

Glory in the Ruins: How God Sees You

Sermon by The Rev. Billy Cervený (Edited for Grammar and Accuracy)

Pray with me.

Father, thank You for this morning. I pray that You would open the eyes of our hearts, that we would see You more clearly, understand Your Word more deeply, and that You would transform us. We pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Good morning.

One question I've asked myself since I was a little boy—and I want to ask you this morning—is this: How does God see you?

If you could step outside yourself and look at you through God's eyes, what would He see? What would His opinion be? Is He pleased with how you've turned out? With how you're living your life? Or is He sitting there, tapping His fingers, saying, "I thought you'd have it figured out by now. You should've dialed this one in. I saw what you did."

That question matters because how we answer it shapes everything. It determines how I approach God—or whether I feel like I can approach God at all. Do I hide? Do I perform? Do I distance myself?

So, I want to dive into that today. We're continuing our series on 1 and 2 Samuel, and today we're entering the second part of that journey—2 Samuel.

In the passage we read earlier, King Saul has died, and David is devastated. He enters into this full-on Old Testament moment of grief—writing a poem and singing a lamentation over God's anointed one who has died.

Biblical scholars often call this one of the most beautiful examples of Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament. But to understand why this poem matters, we need to back up a bit.

The last passage we covered was the story of David and Goliath—one of the most famous stories in the Bible. David was just a boy. Goliath, a giant, comes out to challenge Saul's army. Saul is trembling in his tent. David steps out as Israel's representative, knocks Goliath down with a slingshot, and becomes a national hero.

From there, David's fame skyrockets. He goes viral. David action figures are everywhere. People are into him. There are military parades, and the women are singing, "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands."

Now, Saul—who is insecure and self-serving—does not take that well. Twice, he tries to pin David to the wall with a spear. Not exactly a great way to build trust.

As Saul's jealousy grows, David has to flee. He ends up hiding in caves, living as a fugitive through the remainder of 1 Samuel.

But David wasn't just popular with the people. He was God's chosen. That matters, because the king of Israel was meant to reflect God's heart to the world. You could say the king was supposed to be a kind of billboard, advertising the character of God. Saul, however, was the opposite.

In fact, the reason God chose Saul in the first place was because Saul reflected Israel's heart back to God—he was insecure, unfaithful, selfish, worldly. Instead of being a nation set apart, Saul wanted Israel to be just like every other nation. So God raised up David instead.

Eventually, war breaks out between Israel and the Philistines. It's not going well. In the final scene of 1 Samuel 31, Saul is wounded on the battlefield. The Philistines are closing in. Rather than be captured, he falls on his own sword and dies.

That's where 2 Samuel opens. David doesn't know Saul is dead yet. He's still in camp when a man—an Amalekite—arrives with torn clothes and dust on his head. That's a sign of mourning. He bows before David and says, essentially, "I have a story to tell you."

The Amalekite claims, "I was in the battle. Everyone fled—except me. I found Saul, badly wounded. He begged me to kill him before the Philistines arrived. So I had mercy. I took his life. I brought you his crown and armband as proof—evidence that God's anointed has died. And I brought them to you, David—the one Saul hunted. The next king."

Now, two things about this story.

First, it doesn't add up. In the previous chapter, the narrator clearly told us Saul committed suicide. This Amalekite is lying—probably a scavenger who came across Saul's body and saw an opportunity.

So why didn't he just pawn the crown? Sell it online? Because he had a plan. He knew Saul had made David's life miserable. He assumed David would rejoice at Saul's death—and reward him for taking credit. He thought, "If I say I killed Saul, David will put me on the gravy train. I'll be a hero."

He knew how the human heart works. So do we.

When someone wrongs us—not just inconveniences us, but betrays us, abuses trust, truly wounds us—what happens in our hearts? They become our enemy. And even if we wouldn't say it out loud, we demand justice.

You hurt me. You owe me.

Justice, in our hearts, often looks like this: You must feel what I felt. You must suffer the way I've suffered. You must lose what I lost. And because I didn't deserve this—but you do—you'll pay with interest.

Now of course, we're Christians. We know how to dress it up. We're polite. But that's how our hearts often work.

The problem? Retribution doesn't heal us. It doesn't restore what was lost. It keeps us trapped in the past. It twists us into bitterness, vengefulness. Our hearts go septic.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus' heart doesn't work that way.

So back to our story: The Amalekite gives his best pitch. But things don't go as he planned.

In verse 11, it says David and his men tear their clothes and mourn till evening. They're grieving Saul and Jonathan. The Amalekite must have been stunned. "Wait, what?"

Then David turns to him and says, "Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand against the Lord's anointed?" And then David has the man executed.

And then David writes a song of lament for Saul—the same Saul who had hunted him for years.

He writes, "How the mighty have fallen. Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul... he was strong like a lion... clothed you in fine garments..."

Why would he do that?

Because David was a man after God's heart. He was the great-great-great-grandfather of Jesus, the first in a line of kings that would lead to the Messiah. And in moments like this, David prefigures Christ. He parts the curtain and shows us the upside-down nature of God's kingdom:

- Where the last shall be first
- Where we die to live
- Where we give to receive
- Where we see the glory in the ruin

What does that mean?

Last year, I had the privilege of visiting Croatia—a beautiful Mediterranean country. In the city of Split, there's a massive palace built by the Roman emperor Diocletian—one of the worst persecutors of Christians.

Today, his palace lies in ruins. Giant marble columns jut out of the rubble. Archways rise from the debris. People travel from all over to see these ruins.

But you know what no one says while they're there?
"Wow, what a great pile of rocks."

No. They're all squinting, tilting their heads, trying to see the original design—trying to glimpse the glory that still rises from the wreckage.

Francis Schaeffer once wrote (paraphrased): “We are glorious ruins.”
We simultaneously reflect the glory of God and the ruin of sin.

We are marble arches and broken stones. We love God with all our hearts—but also love ourselves. We care for others—and yet remain selfish. We are walking paradoxes.

And God—the God who so loved the world—sent His Son into that rubble. Why?

Because we've taken a bat to the palace He built.
We've desecrated holy spaces.
We've torn down what He made beautiful.

And when injustice like that happens, it demands justice.

So Jesus came, stood in our place, and said, “I will pay it.”
And on the cross, He did.

Now, having paid the price, do you know what Jesus says when He looks at you?

He doesn't say, “What a pile of rubble.”
He sees the glory.

Zephaniah 3 says, “He rejoices over you with singing.”
He sees the collapsed walls—and the rising arches. He sees the beauty He is restoring.

When I was in Croatia, if I had tried to restack those ruins myself, it would've looked like a sandcastle. But Jesus is the original architect. And He's actively rebuilding.

Philippians 1:6: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.”

1 Peter 5: “He will restore you and make you strong.”

2 Corinthians: “You are a new creation.”

And one day, that restoration will be complete—in the new heavens and new earth.

So why does this matter?

Two reasons, and I'll close with this:

First, it changes how I see God.

He's not shaking His head at a pile of rocks.

He sees a glorious expression of His creation. He's not done with you. You can boldly come before Him.

Second, it changes how I see others.

When I realize that I'm the Amalekite—that I demanded justice, but Christ paid my debt—it gives me grace for others.

I'm still hurt. I can still set boundaries. But maybe, just maybe, as Christ grows in me, I can begin to see the glory in their ruin—and learn to forgive.

Amen.