

David on the Run

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:17-21

As you recall, last week Saul had been on the verge of capturing David when he received an urgent message that the Philistines were attacking Israel. As a result he was forced to abandon his pursuit and return home to defend against the invaders. However, once that matter was taken care of, he reinstated his spy network to once again locate where David was hiding.

I Samuel 24

David was hiding in the Wilderness (Desert) of En Gedi. Close to the Dead Sea, En Gedi, with its waterfalls and vineyards was more like a tropical paradise than the middle of the desert. There were many caves in the hills so it was a great place for David and his men to hide out. Scouts could easily detect approaching troops and there were many defensive positions. As soon as Saul's spies located David, Saul set out with 3,000 soldiers to find him.

In the area, Saul feels the urge. What are the chances? The very cave he chooses to relieve himself is the cave where David and his men are hiding. Referring to it as a "sheepfold" indicates that it was a large cave big enough to shelter a flock of sheep so all or most of David's 600 men could hide in the recesses of the cave. This was definitely no coincidence but a meeting arranged by God to test David and reveal his heart. God placed his enemy into his hands: what would he choose to do? His men felt this was the opportunity from God to kill Saul and they urged him to do so. They were excited at the prospect of their fugitive days ending and their being friends of the new King of Israel. However, instead of killing Saul, David quietly crept up and cut off only a corner of Saul's robe. As soon as he did it, he regretted it; he had been disrespectful to the Lord's anointed. David wanted to be king but not by his own hand. He trusted that when the time was right, God would be the one to remove Saul. We can see that David's heart didn't store up bitterness and anger against Saul even though he was making David's life miserable. Verses 6-7 *"And he said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way."* When his men saw David's godliness and desire to please God they were restrained from doing any evil against Saul.

As soon as Saul left the cave and walked a short distance, David walked out of the cave and called out to him. He approached Saul in humility, addressing him as king and bowing before him. He then tried to convince Saul he had no desire to take his life. He had a perfect opportunity in the cave and had been urged by his men to do it, but he didn't. He proved how near he had been by showing Saul the corner cut off of his robe. David was loyal to Saul even though Saul was unjustly trying to kill him. Verse 15 - *"Therefore let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand."* David told Saul, "I'm trusting God, to deliver me out of your hand." Instead of finding a way out of his trial in the flesh, David did the harder thing - he put his trust in God rather than trusting in himself.

Saul's reaction to David: ***"You are more righteous than I...you have dealt with me well...you did not kill me...the Lord reward you for what you have done to me this day."*** This was dramatic change of heart in Saul; he seemed really sincere about it. David heaped coals of kindness on Saul's head and it melted Saul's heart. Saul even acknowledged that David would surely be king - something he knew all along and knows for sure now. He asked David for much the same promise that Jonathan had requested: that David would not kill or mistreat his descendants when he became king.

As much as David would have liked to return to his home, he chose to stay in his stronghold. Saul had a change a heart once before and David knew it didn't last. He needed to see what Saul would do next.

"If a man is emotionally upset, as Saul was, and awakens to his condition, but only weeps about it and still doesn't obey God, his second state is a thousand times worse than the first. Emotion that does not lead to action only leads deeper into sin and rebellion." (Redpath)

I Samuel 26

The people of Ziph had betrayed David's whereabouts to Saul before in I Samuel 23. Now they try to gain King Saul's favor again by doing the same exact thing - telling Saul that David was in the Desert of Ziph. Unknown to Saul, this would be his final pursuit of David. He immediately mobilized his 3,000 troops to get there as fast as he could. When David heard Saul was once again pursuing him, he wisely sent out spies to monitor Saul's movement. Saul was looking for David but David knew exactly where Saul was.

David crept up to the king's camp to gather intel: how many soldiers were pursuing him, who the commanders were, and what weapons they had. Unexpectedly, he saw that Saul and his commander-in-chief, Abner, were lying in the middle of the camp with the troops encircling them and everyone was sound asleep. David asked for a volunteer to sneak into Saul's camp with him. Noticing that all the soldiers were in a really deep sleep, David and Abishai crept right up to Saul. Saul's spear was stuck in the ground by his head and he was completely vulnerable. Abishai felt that this was a God given opportunity and requested to kill Saul with his own spear. It must have seemed like poetic justice to kill Saul with the very same spear he has tried to kill David so many times. Once again, David refused to harm Saul because he firmly believed it was God's duty to remove Saul, not his. Verse 10 - *"David said furthermore, 'As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish.'*

Quietly and quickly, they left Saul's camp taking only his spear (a symbol of authority) and his water jug (a symbol of life). Once again David had been given a choice whether to kill his enemy or not. But because Saul was the anointed ruler, David honored God by not taking his life.

From a safe distance, David called out to Abner, asking him questions that revealed his irresponsible neglect toward God's anointed. He had been unfaithful, giving only half-hearted service to Saul. We should be on the lookout for these very things in our lives as well. How many of us give half-hearted service at our jobs? How many of us are unfaithful to the commitments we've made to our family or to our church or to the Lord? God tells us in Colossians 3:23 - *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men..."* and He deserves our best effort. Then David made another attempt to reconcile with Saul. He asked what evil he had done that warranted Saul's anger. He revealed that he had Saul's spear and water jug in his possession. He had been close enough to kill he but he chose not to. Then he shared his heart's struggle in being on the run. He missed going to the house of God and living with the people of God. The pressure from all this tempted David to consider leaving Israel altogether and go live among the ungodly. He pleaded with Saul to reconcile with him; to not let him die in exile, on foreign soil.

Saul, out of emotion, confessed his sin once more but it wasn't from his heart. His confession was short-lived, temporary, and never led to repentance. When Saul asked David to come back and rejoin him, David knew better. He finally realized Saul could not be trusted and that his deceptive heart was lying and would soon turn on him again. As Saul's spear was being returned, David proclaimed God's

law of sowing and reaping. If a man is faithful and sows righteousness, he will reap righteousness. But if a man sows unrighteousness, he will reap unrighteousness. David was proven righteous by sparing Saul's life.

Saul's last words to David pronounced a blessing on him, the future king. He declared David would do great things and be triumphant throughout his life. And with that, they went their separate ways.

I Samuel 27

For about seven years David had been living in the most distressing circumstances imaginable: a fugitive being hunted down by a king determined to kill him. Finally the strain took its toll and David began to doubt the promises of God. From his last confrontation with Saul, David came to two desperate conclusions:

- Saul's relentless pursuit would succeed and Saul would kill him
- he must flee for his life from Israel and live with the Philistines

Before David trusted in the Lord to protect him but now he gave up trusting the Lord and decided to go back to King Achish in Gath, the Philistine capital. He left the promised land, left the people of God, and found "protection" among the Philistines. As you recall he went there once before and the Philistines did not trust him. He had been forced to flee for his life by pretending he was crazy. But now David is a well-known fugitive and King Achish welcomed David and his men as mercenary soldiers who would fight against Israel. David told the king he didn't need to live in the royal city so Achish gave him Ziklag, which was in a remote place far from Gath. David and his men would remain there for a year and four months.

And so began a new chapter in David's life away from God; one that fell into lies and deception. One that certainly didn't follow the heart of God. He and his men became raiders who attacked villages for what they could steal; they were armed robbers and murderers. King Achish was under the impression David was attacking small Israeli towns because David lied and said he had been in "the southern area of Judah." In reality, he was attacking enemies of Israel, including Philistine villages. David was successful in his deception because he left no one alive in his attacks. There was no surviving informant to tell the king the truth, that David was actually attacking territories or nations that were friendly with King Achish. The king was pleased, believing David had burned all of his bridges with the people of God and declared that David "*will be my servant forever.*"

I Samuel 28-29

In these two chapters, David actually plans to go into battle with the Philistines against Saul and Israel. He planned to fight the very people he was to be king over! However, distrust of David by the Philistine leaders caused Achish to dismiss him from this battle; from fighting on the side of the Philistines. This gives us a clear picture of God's sovereign power to keep the believer from terrible evil.

I Samuel 30

David and his men returned to Ziklag to find their home was gone. While he and his men had been trying to join the Philistine army the Amalekites took advantage of the defenseless city, attacked it and burned it to the ground. All of the women and children had been taken captive, including David's two wives Ahinoam and Abigail. David brought this exact calamity on other cities during his time with

the Philistines but the Amalekites were more merciful than he was, taking the women and children captive rather than killing them all. Verse 4 - *“Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.”* All was lost and David was alone. No one in Israel could help him. The Philistines didn't want him. His family was gone; all he owned was gone. Even his men spoke of stoning him. They were a pretty rough bunch rather than a fine army. Everyone who was in debt, everyone who was in trouble, everyone who was fleeing the law - these were the men who joined David. These renegades and outlaws wanted to kill David because they blamed him for their losses. Every support for David was gone except the Lord. He was at the end of himself, like the prodigal son sitting in the pigpen. But finally *“David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”* Why would God strengthen him (or us) in such a wayward place? Because God is rich in mercy and grace when we are completely broken and seeking Him. David strengthened himself by remembering God's love, God's promise and calling, and God's past deliverances. He came home to God.

Psalm 42:5 says, *“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.”* Sometimes we need to ask ourselves these questions when we face tough or discouraging situations. Why am I so depressed? Why am I so down? What's the matter with you, soul? What's your problem? Where is my hope? Then we need to remember God will deliver us. We don't need to be discouraged. Our God is on the throne and in control of everything. There is nothing too hard for Him and He will never leave us or forsake us. He never changes. He is faithful even when we are not. We get our strength from the Lord when we pray and seek His face. Psalm 91:15 - *“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.”* David finally prayed.

Of all the time David spent with the Philistines, this is the first time we read of him seeking God in any way. He immediately calls for the priest to bring the ephod and inquire of the Lord if they should pursue the Amalekites. God told him to go, assuring them victory and restoration of all they had lost. Seeing David confident in the Lord stirred his men's hearts to follow him. They were no longer fighting for the Philistines, they were on a mission from God.

A couple of things happened on the trip. When they reached a deep ravine known as Besor Ravine, 200 hundred of David's men were so exhausted they said they could not go on. So David left them there and continued the fierce pursuit with only 400 men. While racing as rapidly as they could to catch the Amalekites, they suddenly spotted a half-dead Egyptian in the field. Considering the urgency of their mission, they could have chosen to ignore the man and keep on going. However, they were compassionate towards someone in need and delayed their search for their families. They gave him food and drink and then discovered he had been with the Amalekites and knew where to find them. In showing unexpected kindness to this Egyptian, God showed David an unexpected blessing. He had a guide to lead him to the Amalekite camp. There are a lot of hardships and misfortunes all around us and people who are suffering and need help. Rather than rushing by and ignoring, God wants us to have hearts of compassion and help those in need. *“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* Galatians 6:2

Being led by the Egyptian, they found the Amalekites. To their amazement the enemy was scattered across the countryside partying. They were dancing and drinking, celebrating the great spoils they had been able to plunder. David and his men, catching the Amalekites off guard, were able to defeat and kill most of the men. David not only freed his two wives, he also freed every captive that had been taken. He recovered all of the plunder, all of the possessions that had been taken including the flocks and herds. God gave David a complete victory because he strengthened himself in the Lord and was obedient. Just think...if David and his men hadn't been sent back home by the Philistines they would never have been able to rescue their families from the Amalekites. It would have been too late and the Egyptian would have been long dead. God's hand at work once again.

On the way back home, when David returned to the 200 who had stayed with the supplies, these men saw their possessions from the spoils of battle and wanted them back. Some of the *“wicked and worthless men”* protested and said they could have their families back but none of the possessions because they hadn't been in the battle. David declared an important principle: the supply lines are just as

vital as the soldiers. Many people serve the Lord in invisible, behind-the-scenes ways, often supporting a more visible aspect of the Lord's work. God will reward both equally. This principle applies to missions as well. If a missionary is out there, "*how can he go, except he be sent?*" In essence, the missionary is like a soldier in the battle. When we send and support them as we stay here by the stuff. Those that stay by the stuff will share the reward equally with those who go into battle.

The selfish men who didn't want to share had greedy hearts and that certainly isn't what God desires. David gave these men a different perspective from a different heart. It wasn't their victory and the spoils did not belong to them. God had given them the victory and the plunder was a gift from the Lord. All honor and glory went to God. In his generosity, David sent a portion of the spoil to 13 cities, trying to rebuild his relationship with those who had helped him when he was a fugitive. It was a good time to mend bridges. Little did David know that in just three days he would receive word that Saul had been killed and Israel had been defeated by the Philistines again. As a result, things would begin to move rapidly and David would soon become king of Israel just as the Lord had promised.

When Jesus triumphed on the cross He won the greatest battle and had "spoil to share." We are blessed that He chose to share that spoil with His people.

*"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of
Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."
Ephesians 4:7-8*