

MESSAGE — Part 18 — Responding to what God is Doing

Earlier this week I sat down with Kevin. Kevin is a family friend, and the two of us were talking at my kitchen table. I don't know how it came up, but he just opened up and shared his story — which, btw, he gave me permission to share with you.

Back in 2005 his dad suffered a heart attack, was taken to the hospital, and passed away not long after.

But here's the thing, as his dad was laying in the hospital bed, Kevin was holding him while his dad took his last breath. And something happened at that moment. He said it was the weirdest thing, but he felt a moment of pure joy come over him when his dad passed.

Obviously he grieved... but for a split second, there was this unexpected joy that rushed over him.

His mom was also in the room while this happened. She didn't say anything to Kevin for a while, but one day they were talking, and she said:

"You know, I haven't told anyone this, but when your dad passed, I felt a moment of complete joy, and I swear I saw what looked like Jesus welcoming your dad home."

The interesting thing is that Kevin's mom is blind. She'd been blind for years. Yet she saw Jesus in that moment.

Kevin didn't see Jesus, but they both experienced that same brief moment of complete joy — and neither of them knew the other felt it until much later.

Kevin said that was a gift from the LORD.
But the story doesn't end there...

Fast forward to 2024. Kevin ends up having a heart attack on the exact same day his dad did back in 2005... it was 19 years *to the day*, and Kevin is going through the same thing his dad did.

And as far as the doctors were concerned, Kevin shouldn't have made it. Yet, here he is, sitting at my kitchen table.

And he says to me: "Scott, it's only by the grace of God that I'm still here. I feel like there must be a reason why. I don't know what that is. But there's got to be a reason."

I'll tell you what I said to him in a bit, but there's something I want us to notice with this story:

When Kevin's dad passed, that was an incredibly difficult moment. Yet Kevin and his mom recognized the presence of the LORD through that brief moment of joy.

In that moment, they were seeing reality through God's perspective.

And now, as they look back on that moment, they're seeing it through who God is...

They're seeing God's goodness, His mercy, and His faithfulness.

This is exactly how 1 Samuel has been training us to look at our moments.

We've been seeing that God forms His people to look at their life circumstances through His heart.

[SLIDE 1] (don't read) Progression of "Seeing"

Chapter 16 taught us to see reality through God's perspective.

Remember what the LORD said to Samuel?

People look at the outward appearance...

but the LORD looks at the heart (16:7)

Then in chapter 17, we see an example of this.

David doesn't just see a giant...

He sees the situation through who God is.

He remembers God's faithfulness and is absolutely convinced, that the battle is the LORD's.

And so...

In chapter 16 — the LORD sees differently.

In chapter 17 — David sees differently.

And now, in chapter 18...

[SLIDE 2] Ch 18 — others must decide how they will see

We'll see how Jonathan and Saul respond, when they recognize that **the LORD is with David.**

Jonathan's response is shocking...

After David defeats Goliath, Jonathan sees that the LORD was *clearly* with David.

But the way he responds is probably one of the most profound acts of humility in the entire Old Testament.

Let's take a closer look...

[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 18:1-2 - After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family.

[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 18:3-4 - And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

A few things to notice here...

Remember, Jonathan is the son of king Saul. If anything were to happen to the king, Jonathan would be the next in line for the throne.

It was his birthright.

But Jonathan *gave it up*.
He handed it over to David

Jonathan's robe, tunic, sword, bow and belt
all symbolized his royal status as heir to the throne.

That's why verse 3 says Jonathan made a 'covenant' with David.

Jonathan is pledging himself to David's future as the king.

This was an *extreme* act of brotherly love.
It cost him *everything*.

**Why would he do that?
Why give everything up?**

**Because when he saw that the LORD was with David...
Jonathan chose to align himself with what God was doing.**

That's true humility.

It's the moment when God's purposes become clear and we're left with a choice:

- Will we get on board with what God's doing?
- Or will we try to take matters into our own hands?

[SLIDE 5] Jonathan recognized the work of the LORD and surrendered to His will. Saul realized the LORD was with David... and resisted.

Jonathan humbly aligned himself with what God was doing.
But Saul was the opposite.

He felt threatened.

People were starting to sing songs about Saul and David.
They sang: *Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.*

Saul was finally starting to realize what everyone else was seeing...
The LORD was with David and not him.
Samuel's words were actually coming true!

That made Saul extremely angry.

So God intervened one more time...

[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 18:10-11 - The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

Just like in chapter 16, a harmful spirit came on Saul. Except this time was different.

One minute David's playing music for Saul...
The next he's dodging spears!

**So what's going on here?
Was Saul possessed by a demon?**

Well, the text doesn't describe this as demonic possession.

But it does show that God allowed a harmful spirit to trouble Saul. There's a couple key details here...

The first is that:
the spirit from God "came forcefully" on Saul.

The Hebrew word behind "came forcefully" is ***tislah***.
—it means "to *rush* upon."

It's the exact same word used in previous chapters when the Spirit of the LORD "came powerfully" on Saul.

Same word, very different result.

Because when the Spirit of the LORD rushed on Saul in earlier chapters, it produced courage for the task God was calling him to do.

But when the harmful spirit rushed on him, it amplified the anger that was already inside him.

The second thing to notice is this:
When the harmful spirit came on him,
the scripture says he was “**prophesying.**”

But he’s not speaking God’s truth here.
This is a different kind of “prophesying.”

That’s why some translations say Saul *began to rave*.

They’re picking up on the fact that Saul was acting like a “raving lunatic,” while David was playing music.

We’re supposed to see the contrast between Saul and David.

That’s why verse 12 says...

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 18:12 - Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had departed from Saul.

This is where Saul realized... The LORD was with David.

But notice his response was the opposite of Jonathan’s.

He could see that the LORD was working through David.
He probably remembered back to when Samuel said in chapter 15:
“The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today.”¹

But Saul wasn’t about to give up his kingdom.
Not even if that was the LORD’s plan.

He wanted to stay king.

But how?

Well, the only way he could see to stop God’s plan...
was to kill David.

And when the spear didn’t work, he switched up his strategy.

¹ 1 Samuel 15:28

He'd let David marry into the family, but under one condition...
David would have to go out and fight against the Philistines.
Saul's plan was for David to die on the battlefield.

Things didn't work out with the first daughter.
But the second daughter was a different story...

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 18:20-21 - Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. "I will give her to him," he thought, "so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him."

Then verse 25 says...

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 18:25 - Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.

So what are we seeing here?

Again, we're meant to see how Jonathan and Saul both responded to the LORD's will...

[SLIDE 10] Jonathan recognized the work of the LORD, and surrendered to His will. Saul realized the LORD was with David... and resisted.

I was thinking this week that there's a difference between:
recognizing and ***realizing***.

To ***recognize*** something is to see it in light of what you already know.

To ***realize*** something is to see it in a way you haven't before.

Jonathan recognized that the LORD was with David
because he already knew the character of God.

Saul realized the LORD was with David,
but only after he felt threatened.

Both men saw the same reality.

They could see that the LORD was working through David.

But they responded very differently.

One humbly aligned himself with God and trusted what He was doing.
The other feared what God was doing and tried to control it.

That speaks to how we see our own situations.

[SLIDE 11] Will we recognize the Lord's work in our lives? And when we do, will we participate in what He's doing? Or will we resist Him?

That brings me back to Kevin's story.

Again, medically speaking, Kevin shouldn't have survived his heart attack. Yet, here he was, sitting at my kitchen table, telling me about how God had been working in his life.

And he said to me:

"Scott, it's only by the grace of God that I'm still here. I feel like there must be a reason why... but I don't know what it is."

I said something like:

"I'm sure there's many reasons... not just one. The fact that you're sitting here telling me this story is probably one of those reasons. Because every time you tell your story... you're giving glory to God. And not only that... God has gifted you in certain ways to help people."

That's actually why he was visiting Amanda and I.
We needed some of his expertise.

But here's the thing about God's will:

Sometimes we think there must be one big reason why we're here,
and we do everything we can to try and figure it out.

When the reality is, God most often uses His people in small, ordinary ways.

The question is:

How will we respond when we see God working?

Will we shy away in fear?
Or will we see what He's doing in light of who He is?

I love how John talks about this.

His letter shows that fear and love move us in opposite directions...

[SLIDE 12] 1 John 4:16, 18 - God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them ... There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Saul was afraid.

He was afraid of losing *control*... and really, his *kingdom*.

That fear was what led him to resist what God was doing.

But Jonathan's trust freed him to participate in what God was doing.

Think about it this way...

[SLIDE 13] Love allowed Jonathan to release what fear told Saul to protect.

[...]

Again, Jonathan didn't just give his coat...

He gave David his right to the throne.

Why?

It's because he trusted in the LORD.

**And because he understood something Saul didn't.
He understood that the LORD loved him first.**

John's letter echoes this in the next verse...

[SLIDE 14] 1 John 4:19 - We love because he first loved us.

All of this reminds me of what today is:
Palm Sunday.

It's the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem...
one week before His resurrection.²

And as He rode in on a donkey...
People had to decide how they were going to respond to Him.

Some celebrated Him.
They welcomed Him as their new king.

Others felt threatened by Him.
And they immediately began looking for a way to kill Him.

But the really sad thing is this:
None of them recognized who He really is!

Some thought He came to overthrow Rome.
Others thought He came to disrupt their way of life.

But Jesus didn't come to *take* power.
He came to *give* His life.

Jesus is God in the flesh.

And He came to rescue us from sin...
by giving Himself for us on the cross.

He did this so that anyone who trusts Him,
will not only have forgiveness and eternal life...

But He gave everything so that we can learn to live a new kind of life—
A life that follows Him *now* and doesn't wait.

² Luke 19:28-48

That's why I like to say **eternal life starts at the moment of belief.**
 Because participation in His will doesn't start after death...
 It starts now.

That's why we're still here.

If you've ever wondered like my friend Kevin:
Why am I still here?
What's God's will for my life?

Here's the thing about God's will...

There's usually not one grand purpose and we just have to figure it out.

[SLIDE 16] Jesus simply invites us to participate in what He's already doing right now. Not in fear, but in love.

The question is, will we recognize what He's already doing in and around our lives? Will we see our circumstances through His heart?

And when we do...

How will we respond?

Are we ready to say yes to Jesus?

And please hear me on that.

Are we ready to surrender our will and pursue God's will?

And I mean today.
 ...on the drive home.
 ...with our families tonight.
 ...when we clock in tomorrow for work.

Let's be *looking* for the small ways in which God wants to use us.

Let's not have hearts that realize God is near...
 yet still cling to our old way of life.

Instead, let's trust the One who paid it all for us.

Because when we understand how much Jesus loves us...
we don't have to hold on tight to our own plans.

Like Jonathan...
we can let go of our "robes and swords."

Because when we release what fear tells us to protect...
That's when we're free to participate in what God's doing now,
right in front of us.

God is actively moving His story forward...
and He invites us to trust Him enough to join Him...
even now.

Let's pray.

We pray as Jesus taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into testing, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever,
Amen.