

Introduction

I grew up in the days of Saturday morning cartoons. A common storyline ran through a lot of those cartoons. Many of them featured a villain whose diabolical attempts to capture or destroy come back to rest on their own head. This was certainly the case in the Roadrunner cartoons. Wile E. Coyote always had a plan to catch and eat the roadrunner but, with very few exceptions, his plans came back to bite him. His elaborate schemes almost always backfired and usually resulted in dynamite exploding in his face or his falling to the bottom of a great abyss or the experience of some other great catastrophe. Meanwhile the roadrunner just kept on running. Something very much like this is going on in our text this morning. Only it is not a coyote and a roadrunner. It is King Saul and the relentlessly successful young shepherd named David.

[Read text and Pray]

Two facets to the central theme of this text stand out. First, we observe a murderous hostility in Saul toward David. Second, we observe the invisible hand of God overruling Saul's every effort to bring David down. Saul's efforts to eliminate the threat to his kingship actually result in further success for David. The outcome was that David came to have even more favor with the people of Israel. In this way this text highlights for us the futility of Saul's hostility. The reason is because God was with David. David dwelt in the shelter of the Most High God.

I want you first to notice with me . . .

I. David's Early Success. (12-16)

We looked at these verses last time, but they are significant to the context as we move forward. Saul was jealous of David's success and had his eye on David, not for his benefit but for his destruction. He was fearful of David—fearful that David would replace him. It mattered not that Samuel had told him the kingdom had been taken away. He did not want to let go. So as David surged in success, Saul surged in fear. The masses could not quit talking about David. Everywhere he went, people were so excited for what David had accomplished and what he was accomplishing. But Saul wanted to put that to an end. He was like the Pharisees and Sadducees in the days of Jesus. Jesus was making his way through the villages of Judea teaching and healing and everyone was talking about Jesus. But the jealousy of the religious leaders grew hotter and hotter and they wanted to bring him down.

Twice in the space of five verses we are told that the reason for David's success and Saul's fear was that the Lord was WITH David. He had departed from Saul, but he was WITH David. Saul was holding on to his place in the kingdom as tightly as he could. In just the same way, the prince of the power of the air does not want to be knocked out of his place either. All the evil that is going on in this day and time is evidence of his efforts to hang on to what he has got.

But much to Saul's chagrin, David flourished. He led victorious campaign after victorious campaign and grew in favor with the people despite the envy of Saul.

Turning our attention from David, the roadrunner, let's consider Saul, the equivalent of Wile E. Coyote. I want you to observe . . .

II. Saul's Diabolical Schemes. (17-29)

Having missed with his spear, twice, Saul changed tactics, but his goal remained the same. He wanted to take David out. However, he thought it better to let the Philistines do the dirty work. The odds were that if David continued to lead in battle against those uncircumcised people, sooner or later, they would eliminate him from the equation.

A. So Saul offered David to marry his daughter Merab on the condition that he would continue to fight and be valiant. David responded with reluctance out of a genuine sense of unworthiness. Perhaps David's poor status was an issue for Merab despite his victory over Goliath. Michal, you see, is distinguished from Merab by the statement that Michal loved David. We really do not know the details here, but for some reason when the time came for Saul to give Merab to David, he instead chose to give her to Adriel the Meholathite. Saul reneged. Interestingly, the sons of Merab and Adriel were among men that David, when he became king, turned over to the Gibeonites who hanged them.

B. But Michal loved David and on that basis Saul went to another plan to seek to accomplish his objective. Saul's thought was that she would be a snare for David, and the hand of the Philistines would be against him. Outwardly they would plan a wedding, yet if everything went according to Saul's scheme there would actually be a funeral. This time Saul would take extra steps to make sure David's humility did not interfere with the plan. He got his servants to flatter David that the king delighted in him and wanted him for a son-in-law. David retained his humility. He pointed out that he was poor and of no reputation. Does that line sound familiar? Paul spoke of Jesus that he made himself nothing taking the form of a servant.

This seemingly is what Saul was hoping to hear. He had a plan. He offered David a bride-price the poor man could afford. He would not require money from David. He would merely require that he kill a hundred Philistines and bring the evidence to Saul. The kind of evidence he asked for as best I can tell would make David particularly repugnant to the Philistines. Collecting foreskins would be humiliating to the Philistine survivors and inflame their anger at David. Saul figured that David would take the bait and go after a hundred regular uncircumcised Philistines the way he had gone after Goliath. Saul wanted to be sure that David did not survive. So he also gave David a time limit to get the job done.

On these terms David was pleased to marry Michal and become Saul's son-in-law. So he took his men and did double what he had to. He killed two hundred Philistines and brought the evidence to Saul. Imagine the reaction of Saul when David returned. I can just see Saul's countenance sink and the air come fluttering out of his lungs in utter disbelief. Foiled again!! And then for the count, Saul no doubt was going to be sure that David was not a single piece of evidence short of the one hundred he required. Again can you imagine Saul's expression when David told him, not only am I not short of the hundred, I brought you two hundred. Saul had no choice but to give David Michal for a wife.

But he wasn't done. He is out-and-out opposing the Lord here. Saul knows that David's success demonstrates that the Lord is with David. After hurling the spear twice; after sending David out again and again; after trying now for the second time to get rid of David by enticing him to earn a wife; after requiring not one but the deaths of a hundred Philistines and after David has killed two hundred; Saul can see the writing on the wall. He is more fearful than ever. And he is more determined than ever. He is David's enemy continually.

The enmity and scheming of Saul only backfired. Notice next . . .

III. David's Supreme and Continued Success. (30)

The Philistines were roaring mad. Two hundred of their men had been killed and mutilated. They came out to battle again and again. Their princes came out. And every time they did the Israelites were successful. Leading that success was none other than David. He had more success than all the servants of Saul. And his success over the enemy had an effect on how the people viewed even the name of David. His name was highly esteemed. He was humble; he was poor; he was opposed by his countryman; over and over he faced death; but his success surpassed all others and his name was highly esteemed.

The success of David points us to the greater son of David, the Lord Jesus.

He was humble; he was poor; he was opposed by his own people. In his earthly life, he faced test after test. He was met head-on by the devil himself in the wilderness and on the cross. His success in facing temptation surpasses that of all others because he never sinned. And even through his death he won. As Paul puts it in Philippians, "being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Looking back, we can see how David points us forward to his own descendant and his Lord. At the birth of Jesus a king in Judea whose name was Herod sought to bring about his death. Baby after baby was killed by that diabolical man in a vain attempt to keep his throne guarded from any potential enemy. But he was unsuccessful. Christ went on to live a life of perfect obedience to God and die in the stead of sinners that we might join him in his victory and in his eternal reign. Sinners get in on that through the simplicity of faith. By grace are you saved through faith. If you have not come to Christ I urge you this morning, if you see that you are a sinner in need of God's forgiveness, look to Jesus, the king and victor over sin. Trust in him and he will save you, bring you into his fold, into his kingdom and make you a partner with all the redeemed.

All in all let us see the lesson of . . .

IV. God's Overruling Providence.

The lesson of God's overruling providence is a blessed and needful one for the people of God. God is in the business of foiling the attempts of the wicked to interfere with his plans. He operates in such a way to allow the wicked to involve themselves in an all-out assault on him and those who belong to him. Yet when all is said and done, they can do nothing other than fulfill his very plan for his victory and their calamity. This chapter records a vivid depiction of God's providential overruling of the designs of his enemies. Saul makes attempt after attempt to eliminate the threat of David to his throne. But God is at work in every one of these attempts to protect David and to further David's success. Everything Saul does backfires. He is just like Wile E. Coyote. Saul's efforts to thwart David only work to ensure the rise of his success and esteem. In fact, the harder Saul tries, the higher David rises. Instead of undermining David, Saul's hostile actions only serve to cement David's eventual ascent to the throne.

Saul hurls his spear and David evades him not once but twice. Saul made David a commander of a thousand, and he went out and came in before the people and had success in all his undertakings. In fact he had great success. Saul offers David his first daughter but David's humility keeps her from him. Saul offers David his second daughter for the price of a hundred dead and humiliated Philistines, and David kills two hundred without so much as an injury to himself. So as Saul grows increasingly fearful and vengeful, David grows increasingly successful. And his name was highly

esteemed. There is but one explanation. It is stated in verse 12, verse 28, as well in verse 14, which asserts that "David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him." Saul was against David as his enemy continually, as it says in verse 29, but no matter because God was for David. And when God is for you, it does not matter who or what is against you. God will use every evil intent and every seeming coincidence and every seeming accident for good in his plan for you. And no one can thwart him.

In his commentary, Bill Arnold calls this biblical teaching the principle of "reverse returns." Those who stand against a servant of God, who put forth efforts to oppose him or her, will find that their actions only serve to accomplish God's purposes and do them good. It is a common and major pattern that is reflected in the scriptures.

Think for example of Joseph and his brothers. Those brothers were offended at Joseph and jealous of the love their father had for him. And with nothing but evil intentions they got rid of him—sold him into slavery to some merchants who were going down into Egypt. And you know what happened. He went from slave to inmate to the palace of Pharaoh where he was at just the right place at just the right time when a severe famine gripped the land and his wicked brothers came to Egypt in search of food. The brothers' intent was to do Joseph harm but the outcome in the providence of God was good for him and even for them.

Think also of the descendants of Israel who multiplied while living there in Egypt. Pharaoh became fearful of losing a hold over the Israelites. He afflicted them with heavy burdens requiring them to build his great cities. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out. Pharaoh even instructed the midwives to kill the male babies, but they feared God and the Israelites increased even more.

When Moses and Aaron appealed that Pharaoh let the Israelites go, he hardened his heart. But the result was that God demonstrated his power with the ten plagues. It was by those plagues that the Lord brought the Israelites out of the bondage.

It would also seem bad when Nebuchadnezzar sent his forces into Israel to kidnap young people and bring them down to Babylon. But God preserved the godly ones who were brought down and he used them mightily as a witness unto his power and majesty.

That is what God does. This is the assurance espoused by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:28. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Not SOME things but ALL things. They work together because God works them together for good. Whenever God's enemies bow themselves up and resist him, they will find that the evil actions motivated by their evil desires only serve to accomplish the very thing God has planned to take place. If God is for us who can be against us?

Psalms 91 captures the sense of what we see here in God's overruling providence.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

5 You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

6 nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

8 You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—10 no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

12 On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

13 You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

14 "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.

15 When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.

16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

This psalm and this principle from the word of God does not mean that nothing uncomfortable will happen in your life. It does not mean you will not get cancer. It does not mean you will escape persecution. It does not imply your heart will not be broken. The reality is YOU WILL face trouble. The lion and the adder will be in the path you trod. They may bruise you on the foot. But you will bruise them on the head. The reality is that if the Lord is your shelter and you dwell in him, you will remain in his shadow. And the shadow of the Most High is an impregnable fortress. It will be night. The arrow will fly. Pestilence will stalk. Destruction will bring waste. But these will not ultimately destroy you. Evil will not bring you down. That's because if you hold fast to the Most High, he will be with you; he will deliver you; he will protect you; he will answer you; he will rescue you. With long life he will satisfy you and he will show you his salvation. That is what he was doing for Joseph, for the Israelites in Egypt and David under the jealous envy of Saul. That is what he has done in the lives of countless Christians through the years who have been persecuted for Christ but have nevertheless thrived.

How important is this reminder in the day in which we live! It is always important no matter the times in which we are living. There are always going to be threats to our health and safety and contentment. But the days in which we live are marked by a past of relative ease socially. The United States has a history of religious toleration and freedom. You may get tired of hearing me say this, but brothers and sisters, the United States is not what she used to be. We are in the midst of a steep decline in which Satan is bringing hell into the culture. Every day it is becoming more radicalized. More and more people just think that if you believe the Bible and live accordingly, you are out of touch. You have lost your mind. You are insane. The persecution from which we have largely been spared is surging with a steadily increasing pace. Unless there is a massive revival, it is just a matter of time. I say it to prepare you. But I also say it in this context in order to encourage you.

No matter how evil the intent of God's enemies toward him and his people, they can do nothing that will not end up coming back upon their heads. They can do nothing that will bring ultimate harm to the people of God. Now, they may take us down to death, but they cannot take us down to hell itself. What can we do? We can dwell in the shelter of the Most High. We can abide in the shadow

of the Almighty. We can stay holed up by faith in the Lord as our refuge and fortress, our God in who we trust. He may allow the Sauls of this world to hurl their javelins again and again but keep us from being pinned to the wall. We may go out into battle and go out to slay the wicked one; we may sometimes be unaware of danger lurking. But our Father in heaven is not. And the worst thing they can do to us is the best thing that can happen to us. When we die, if we are in Christ, then we still live. In fact for us death is deliverance. We are delivered from pestilence, delivered from the arrow, delivered from destruction for all eternity.

Conclusion

I saved the best for last. There is a preeminent example of the principle of "reverse returns." No greater evil was ever committed than when Jesus was put on the cross. Satan sought his untimely death. Satan tempted Christ in the wilderness. Unsuccessful, he paused though he continued to seek an opportune time. Finally, the devil entered Judas, and Judas betrayed Jesus. The raging envy and jealousy of the Jews culminated in a sentence of death on a cross. All hell is rejoicing. Satan is doing a touchdown dance of delight. Jesus is embracing the shame of such an ignoble death because this act of hate is precisely what was necessary for him to free his people from their sins. Through death Christ destroyed the one who has the power of death, the devil, and delivered all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

And because of this great victory, redemption is offered to sinners. How can you avoid the same scenario as Wile E. Coyote and Saul and Satan? How can you live a life of sin and evil without all your diabolical intentions coming down on your own head? Without stepping into the very hole your own sins have dug? You must abandon yourself. You must stop trying to preserve your place in this world. You must surrender the throne of your life to the true king. Stop seeking his demise and seek the demise of your prideful, jealous, sensual, and arrogant self. Take up a cross to yourself and follow the king of kings. Highly esteem the one whose name is above every other because at the name of Jesus, every knee will ultimately bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.