Prayers

Opening prayer

Glory, honour, power and praise be to You, Lord Jesus Christ. You know all things, and You understand our lives and You know our need of forgiveness. Thank You for the attention You pay to our lives, and give us the gifts and graces we need to go about our daily work with joy, and with confidence that You hold our lives in Your hands. Your graciousness is amazing and we praise you, Lord Jesus Christ; AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: FARMING

1. ***For yourself***
   Praise God for the blessing of food to eat, and pray that everyone, across the world, will have enough to eat

2. ***For your friends and family***
   Praise God for your family, and name them one by one before God. Ask the Lord to provide each one with the spiritual sustenance they need as well as their earthly food.

3. ***For the church and its work***
   Praise God for your church, and give thanks for the work it does that reaches out to the poor.

4. ***For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)***
   Pray especially for farming communities ravaged by modern 'plagues' or drought. Pray for those who will have the hard work of deciding what to hold back so that it can be the 'seed' for next year's crops. Pray that seed will be readily available for those who face problems.

Meditation

For those who have eyes that are open to see
> And want to find the truth about God and Jesus;

Salvation is for those who own His name,
> And judgment comes to those who burden the poor;

Blessings fall on people who seek to do good,
> And curses fall on people who choose to do evil;

Deliverance comes to all who trust in Him,
> And bondage awaits all who love their own ways;

The Kingdom grows where God's will is done,
> And His justice arrives to set the captives free;

So let all people turn to look at God's Word
> And let everyone yield to His plan of Redemption.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Samuel 18:20-32

[20] Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. [21] He thought,

> 'I will give her to him, so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.'

So Saul said to David,

> 'Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law.'

22 Then Saul ordered his attendants:

> 'Speak to David privately and say, "Look, the king is pleased with you, and his attendants all like you; now become his son-in-law."'

23 They repeated these words to David, but he said,

> 'Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known.'

24 When Saul's servants told him what David had said, 25 Saul replied,

> 'Say to David, "The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies."'

Saul's plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.

26 When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king's son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed, 27 David and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. He brought their foreskins and presented the full number to the king so that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.

28 When Saul realised that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, 29 Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy for the rest of his days. 30 The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known.

Review

> ***After some protracted negotiations, King Saul gives his consent to a marriage between David and his daughter Michal. But he does so only after doing his best to place David in harm's way.***

Yesterday, we began to appreciate an important sub plot to the story of 1 and 2 Samuel. It is about who will marry David, and therefore produce an heir to carry his lineage through history, ultimately as far as the Messiah. Previously, we read that Saul pledged his eldest daughter, Merab, to be married to David, but in unexplained circumstances, the girl was married to someone else, and David was kept waiting. We do not know anything more, though we get the feeling that Saul purposefully deceived David.

It is in this passage that we discover the identity of David's first bride; she is in fact one of the younger daughters of Saul, by the name of Michal. The first we hear of this is in verse 20, where we read that Michal had a crush on David. She was one of many young women who would have given anything to marry the great and handsome young man who had just slaughtered Goliath, defeated the aggressive Philistines and secured the peace of Israel.

But all this was far from Saul's mind. After nearly killing David with a spear, he continued to struggle over how to handle David, and was becoming rather paranoid about him. On the one hand, he knew that he had to give David a place at court because he was the commander of the army, but when it came to arranging a marriage to achieve this, he prevaricated (18:17-19). On the other hand, he repeatedly manoeuvred David's position in battle to ensure the maximum danger, hoping that he would killed in action (18:21)!

Saul was handed the opportunity he needed when it came to his attention that his daughter Michal had eyes for David (18:20). Getting the two together, however, took some negotiation (18:21-24). This may be because the relationship between Saul and David was strained, but again, the text does not say this in so many words. We simply read that after speaking to David (18:21), Saul later negotiated the terms of the marriage through his servants (18:22f.). But as we discover what these terms were, we understand why Saul kept his distance; this was yet another of Saul's attempts to get David killed in battle. The task required of him was suicidal!

David, however, took everything in his stride, and accepted the extraordinary penalty placed on him by Saul. He was required to slaughter a hundred Philistines, and prove it by presenting a hundred foreskins to Saul as victory trophies! With his eyes on the earthly odds, Saul was sure that David would be killed in the attempt, but David knew what he was doing. He had been asked for a hundred trophies but David obtained two hundred! He took a picked team of men and did the deed without difficulty, so much so that Saul clearly observed that '*the Lord was with David*' (18:28)! We might well recoil from the idea that David had to kill

people in this way, but the most likely scenarios is this. The Philistines were continually encamped on the borders of Israel, because throughout this era, they were intent on invasion. It seems that David had ample opportunity to raid the Philistine camps and kill their soldiers. His actions enabled him to marry Michal, and they lessened the military threat against Israel.

Our passage today may seem to be of only passing significance. It certainly fills in some of the events in the young David's life, and as we read on in 1 Samuel, we will discover that the feud with Saul never ends. Eventually there is a break between the two men, and one of the casualties of this break, when it come, is the woman David married first, Michal (19:11f. 25:44 and 2 Sam 3:13). The bitterness created by the breakdown exposes a flaw in David's personal life, which comes back to haunt him (2 Samuel 6:16f. 11:1f.)

We should not read too quickly over any Biblical stories about marriage or childbearing. Throughout history, God has used these major events in life in the furtherance of His salvation plan. For example, the hope of Israel was frequently dependent upon a child; on the young Moses, protected from ethnic cleansing in Egypt (Exodus 1,2), on the young Samuel, on whose shoulders lay the task of restoring godliness to the ravaged tribes of Israel (1 Samuel 1,2). David himself is heartbroken over the death of a child he hoped would be his successor, who would carry God's covenant into the future (2 Samuel 12). It should come as no surprise therefore when Isaiah prophesies that God intends to come and 'be with' His people as a child, born to be king (Isaiah 7:14, 9:2f. 11:1f.).

What we have read today happens in the middle of this great sweep of Old Testament history, and we should be on the watch for who David will marry. For after marriage will come the birth of a son who will be king after David, and because we already know that God is with David in a special way ('*the Lord ... is with him*' - 16:18, 18:12,14, 2 Sam 5:10, 6:10 etc.), his rightful son and heir will be an important person. Of course, we know that this son is Solomon. But because we hear nothing of him or his mother here, we must unfortunately assume that we are reading about relationships that will not last.

This may sound a rather downbeat assessment for a story that speaks of the victorious David, But we must keep our eyes on the wider picture if we want to perceive how these events relate to world history and the saving power of God revealed within it.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Do you find it offensive when the Bible talks of arranged marriages? Why would God allow such a degrading treatment of women?
2. Do you agree that Saul is showing signs of paranoia? Why do you think that God allowed Saul to remain on the throne?
3. Was David right to accept a daughter of Saul in marriage, and should he not have kept his distance? Why do you think he did not?

Discipleship challenges

- *Over a period of a week, write down some of the complicated things which happen in your life which seem inexplicable. Offer them to the Lord in prayer.*

- *In a similar manner consider the life of the church, and pray that the Lord will use everything happening for good and for the Kingdom; even if this is not immediately clear to everyone!*

Final Prayer

Thank You Lord, for love. Thank You for the different ways in which we show love to each other, within marriage, between parents and children, between friends, within the church and also to our neighbours in the wider world. Sustain us in the pleasure and duty of all our loving relationships, for the good of Your Kingdom; AMEN