

## Samuel to king David David spares Saul 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 24

*[King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

As we look at 1 Samuel chapter 24 today, there are two things that we can learn from this episode of David and Saul.

The first thing is the divine providence of God and how we ought to be aware of the bigger picture in life, and not take things into our own hands to satisfy our personal desires. J T Packer gives an understanding of God's providence along the lines of this. "Providence is defined as the never-ending activity of the Creator as He sustains His creatures in ordered existence, guides and rules all events, circumstances and free acts of both angels and men, and brings everything to its appointed end for His glory."

In some of the previous incidents in David's life he has been helped by the providence of God without fully understanding that God was in control and was sustaining him through those experiences. We see in chapter 24 a change in David's character as he begins to view things from God's side and not from his own selfish desires.

The second thing that we can learn is how we should behave, knowing that God is in control and that we have the Holy Spirit within us to guide and help. Do we resist natural response and love our enemy as God does, or do we take matters into our own hands?

As we look back over the previous chapters, we find that King Saul has increased his intensity to try and find David and kill him. Time and again we see how God has protected David and had helped him to escape the clutches of Saul. At the end of chapter 23, God had used the Philistines to draw Saul away from his pursuit of David, and allow him to escape. David and his men found shelter and concealment in the caves in the rocks of En Gedi. As we read these Scriptures it brings to life the story of David, but we can often miss the things we should learn that is relevant to our lives today.

When we see things in our world and in our personal lives that go against what we believe, we sometimes see the aggressors succeeding and the sinners profiting, while the believer suffers. When temptations and trials come our way, the question we have to ask is how do we live patiently and with hope in a world where evil exists?

Jesus taught hard, radical things. During His Sermon on the Mount, He said,

"You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy"" (Matthew 5:43).

It seems that by the time of Christ, the religious leaders had taken the Old Testament command to 'love your neighbour' to mean one should also hate their enemy. Their teaching was a perversion of God's word. Jesus corrected their teaching,

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

It would have been a difficult message had he merely said, “Love your neighbour and tolerate your enemies,” but Jesus went much further. His people, with His Spirit inside them, are to love their enemies pray for them. But why? Jesus went on,

“So that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45).

Why would we want to love our enemies? Because in so doing we are of like nature with our Father in heaven. He is indiscriminate in his love, pouring out rain on both the just and the unjust. John 3:16 tell us,

“God so loved the world,”

so we ought also to love the whole world. Jesus continued,

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matthew 5:46-47).

Everyone, Jesus says, knows how to love those that we like and are in our circle of friendship. It is to love those who are outside of our circle of friendship that is difficult, but also Godlike.

In the chapter that is before us, 1 Samuel chapter 24, David adopts the words of the Lord in Matthew 5 and will behave as his Father who is in heaven. He will love his enemy as God has loved his.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Verse 10 also tells us that,

“If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.”

God’s love came crashing upon a world at odds with and at enmity with Him. In our story, David begins to act as a man after God’s own heart and will love his enemy as God does. We should learn from his example.

Saul had now finished with the Philistine distraction, which had helped David and his men to escape and find shelter in En Gedi, and returned to pursue David once more. Someone had informed him of David’s whereabouts—he was hiding in the wilderness of En Gedi. Saul gathered three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men. David’s six hundred distressed, indebted, and bitter men were pursued by Saul’s three thousand chosen warriors. The odds were stacked against David, but God was with him, having led him to the wilderness. En Gedi, near the Dead Sea, was filled with nooks and crannies and caves where David and his men could hide from Saul. Hundreds of caves litter En Gedi and some of those caves had been carved out more deeply by local shepherds. These enlarged caves would serve their flocks as a source of respite from the merciless midday sun.

Our story unfolds with David and his men hiding in one of these large caves. As he pursued David, Saul needed relief and He went into the mouth of a cave alone. It was not a coincidence, but God's providence, that Saul entered into the one cave in which David and his men were hiding. Saul did not realise that he was in the company of his sworn enemy. David faces a new temptation with the opportunity to finally get rid of Saul and end the persecution against him and his followers. David's men are quick to respond and show how our natural minds work. "End your misery and kill the King!" Their immediate response was one of retribution and we have to be very careful when others try to give advice. David's men said to him,

"This is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you'"  
(1 Samuel 24:4).

We can search the whole of Scripture, but will never find this prophesy mentioned where God promised this to David. We have to be on our guard as there are many believers who will misinterpret the providence of God and fashion Scripture to make it seem like it is God's will.

Their thought that David could be King right then, to end all their trials and make their lives so much better. Was this right? The answer is no. We have to align everything with the whole of God's word. We can often use one or two verses to try and substantiate a particular point, but we need the balance of the whole of Scripture. We see in the temptation of the Lord Jesus that Satan misuses Scripture as he tempts the Lord. The temptation for David to take the life of Saul weighed heavily on him, especially as his friends were encouraging him. Satan knows that there are people in our lives who can influence us, and he can use them to sway our decisions.

David then arose and came upon Saul stealthily, but instead of cutting off Saul's head, he cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Disappointment would have rushed through David's men as they watched their leader return with only the corner of a garment. Their lives had been made miserable by this man, and his life was now theirs for the taking. They felt that God had provided David with a golden opportunity. He had made a way where there seemed to be no way. But David could not bring himself to kill the king even though his men had claimed that God would give the life of Saul into his hands.

David would succeed Saul as king, that much was clear, but God had not given him a promise that he would be the one to take Saul's life. Second, even if the implication from God was that David's enemies would be delivered to him, Saul was not David's enemy, for David didn't see him as such. These natural men looked with their natural eyes and saw what they wanted to see. Instead of following their counsel, David, knowing God's will, resisted the natural response and instead cut off a piece from his robe. It would have been so easy for David to have taken his knife and cut Saul's throat, putting an end to the persecution.

Even though David spared Saul's life, he immediately regretted what he had done and knew that the tearing of a robe signified the forfeiture of the kingdom from that day. The cutting of the garment was a symbolic declaration that it was a revolt against the king as explained in 1 Samuel 15 vv.27,28. We have in the Scripture in 1 Peter 2 which tells us how we ought to live in relation to others and verse 17 says,

"Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the King."

David understood that this was not the time for him to take matters into his own hands, but to wait on God's timing; and that as Saul was the anointed King, it was not for David to take Saul's life.

We know that David was a man after God's own heart, and it was this that affected his conscience. As believers in the Lord Jesus we should have a conscience that is sensitive so that when something is wrong it should be restrained, and enable us to act in a godly way.

In our world today the media can blur right from wrong, and society pressure sometimes silences a person's conscience. David's men only saw what was before them and their natural instinct took over. David had to speak forcibly to them to make them understand that this was not the time, God would deal with Saul in His own time. As we have already thought of what Jesus said in Matthew 5, we need to show love and mercy to others and to leave judgment to the Lord.

In loving our enemies, we must resist the natural response. It is not natural after being struck on one cheek, to offer the other. It is not natural after being forced to go one mile, to go a second. And it is not natural after being targeted by a beggar or borrower, to give and lend. It is precisely the natural response Jesus calls us to move past in Matthew 5:39-42. He draws us into a deeper, spiritual, response. Our old self is to be put off, making way for the putting on of the new self, so we must consider ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11).

When you are slandered, the natural response is to slander in return. When you are given the cold shoulder, the natural response is to respond in the same manner. When you are hated, the natural response is also to hate. But responses like these are short-sighted because they never lead to a purposeful life. We have to be careful as Satan is always ready to attack us. We read in 1 Timothy 4:2 of some having had their conscience seared with a hot iron which means that their feelings are gone. In 1 Timothy 1:19, we are exhorted to have a good conscience which will make us sensitive to others and help us to make the right decisions. David could say to his men that the Lord had forbidden him to kill Saul, and likewise we have the word of God and His will available for us to follow today.

Saul departed from the cave, but David's heart remained broken. He had to seize the moment, he thought, so he exited the cave after Saul.

“My lord the king!”, he shouted. “Why do you listen to the word of men who say, ‘Indeed, David seeks your harm?’ Look, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and some urged me to kill you. But...I spared you. ...I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed. [See, my father]...see the corner of your robe in my hand” (1 Samuel 24: vv.8-10).

Waving the part of Saul's robe which he had cut off, David earnestly sought to be reconciled to his king and father-in-law.

That David did not remain in the cave is astounding. It does not take an advanced military mind to understand this was not a good fighting strategy. He and his men were defenceless there in the cave. By revealing his position, David had exposed him and his men to great danger. They were at the mercy of Saul, but it seemed worth it to David. He reconciliation with Saul, so he humbly spoke to the man. He bowed to Saul, paying homage to the king. He referred to Saul as his king, his lord, his father, and the anointed of the Lord. He referred to himself as a dead dog, or worse, a flea! He even blamed Saul's actions on the bad counsel of others (even though Saul's madness clearly originated from within his own jealous heart). With great humility, David pursued reconciliation. He showed respect for Saul in the same way that Daniel had done with Nebuchadnezzar.

Proverbs 15:1 tells us that,

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

David knew this concept, a harsh word would only stir up a man like Saul, so he spoke humbly and softly as he pursued reconciliation. He was risking everything in an attempt at unity. In so doing, David stands as a powerful example to every believer who needs to be reconciled to

another. Perhaps you've already done all you can do to humbly fight for unity, but David's account here tells us of the greater risk that God might be asking of you. Perhaps he would nudge you towards coming out of your place of safety in an attempt at solidarity with the one you are at odds with. The apostle James warns us about our tongues and so too in Proverbs 26:20,

“Where there is no wood, the fire goes out, and where there is no talebearer, the strife ceases.”

Verse 22 tells us that these words can be hurtful. Let us ever be mindful of what is said in Song of Solomon 2:15, it is the little foxes that damage the vines, the emphasis being on little. Let us remember to show humility, to show respect, and watch what we say.

In 1 Samuel chapter 24 verse 10, we get the fact of the divine providence of God in that there was the opportunity, as David's men saw it, to get rid of the King, but the principle of restraint was shown by David because Saul was the Lord's anointed. This title is how David thought of Saul. He truly believed Saul to be the called, chosen, selected, and specially prepared man of God to be the king of Israel. Saul was the anointed of the Lord and while he sat on the throne and David would do nothing to take matters into his own hands. He would not remove Saul, for God had selected him.

In verse 11 we have the proof of the providence of God, the cutting from the king's garment showed how easy it would have been for David to take his life, but it was the Lord's will that he was spared. Deuteronomy 32:35 tells us that to God belongs vengeance and recompense, and we have the exhortation in Romans 12 :17 &18 to repay no man evil for evil, but to live peaceably with all men.

There is a powerful lesson here for the believer today. The fact that Saul had been a drain on David's life is beyond question, but David still saw Saul as God's man. Perhaps the annoying, trying or life-draining people in our lives are the very ones anointed by God to shape and mould us. Saul's life drew out the character in David's. It might be that the harshest and hardest people in your life are there to bring the glorious character of Christ to the surface of your character. Certainly there was an affectionate tone in David's voice which undoubtedly had an effect on Saul and as we read in verse 16 it brought tears forth from the king. May the character of Christ be seen in our lives to touch the hearts of those who are offending us and bring them to know the love of the Lord Jesus.

Twice, in slightly different forms, David told Saul that God would have to be the Judge between them. David thought that God's judgment would include God avenging him and pleading his cause, and then God would deliver him from Saul's hand. David's attitude was powerful, for he did not place his hope in Saul or himself, but in God. For him,

“God was his refuge and strength and a very present help in trouble”  
(Psalm 46:1).

When in trouble, we often think we must avenge ourselves. To take matters into our own hands this is a natural response to trouble. We often believe if we don't do it, no one else will therefore we plead our cause. David turned to God for all of it, believing He would be the One to intercede on his behalf. This attitude is certainly Christlike, as we read in 1 Peter 2:23,

“Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously.”

David, like Christ, committed himself to God's defence.

The close of the chapter ends with the response of Saul. When David had finished speaking, Saul, moved by the tone of David's voice, lifted up his voice and wept. Saul confessed David was more righteous than he was, for Saul had repaid David evil, unlike David, who repaid Saul good. There is no record of David ever trying to kill Saul, he was always on the defensive. Saul's conscience was pricked and brought out an emotional response, but as we read on in the book of Samuel, we find that his conduct didn't change. There are many today, who when they hear the word of the Gospel can be emotionally moved and intellectually affected, but their will never changes, and they carry on their lives without trusting in the Saviour.

Saul acknowledges that David will be King and also that David was truly one who loved God and was obedient to His will. Saul concluded his cry by making David swear kindness to his offspring. David also promised this to Jonathan, a covenant which David swore to keep, and we see fulfilled in the place that Mephibosheth received at the King's table.

There is evidence that David knew the repentance of Saul was shallow, for when Saul returned home, David did not go with him. Instead, he and his men went up to the stronghold, but as we know from later in the story, this was only a temporary respite. We have always to be on our guard as sometimes when everything is going well in our lives it is usually the time when the enemy attacks. We need to have the wisdom of Christ to know when we ought to remain guarded. David was willing to reconcile to and love Saul, but that did not make him into a fool who would commit himself to Saul. Like Jesus, who after gaining some popularity,

“Did not commit himself to them, because He knew all men and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man”  
(John 2:24-25).

Like David and Christ, we also ought to be wise. To love our enemies does not mean to walk into abuse, but out of it. We are not to let ourselves be taken advantage of. We are to do the work of reconciliation, but we are also to have practical wisdom about us. Let us ever be aware that God is in control, and He can use armies of Philistines or acts of nature; and that we should be on our guard not to take matters into our own hands. The words in the book of Haggai 2:4 should encourage us,

“Work, for I am with you says the LORD of hosts.”

Let us be strong believers as we strive to do the Lord's work, patiently waiting on Him for guidance and showing out to this weary world a Christ-like character.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on 'David spares Saul', 1 Samuel chapter 24, talk number T1363.

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