

The Life of David

David Spares Saul Again

1 Samuel 26:1-25

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Scripture

When you hear today's Scripture reading in this sermon series on "The Life of David," you may think that we have already covered this incident. And, indeed, it is very similar to the incident that occurred in 1 Samuel 24 where we learned how David spared Saul's life. Some liberal scholars insist that the two chapters are actually recording the same incident. However, there are significant differences in the details of the two chapters, and so we are persuaded that chapter 26 gives us a second incident in which David spared Saul's life. Moreover, whereas Saul's behavior remained essentially unchanged from the previous occasion, we see significant growth in David's faith in this second incident.

So, let's read about David sparing Saul's life again in 1 Samuel 26:1-25:

¹Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?" ²So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. ³And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, ⁴David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come. ⁵Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.

⁶Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" And Abishai said, "I

will go down with you.”⁷ So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him.⁸ Then Abishai said to David, “God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.”⁹ But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless?”¹⁰ And David said, “As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish.¹¹ The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord’s anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go.”¹² So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul’s head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.

¹³ Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them.¹⁴ And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, “Will you not answer, Abner?” Then Abner answered, “Who are you who calls to the king?”¹⁵ And David said to Abner, “Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord.¹⁶ This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the Lord’s anointed. And now see where the king’s spear is and the jar of water that was at his head.”

¹⁷ Saul recognized David’s voice and said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And David said, “It is my voice, my lord, O king.”¹⁸ And he said, “Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands?¹⁹ Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day

that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' ²⁰ Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains."

²¹ Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." ²² And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. ²³ The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. ²⁴ Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation." ²⁵ Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place. (1 Samuel 26:1-25)

Introduction

I remember one night when I was on guard duty while serving in the South African Air Force. I was to guard the supply room overnight. It was winter, and it was very cold. I was bundled up in several layers of clothes, and had my greatcoat on as well. The entrance to the supply room was recessed, and I sat on the concrete entrance trying to stay out of the wind. Before I knew it, I was fast asleep. Just as the guard duty sergeant was taking my rifle over my slumbering body, I woke up. He had my rifle, and I was defenseless. He gave me a tremendous dressing down, and told me how bad it was not only to be caught asleep at my post but, far worse, to have my weapon taken from me! I was speechless, of course, as there was nothing to say. Thankfully, he returned my rifle to me and did not report my negligence to our superiors.

In today's lesson, we read how David and Abishai took Saul's weapon from him while he—and all his guards—slept.

Lesson

First Samuel 26:1-25 shows us the faithfulness of God's servant.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Faithful Servant Is Patient (26:1-12)
2. A Faithful Servant Is Encouraged (26:13-16)
3. A Faithful Servant Is Distressed (26:17-20)
4. A Faithful Servant Is Hopeful (26:21-25)

I. A Faithful Servant Is Patient (26:1-12)

First, a faithful servant is patient.

David and his men were once again hiding in the wilderness of Ziph. And once again the Ziphites reported David's whereabouts to Saul at Gibeah. **So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph** (26:2).

David learned that Saul was once again after him, and so he **sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come** (26:4). David went looking for Saul and his army. He had a vantage point where he could see Saul bedding down for the night, with **Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army**, right beside him, and the entire army of three thousand men **encamped around him** (26:5).

The text does not tell us why David wanted to sneak into the middle of Saul's army. David's nephew, **Abishai**, volunteered to go with him on his nighttime mission. **So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his**

head, and Abner and the army lay around him (26:7). Verse 12 tells us that **they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.** The Lord was supernaturally protecting David and Abishai while they snuck right into the middle of Saul's camp.

Then Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice" (26:8). This is similar to what David's men said to him in the cave of Engedi. Abishai, like David's men in the cave, saw this as God's providence. Here was Saul fast asleep, and he could be killed with one swift blow. But, as we said before, circumstances by themselves do not give us the green light to go ahead. Circumstances must always line up with God's word. David knew that Saul had been anointed by God as the first king over Israel, and should not be touched. That is why he **said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"** (26:9).

David explained to Abishai that the Lord would deal with Saul in his time and in his way. No-one should strike Saul, the Lord's anointed. Then he instructed Abishai, **"But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go"** (26:11), which they did. And then they left Saul's camp.

Here we see David's patience, as we did in the first incident where David spared Saul's life (24:6, 10). But, this is now a more informed patience. Remember, he had just seen how the Lord had dealt with Nabal. David wanted to kill Nabal, but only the Lord's providential restraint through Abigail prevented him from making a huge mistake. David had learned that he could trust the Lord to deal with those who were opposed to him. He did not have to take matters into his own hands. He now knew that the Lord might directly intervene in Saul's demise, or the Lord may use some other means to bring about Saul's departure from the throne. It was not

David's responsibility to dethrone one whom God had enthroned.

Sometimes we may find ourselves in difficult situations. We want to find relief in our situation. But we must never do that which is opposed to God's word. For example, you may face marital difficulty. The world says, "Go ahead, get a divorce." But, in some instances, divorce is *not* the right course of action. A faithful servant is patient in the time of difficulty. We may not know what God is doing, but we do have God's word, and God calls us to obey his word while he works out his will for our lives.

II. A Faithful Servant Is Encouraged (26:13-16)

Second, a faithful servant is encouraged.

Let us remind ourselves again that no-one in Saul's army woke up while David and Abishai crept through their camp "because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them" (26:12). God was in sovereign control over every circumstance.

David escaped to higher ground with a great distance between himself and Saul. He shouted to Abner, Saul's commander, **"Will you not answer, Abner?"** Shaking himself awake, **Abner answered, "Who are you who calls to the king?"** (26:14). David delivered a dressing down of Abner, telling him what a terrible job he had done by not keeping watch over Saul. In fact, he deserved to die because he had not watched over the Lord's anointed. And then, to prove that he wasn't just shouting empty words, he said to Abner, **"And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head"** (26:16b). Abner must have been completely horrified by what he saw.

Saul thought that he was powerfully protected because he had Abner and three thousand of his chosen men with him. But, the truth was that in reality Saul was utterly defenseless. David had disarmed Saul of his spear, which was the symbol of his power. And so commentator Dale Ralph Davis concludes: "Even at night

one thing was clear: Saul's power is gone; nothing can keep David from obtaining the kingdom. It was a sign for Saul but also for David. David should receive it as encouragement, as an assuring token from Yahweh."¹

God encourages his faithful servants with some token, some evidence that he has not forgotten his word and promise to them. Sometimes God's encouragements can be very dramatic, and at other times rather ordinary.

In his book titled, *The Mystery of Providence*, the Puritan John Flavel wrote of a certain Mrs. Honeywood, an earnest Christian who nevertheless felt God had cast her off and that she was without saving hope. One day a minister was meeting with her and marshaling reasons against "her desperate conclusions." It was then she took a Venice-glass from the table and said, "Sir, I am as sure to be damned as this glass is to be broken," and with that she threw it mightily to the ground. To the astonishment of both, the glass remained intact and unbroken. Obviously the minister did not fail to apply the assuring sign!²

We don't have to look for spears or unbroken glass. Let us remember that God will encourage his faithful servants when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances. Let us remain faithful to God and his word in our lives so that he may encourage us.

III. A Faithful Servant Is Distressed (26:17-20)

Third, a faithful servant is distressed.

Saul must have been shocked to wake up hearing David and Abner shouting to one another as David stood "on the top of the hill, with a great space between them" (26:13). After he confirmed that it was indeed David on the top of the hill, Saul heard David

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 273.

² John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (1678; reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1963), 71–72.

ask, **“Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands?”** (26:18). David pressed on and asked Saul to hear him out. David offered that it was possible that the Lord had stirred Saul up against David as a judgment on David. But, more likely, Saul was pursuing David because of his ruthless advisors. David’s concern was, as he said to Saul, **“...for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, ‘Go, serve other gods’ ”** (26:19). Moreover, David asked Saul, **“Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord”** (26:20a).

Exactly what was David saying to Saul? David was fully aware that the Lord is everywhere, as he acknowledged in Psalm 139:7-12. Nevertheless, David also knew that **“the presence of the Lord”** was especially seen in the sanctuary, as David wrote of the Lord in Psalm 63:2, “So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.” David was being chased out of the land and being shut out of the sanctuary where the Lord met his people. That was a great distress for David.

A faithful servant is distressed when not able to be in the presence of the Lord. Of course, the Lord may be worshiped anywhere. But, he is especially present in the congregation of his saints. Let us be people who love to worship the Lord with other saints, and let us be distressed when we are not able to do so.

IV. A Faithful Servant Is Hopeful (26:21-25)

And fourth, a faithful servant is hopeful.

As before, Saul again admits that he had sinned, acted foolishly, and made a great mistake (26:21). But David simply answered and said, **“Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it”** (26:22). He did not believe that Saul was sincere in his apology. David then said, **“The Lord rewards every**

man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed" (26:23).

The final words that Saul ever spoke to David are found in verse 25a, **"Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them."** Then the author of First Samuel simply notes, **"So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place"** (26:25b), never to see each other again.

A faithful servant's hope is in the Lord and not in man. David trusted the Lord to reward him for his faithfulness. And, of course, the Lord did enable David to remain faithful to him, even though he would stumble badly in the future.

Let us place our hope in the Lord and not in man.

Conclusion

Therefore, having examined David sparing Saul's life again as set forth in 1 Samuel 26:1-25, let us grow in faithfulness.

In this incident we see David's faithfulness. Later, he would falter and sin. But here he was faithful. Jesus was also faithful, and he never faltered and sinned. Jesus now calls all of his disciples to exhibit faithfulness, as it is a sign of belonging to him.

Rich Stearns, the president of World Vision, calls it the domino theory of spiritual impact. Imagine a long line of dominoes. When one falls, it starts a chain reaction that can cause dozens or hundreds more dominoes to fall. For instance, Jesus set up 12 dominoes (his disciples), mentored them, empowered them with the Holy Spirit, and then sent them off to go and do likewise. Now there are over 2 billion followers of Christ in the world. That's a lot of dominoes!

Stearns tells the following story about the spiritual impact that one person can have. In the 1880s, Robert Wilder, a missionary kid from India, was preparing to return to the mission field.

During college, he even signed a pledge along with friends to become a missionary. But because he was so physically frail, he never fulfilled that pledge. Instead, he encouraged others to take up the task. *One domino fell.*

During a preaching tour that took Robert through Chicago, he spoke to an audience that included Samuel Moffett. Samuel also signed Robert's pledge, and within two years he landed in Korea. *Another domino fell.*

A few years later, Samuel shared the gospel with a man who had become disillusioned with his Taoist practice. Kiel Sun-chu trusted Christ, and quickly *another domino fell.*

In 1907, Kiel was one of the leaders of the Pyongyang revival. In January of that year, spontaneous prayer and confession broke out during regular church meetings. *Thousands of dominoes fell.* Those days of fervent prayer are now considered the birth of an independent, self-sustaining Korean church.

When Kiel died in 1935, 5,000 people attended his funeral. The church in Korea now numbers about 15 million, and it sends more foreign missionaries than any other country outside the United States. *Millions of dominoes continue to fall.*

Stearns concludes:

As Christians, we are all dominoes in the chain reaction set off by Jesus 2,000 years ago. The amazing thing about dominoes falling is that the chain reaction always starts small—with just one, seemingly insignificant domino. Whether you are sponsoring children, filling backpacks for children in inner-city schools, talking to your own children, or praying earnestly for [people around the globe], you have no idea what how big the impact will be as God multiplies your faithfulness.³

Dear friends, let each one of us grow in faithfulness. Amen.

³ Rich Stearns, "Spiritual Dominoes," *World Vision Magazine* (Winter 2011), n. p.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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