. Matters have escalated.

Perhaps Timothy and Titus will speak in Paul's defence. Paul gives his warning that, when he comes, he won't spare the impenitent. Like those condemned by Matthew 18, they will presumably be removed from fellowship.

Some of the Corinthians have sought from Paul a demonstration or proof that Christ is speaking in him. They want to test the veracity of his claimed authority. Paul treats this less as a questioning of himself, but as a questioning of Christ.

Christ has been powerful among them, and the Corinthians should be well aware of this. Paul relates what he has been saying to the weakness and power connection to which he has often returned in the letter. Christ's own identity was marked by this connection between weakness and power, and it is Christ who both must be determinative for the way that we think about power more generally, and must be the one in whom we situate ourselves.

Those who think about power in earthly ways will find it difficult to understand the Christ-shaped ministry of Paul and his associates. The Corinthians have been looking for proof from Paul, but Paul turns things around on them. The proof of Paul's ministry, as seen in chapter 3 verses 1 to 3, is the Corinthians themselves.

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts to be known and read by all, and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts. If the Corinthians are testing Paul, they should turn the spotlight around on themselves. The evidence of the authority of Christ at work in and through Paul is the Corinthians themselves, if they are looking for proof, then they should look at themselves.

The question that they must answer is, is Jesus Christ in you? Paul words the question in a way that presumes a positive answer. For all their faults and failings, Christ is indeed among them, whatever unsettling aspects of evidence that throw that judgment into temporary shadow. If Christ is indeed working among them, then there is evidence of Christ at work in and through Paul.

Once again, Paul's concern here is not self-justification and self-defense, but the building up of the Corinthians in the truth and in the path of righteousness. Paul is much less concerned with his own apostolic reputation than he is with the Corinthians' well-being, the health of his children in the faith. Paul is not spoiling for a fight with the Corinthians, or looking for an opportunity to flex his apostolic authority.

Rather, he is very glad to appear weak if they are strong in the faith. As a good father, he does not rejoice in bringing punishment and rebuke. He is entirely uninvested in proving himself tough when it is not in the service of building up his children.

It is for this reason that he is writing to them now in such a manner, to avoid a situation where he has to employ a more forceful authority with them. What he is praying for is their restoration. His authority was given for the sake of building up, not for tearing down, a point he has already made in 10.8. While there may be occasions when tearing down is required, this is not the ordinary intended use of his authority, so he will do whatever he can to avoid the unnecessary employment of it in such a fashion.

In Paul's final admonitions to the Corinthians, we might get a sense of those things that he deems most needful for them at this present juncture in time. He wants them to seek to restore things, their appropriate conduct, and their relationship with him. He wants them to be comforted, something that will be achieved as restoration occurs.

They should put an end to conflict and dissension, and they should be at peace. God is the God of love and peace, and these are behaviours characteristic of his presence among us. As he often tells the recipients of his letters, Paul charges the Corinthians to greet one another with a holy kiss, as an expression of the holy unity and peace that we enjoy in Christ.

He conveys the greetings of other saints to them, which would serve to remind them of the fact that there is a wider body of people, of Christians, attending to the matters between Paul and them, and that for the sake of bringing glory to God through their thanksgiving on the Corinthians' account, they should respond appropriately. Finally, Paul gives a threefold Trinitarian blessing to the Corinthians. Each person of the Grace with the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, Love with God the Father, and Fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

We can best understand this with what some theologians have termed the doctrine of appropriation. God's works are indivisible. All of God does all that God does.

The Trinity isn't a division of labour, nor is the grace of the Son a grace that is not at the same time a grace from the Father to us, or the grace communicated to us by the Spirit. The same can be said of the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Son that the love of the Father is made manifest, and it is the Spirit by whom that love is poured out and personally present in our hearts.

The fellowship of the Spirit is, according to 1 John 1, verse 3, a fellowship that we enjoy with the Father and the Son. The doctrine of appropriation offers a fuller account of how each person of the Trinity can possess in a unique manner what is the common property of all. According to this approach, for instance, by recognising the order of the Trinity, names, qualities, or works can be especially attributed to one person, albeit not to the exclusion of the others.

So while fellowship may be something wrought by all of the persons of the Trinity, it is most fittingly associated with the Spirit. A question to consider, how might taking Christ as our model for power change the way that we regard and exercise it?