

Showing Mercy Amidst Trials

The Life of David

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Well, this evening we continue to see something of the life of David. I say something because we're not dwelling on every single chapter or every single verse of every single chapter of this narrative, and at the moment sees David the fugitive. He's on the run we were looking at last week. He has friends and Jonathan being the foremost of those, but others too who have come to him and in whom he is also strengthened but their lives are at risk too. Just as David's life is in danger, so anybody associated with him is also a marked man. Saul shows no pity and has put to death priests whom he suspected of being complicit in what he imagined was some vendetta against him, David being the kind of leader of that. And so therefore David is a marked man, anybody who associates with him is a marked man, a marked woman also. Many of the Psalms that he wrote emerged from this experience and what that Lord was teaching him, moments where he was, himself, feeling that threat and out of which he then poured out his heart to the Lord.

David makes mistakes in this period. He makes some very spectacular mistakes, doesn't he, later on in his reign. We'll come to those in due course, but he made mistakes. We saw last time that in this period of being a fugitive, that he sought refuge amongst the Philistines. Extraordinary, and we'll be looking at that in a week or so's time. So there were various missteps, various wrong turnings that David took and, well, I said last week and I'll be saying it again in future sermons, we treat David with sympathy, that this was a time of extraordinary pressure. The narrative is exciting, the escapes are full of action and intensity but to have actually been there and been experiencing was extraordinarily wearing upon him.

So this evening's sermon, then, given the context in which the point we're mostly looking at this evening arises is really quite in itself extraordinary and my title is this, "Showing Mercy Amidst Trials." Showing mercy amidst trials and we have various moments when David shows mercy, some that come perhaps more naturally to him, another which he gets there in the end, shall we say. But how extraordinary that such acts of mercy should proceed from him when he's under such pressure, when you might think he's off-balance, his mind is under duress, he hardly has time to rest, he's always looking over his shoulder, betrayal on every side, the Ziphites are telling Saul he's here, the people of Keilah are willing to deliver him up to Saul, maybe his own people will suddenly turn against him and they do at one point a little on in the narrative, and yet amidst trials, he

shows extraordinary moments of mercy, mercy, mercy towards people and particularly Saul, who have wronged him very very seriously. When anyone is trying to kill you, he is wronging you very very seriously, the reason for them wanting to kill you is a total bit of deceit, it's a fabrication.

So we turn, then, to our first example as we, our first heading, I should say: examples of David's mercy. Valuable these are because of the context in which they arise and I've got three. So as to say, we're not sort of homing in on every chapter and spending a sermon there and we're going to be venturing around a little bit this evening and picking up different things from different places, but we read the first instance of it in 1 Samuel 24. Here is David, had to move on from previous locations and looked at that point as if he's encircled by Saul, a mountain, and he was being trapped there. Saul's army was all around him and then there's news, "Philistines are upon you, Saul!" And he has to go and attend to that. David sees the providence of God and is able to escape from Saul.

But Saul doesn't stop there and the Philistines, dealt with them at least to some extent, and he's back now with some of his choice men searching for David and they're going with a fine-toothed comb. They know where he is, they've been told. Saul knew exactly who it was telling him but, "Take note," they say, "David is in the wilderness of En Gedi." Betrayal. Betrayal. Betrayal everywhere, can't trust anybody. Now they're on to him again down here near the Dead Sea in the very wilderness kind of area where there are caves and there are locations that give you a little bit of hiding place when you're a fugitive. There's Saul very thorough in his search, driven, obsessed here with what he thinks David is looking to do to him, obsessed with hanging onto his crown at all costs.

So he's searching high and low for him, and there is David, his men, hiding in one of these various caves and Saul with the rest of his army and he goes into the cave, we read there to tend to his needs. We rather think that part of what that is there, we're not overly on what that might require there, but that he had a bit of a rest, that all of this rushing, going at breakneck pace, this obsession with this and having had to fight the Philistines and then rushing back again, well, he was just getting quite tired and he's not quite the young man that he was and he's gone in to rest.

There it is. There is this man who is pursuing David and who has already shown a willingness to kill him if he gets him now sleeping there. David with his men, his men are saying to him, "Look at this. Is this not the providence of God?" Where they got to this word that they believed God had said to David there, that, "Look, behold I will deliver your enemy into your hand that you may do to him as it seems good to you." But having said that to David, but they've put some construction on it. "There is your moment. End your problems. You'll become the king. End of story." And it could have been done. There is the very man asleep, vulnerable, he hasn't a clue that in all the caves he's chosen to go into, it's that one where David and his men are and they're urging him on that they might end it there. Perhaps they're all thinking this, "Do it and this will solve the problem."

And David has his sword and, well, not quite as in his mind there, I imagine some degree of confusion almost in it but he restricts himself to this even though his sword is there and he must have just wondered as he held his sword near to Saul is, "Is this my moment?" But no, he holds it together, we might say, and instead just cuts a corner of Saul's robe off. Even that he felt was smitten, that he'd done that, this act of disrespect. That was the royal robe and he'd been there with his sword around the Lord's anointed, this was audacious, this was reckless, this was really dishonoring and he is smitten in heart after this. His men are not so and they're still urging him. They had to be restrained, they would have done the job.

But afterwards, of course, David is able to speak to Saul. Saul hears this voice. He's been shocked to realize he had been there asleep and that David could have killed him at that moment but David instead had shown mercy. It was in his power to exact some revenge. He could have been thinking all the priests who really under Saul's say-so have been butchered up. Ahimelech, godly high priest and all the other godly men had been put to death and then the rest of the people in the town of Nob had been put to death, and all the other ways in which Saul had shown himself so unsuited to be king. And now the moment was there but he didn't take it and whatever might have been there, a feeling of what vengeance would do and getting my own back onto him, kept him under control and said, restricted himself to taking that portion of Saul's robe which then, of course, he could show, "Well, I could've cut off a lot more than that but that's all I did. That shows that you were that near to me or I was that near to you and restrained myself and I restrained my men. So please, Saul, listen, I'm not trying to kill you. Had I been trying to kill you, you wouldn't be talking to me now. You'd be dead."

Mercy and under great provocation. His friends urging him forward with, yes, maybe thinking of Ahimelech's death and other people who were dead as a result of this man Saul lying there asleep. But David restrained himself and that response from Saul was really quite remarkable, that Saul as he turns around and reason has come to him, suddenly whatever this madness that grips him, this obsession that's there, seeing now the danger he's been in and how David has vindicated himself in his presence, why, now he is actually speaking sense. Verse 17 of that chapter, "You are more righteous than I for you have rewarded me with good whereas I have rewarded you with evil." Got some honesty there. There is a moment now of clarity. The clouds have cleared. There's light traveling into Saul's mind, enlivening his conscience and he's speaking truth.

And he says a bit more besides, doesn't he, in verse 20, "And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand." He knows somewhere in his heart that's what's meant to happen. Not him, not his descendants, not Jonathan, that's why he wants David to promise to look after them when he's already promised that, hasn't he? He's promised that to Jonathan. But Saul concedes that, "David, you're meant to be king and I'm not, that this is not within my gift, that God has withdrawn it from me." Stunning insight, honesty, and it all proceeded here from David's act of mercy where we know and we read that carefully there, David swore to Saul that he would look after his family. Saul went home but it doesn't say that David went home with him. No, he went to the stronghold as he knew that actually despite this

sudden change of heart that it was only a temporary change of heart. David knew the man better than to trust him at that point. He goes to the stronghold, if that's all the same, Saul.

So that is the first example, remarkable example. So is the next one. 1 Samuel 26, it's Saul again and we're back in the territory of the Ziphites in the wilderness of Paraim and Saul again, they're exhausted, they've been following hard after David. The army is the army with Saul's captain, Abner, they're asleep. In fact, the Bible tells us there and have to read that at some point for yourself, refresh your minds in the narrative, but the Lord sent this deep sleep upon them. Now they're there and David has called volunteers to go down to the camp and Abishai has said, "I'll come with you."

So they go and there is Saul again sound asleep and Abner, who is meant to be sort of guarding the king with his life, he's sound asleep. Here again is the moment and so there in 1 Samuel 26 and the same temptation in verse 8 of that chapter, "Here's your moment. Here is the quick fix. The man that stands between you and the crown and who's threatening your life daily in your hand to do with him as you wish." Problem solved, yes, but David resists. You see that in verse 9, he will not touch the Lord's anointed. This man is still the king and whatever this man might be doing, have done, may yet do, that he will not lift up his sword to kill him. Instead there is Saul's spear which David picks up and this is a poignant thought with that. Is that that spear that he once, twice, three times hurled at me? Anyway, I'll take that spear and the jug of water that's also there beside him as he sleeps.

Now as he goes away, he then calls out at a safe distance, calls out to the army, calls out to Abner who should have been on guard and should have ensured that the king's life was not in jeopardy, rebukes him for his lack of attention and how he had allowed David and Abishai to come in the camp to get that near to Saul. They could have killed him easily and here's the proof, the spear and the jug that were there by his sleeping form. That's all they took. They could have ran that sword into him. They could have done him serious injury but David showed mercy. And again he enters his protest to Saul in verse 23 of that chapter, and again there's a moment of clarity in Saul's conscience but no more than that.

Well, we're having to move quickly to our third example and it's not Saul this time, and in a way this time it's a little bit more complex because this time there is a lack of mercy just about because this is David and his response to a man, wealthy landowner, had herds and plenty of riches, by the name of Nabal, that meant fool. That was the kind of the name that was given to him around and about. He was called fool because that's what he was. He was an unspiritual man, an ungrateful man. David had really by his men looked after Nabal and all his flocks, they'd all been kept safe and now it was the time of Nabal to sell the stock, be able to have everything valued, sell the fleeces or whatever, and you would have money and a big celebration. And David politely requested through his men that Nabal might just remember the help that David had given, might at this time when here's this wealthy man who's just got a bit wealthier would like to give a portion of that wealth to David's men that looked after him.

Well, Nabal instead snubs the people that have come from David and rebukes David for casting off, as it were, his place as a servant and running away and has some very very bad thoughts about David. Well, the feeling is mutual so when David hears that, he's ready to move quickly with vengeance. They're going to kill Nabal. They're going to kill every male within the whole town and the whole place where Nabal is and would have done, it would seem, but for the fact that Nabal's wife, his suffering wife we commonly suspect she is, called Abigail who is far more spiritual, far wiser. And hearing that her husband has acted so dismissively, so unkindly, ungenerously to David's men, realizing what the implications of this might be, quickly goes with gifts to come before David, provide provisions for his people, and plead with him not to go through with this act basically of vengeance. Not to do it, and she speaks to him and we read of the results of these things and there in verses 30 and 31 where Abigail speaks. She says, "And it shall come to pass, when the LORD has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant." And she said many other wise words to intercede for her husband and pleaded with David in 1 Samuel 25 along those lines. Then here David in verse 32, "Then David said to Abigail: 'Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!'"

Well, that mercy that David had shown to Saul and which now had disappeared when it came to Nabal, Abigail was able to appeal to David and David was able to rediscover that and actually admit that had Abigail not come and made that appeal to him and brought again to remembrance the sorts of things that were there with him when it was Saul that was before him, and David eventually after a little reluctance, shall we say, showed mercy towards Nabal and listened to Abigail. Well, that speaks well of David and it speaks well of him that he actually admits as much, that that was what he was going to do. He was. He was going to kill Nabal and all the males in that location. Strange, isn't it, that actually there is Saul trying to murder him, there is Saul who has murdered a lot of other people, there is Nabal who has insulted him, who has snubbed him, but it's actually that one that he's responding to with anger and with a sword and he's going to kill him had not Abigail come, whereas with Saul, well, the reasoning might have been greater that here is somebody that you might want to avenge yourself on, that he had not. Well, there is the complexity of human nature. There is the complexity of David's character laid bare before us to look on and wonder at. But he holds himself eventually together and this man amidst all these trials, all the difficulties he's facing with all the people that are looking to betray him to Saul, that his life is always in his hand, but here with Abigail's help we have to say but here he is showing mercy, not carrying through with a desire for vengeance, an opportunity for vengeance, forgoing it, resisting it, not doing the thing that he could do.

Let's move on to our second heading: God delights in showing mercy, so must we. God delights in showing mercy, so must we. And it's mercy that is given willingly is really mercy that's not given willingly is hardly worth the name, but if it's grudgingly given, if it is very very reluctantly given where being generous to David in allowing Nabal's act of mercy, but if it's not given with a generosity of spirit, with something that welcomes doing it and feels happy doing it, nothing grudgingly, no arm twisted behind one's back, hardly really qualifies as being showing mercy. But that forgoing of vengeance, that saying no to it but rather here though that could be there and though there's a train of thought will lead me there, but I will block that off. I will seek grace and instead show mercy.

Well, vengeance would be righting wrongs, yes, and doing it by harming the offender to the extent that one's self had been harmed. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, it would have that aspect to it, that there is the offense that has been committed against one's self and vengeance would be having some appropriate harm similar to the damage inflicted inflicted back. It is there the difficulty is that there's nowhere to stop and the damage inflicted may be greater than the damage inflicted to one's self and weighed in the balances. Well, that would be vengeance and it would be to say, "Well, they deserved it so they got it."

Well, we might think that there is satisfaction to be derived in it, that whatever hurt we have received, however we have felt injury, damage, loss at the hands of others, that that's now been righted, that the balance is now even, the balance sheet comes out even score, and we can feel happy in that and satisfied in that. But David shows us actually, no. Had he have done something against Saul, even cutting off the corner of his robe, that's something that David was finding difficulty doing because his conscience reproved him for doing it, accused him. Whatever had arisen in himself and maybe he was just entertaining the thought as his friends urged him, "There is Saul. Deal with him. Here's your moment." But no, he was able to stop and look ahead, "But if I did that, would I be satisfied? Would I be at peace? Would I think, well, that was good, a good job done there, let's move on? No, I wouldn't be able to move on at all. I would feel stricken in conscience that I had done that thing." Because here David is showing he's a man after God's own heart and that the Lord himself is merciful, full of mercy, and that this because David's heart is in tune here with God's heart, is something that he will show too, that he will do likewise.

God shows mercy and so will I, indeed so must we because the Lord, and we use the word, don't we, delights to show mercy. Delights to. Doesn't, in that way, show mercy grudgingly as I described, as though I really would like to do this to them and break apart their joy and whatever else there. No, not there. He delights, he loves to show mercy. It gives him much pleasure to show mercy. The nature of mercy is, of course, that we don't deserve it, that there is a wrong that has been done. Undeniable. Had been to David undeniable, but that God is willing to overlook such offenses, that where he might implement justice where rightly on his behalf he might avenge what is done against his honor by requiring from us damage that has been done because he's a great King and the damage is huge, but no, he is willing to forgo that vengeance, that application here of

justice and show mercy instead. And delights to show that mercy, be very happy putting that word there, as it were, and to God and his glory and his complacency, but he declares that he delights, he is happy to show mercy.

We think of instances of it, we think of the woman caught in adultery, don't we? How they rushed her before the Lord to try to make the law of Moses sort of hem him into give an answer that would be difficult for him they felt to give. Of course, with wisdom beyond anything they'd ever expected, the answer beyond anything they had seen coming, and he brings them instead to sit under the law of God and under God's searchlight into their hearts. They'd have been quite pleased, actually, to stone that woman to death. They would have been quite happy to see that done and rather felt that he should in that instance, if he is really a prophet who really understood God, he would be right at the forefront of that. But he declines to do that and instead puts it upon their consciences. "Well, you throw the stone first, then." And they all just to the youngest, they went away. "You who have no sin, you throw that stone." And each of them there conceded that they were wrong in their hearts, that there was something ugly, horrible, that was moving them and our Lord shows great great mercy to this woman, "Go and sin no more." What a beautifully balanced thing that he said to her. There was mercy and it wasn't as if the Lord would rather have liked to have seen her stoned to death actually, and yes, he had to fight hard against that, but delighted to show mercy. There was warmth, there was generosity in how he spoke to her.

Why, if we look in Matthew 9 and where the Lord challenged, really, about the people that he was mixing with. The Pharisees saw these tax collectors and sinners and he was with them, they were listening to him, he was speaking comforting words to them, and this was something that they did not like. Here comes the question that we had the other week, "Why do your disciples eat with unwashed hands?" Well, here it is in Matthew 9:11, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" It was said to the disciples but we read, actually, Jesus heard that and there in verse 12, "He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." God desires mercy, not sacrifice, not some obedience to a rule, not something by way of the law in that. There is more than your sacrifices. There is more than your definitions of what are clean and what are not clean people to be with, a work much greater than that, a work actually that's authorized by God, that actually lives out in acts truly imperfectly his desire to show mercy rather than sacrifice.

So we find again and again that this is the discovery of all saints who have found the Lord Jesus Christ, that they realize that God desired mercy. Had he desired vengeance, they would have not gone anywhere near being converted, wouldn't have come within a million miles of it. It wouldn't happen and it only happened because the Lord Jesus Christ had died upon the cross, purchased grace, that by the power of his spirit we would see what else we would never have seen that we needed mercy from God. And we ask for it and the Lord delighted to give it. Take the Apostle Paul, 1 Timothy 1:15 and 16. This is his own testimony here we read as he reflects upon what the Lord showed him. He says

this, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." This I obtained. I obtained mercy so that other people because if God can be merciful to me and I'm the chief of sinners, well, you haven't persecuted the church, you haven't put people to death who were followers of the Lord. You haven't fought against God to the extent that I have plus ignorant man that I was, acting in unbelief. I was the worst of the worst. So you can believe for mercy and if I found it, you are surely asking of God who is willing to show mercy to you.

Mercy. God delights to show mercy. Well, we know, don't we, Ephesians 2:4, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." Rich in mercy. That's not just a little mercy grudgingly given, reluctantly conceded, that, no, let them rather perish, let them die for their sins. I'm doing this for them that I regret it. No such regret in the heart of God but you and I receive mercy that is freely given, who is rich in it, and we receive that in the happy words to hear it and here pronounced over us that our sins were forgiven.

Romans 2 and there in verse 4, we learn again as Paul remonstrates with people steeped in the law, for this was their way through, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" That's all part of mercy, isn't it? The words all fit together. Goodness and forbearance and longsuffering. God had he have desired just to show what justice is like, there would have been no moment's hesitation. The vengeance of God would have come down upon us and that would be finished. But no, these people are provoking God because here is the offer of the gospel, here is Jesus Christ, they're despising him and they're despising the riches of his goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, and that it is the goodness of God that is making this appeal which is saying to them, "Turn around. Repent. You will perish." The goodness of God. There is his mercy revealed.

We know, don't we, there from the Beatitudes, that then that's looked for us to be merciful. God wants us to be merciful. We will receive mercy if we show mercy. Matthew 5:7. Wisdom that comes from above that is peaceable, humble, entreatable, that is full of mercy, full of good fruits as we learn from James 3:17.

So David has learned well from the Lord and his character here. Listen to what he does. The Lord bears with provocations far worse than David had to bear. Even though Saul was trying to kill him, it's certainly worse than Nabal's childishness and ingratitude was by way of a snub. God daily bears from us far far more than this and a whole lifetime's worth of it we bring to him before we're converted here to all of that, the needs, that initial forgiveness, but even after that as Christians, still provocations that we bring to God by our behavior but he goes on desiring to show mercy. Rich in mercy.

Well, there is, then, David learning that. When the moment is there for him to inflict vengeance, to, "Well, if he's trying to kill me, I will kill him. He's already killed people,

then let his death now make right those others whom he's already killed." No. And he fulfills what we read in Romans 12, Paul's words there, needed words, aren't they from verse 17, "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," you hear the appeal, don't you there? "Beloved," speaking to us as Christians, fellow Christians, "do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." He goes on, "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."

So this is the lesson that we all have to learn and while at times vengeance might seem sweet and the thought of it there might bring some degree of comfort, what trouble we would bring upon ourselves by way of our conscience that would reprove us and tell us that that was not what God would have had us do, that we had received mercy and why didn't we show mercy in return? And that troubled conscience would have been there to refer to, that we refer to it. We read it in chapter 25 of 1 Samuel, his reflection had he have killed Nabal, what that would have left him with, blood on his hands, a troubled conscience. Or if he'd killed the Lord's anointed, what peace would there have been in that? What rest to him in that? What satisfaction? How could he have thought, "Well, he deserved it," when his conscience is screaming at him that, "You have done wrong in this."

The complications of it would be unimaginable. Complicated enough because there was going to be Civil War breaking out in the remnants of Saul's supporters. They would have made life difficult as we're thinking this morning for David in the early days of being king and how much the more had he murdered Saul? Where that would have left him. The crown, the throne would have been hugely unstable, that hanging over him that he obtained that crown by murder, that jibe, that accusation could always be made and would have force in it. So David could see that this was not going to obtain the blessing of God. Whatever personal satisfaction might have been there and he could entertain it, but why, why forfeit a good conscience, why forfeit the blessing of God upon his rule. Wait upon God. God will repay, he says.

So mercy following with humility and how David describes himself, doesn't he there, to Saul. "Why are you looking for me? I'm just a dead dog. I'm just a flea. I'm no threat to you." He describes himself later as a partridge, hunting a partridge. "What harm am I to you? I'm harmless, Saul. I'm harmless." He describes himself in these very belittling terms there. He's destined to be a king and yet he's describing himself as a dead dog, a flea, as a partridge. "Why are you bothering with me, Saul?"

Well, let me finally come to my final heading briefly: God keeps an accurate record of wrongs. God keeps an accurate record of wrongs. So he desires to show mercy, yes, but depend on it, he will be full of mercy, riches of mercy, forbearance that he will show towards sinners and we, each of us, can give our testimony that he's done that in our case. But for those who don't learn and don't listen. Nabal didn't learn. Abigail says the man is a fool. Such is his name, so is his nature. Saul despite a bit of clarity, light shining on his

conscience, reverts sadly back to type. He doesn't listen and his end, of course, turns out to be very sad. It's very very tragic. And in this, God knows all the sins of the people and he's recorded them. What has been done against David, even if David here has given place to God, sure, because God says, "I will repay." It's not going to go unnoticed. If the man does not repent, it remains on the record and they will have to pay for every last penny of it. They are to be handed over to the jail. The jailer will put them into prison and they will have to pay every last penny of it. But God is a God of justice and he knows the wrongs that are done, knows our wrongs and, well, by the wisdom that God gave us we've been moved, haven't we, to seek mercy. We found mercy. We rejoice in that mercy. What if people don't? The Sauls, the Nabals and whoever else? God does care about those wrongs and David actually expresses it, doesn't he, let the Lord avenge between you and me. If I am meaning you harm, well, then the Lord judge me for it. But if not, if not, Saul, think that you will have judgment visited upon you not from my hand but he will bring it to pass.

So in a sense there we have to reckon with that, that we may absorb wrongs, we may absorb hurts or insults and everything else there, but people if they don't repent carry the record of those things, not that we get a recompense or that recompense to us, but it's answerable to God. Every word, every idle word we say is answerable to God. And he has his appointed time, Revelation 6:9-11, and the saints there under the throne and, "When will our blood be avenged upon these wicked evildoers?" They're told to be patient, aren't they? It's not going to happen, it's not going to happen just yet but the day will come when it does and there is a full reckoning because the judge of all the earth will do right.

We leave things, therefore, in his hands. He is far far better able to properly present his case and require justice, his justice, not our justice, not the rough justice or the justice that we might with our fallible ways try to implement. Give him room to do that because he will. And Saul, Nabal, well, read Nabal in 1 Samuel 25, very graphic his end. He is struck down. He has a stroke and his heart turns to stone and a few days later he was dead. That was sudden and that's an example to us that God does not suffer his people to have injury that will go unrequited at the hands of those who've done it, that all those who insult and all those who speak ill of the church, speak ill of God, wearied by it, feel it, feel the provocation, but they will have to answer for it one day. But for us in the meantime, we show mercy because that's God's character. That's what he's done for you and for me. Well, that's what we are instructed to do for others, show them mercy, and well, it worked temporarily upon Saul, it worked temporarily upon him, but maybe upon others it will have a fuller dimension and people may, because we are merciful to them, actually see that behind us lay a great God of mercy whose instructions we follow that may actually impress upon them their need to repent and find mercy for themselves. And may that be, indeed, our experience.

SHOWING MERCY AMIDST TRIALS

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 1 Samuel 24.

David is now a fugitive. He does have friends, but their lives are in danger if they are associated with him. A number of Psalms that David wrote come from this period of his life. David makes some big mistakes during this time. But he also performs some acts of mercy, all the more precious because they are done during a period of great personal trial. They speak about the man that David has become.

1. Examples of David's mercy.

There are three examples that we will look at. Two of them involve Saul. The other one, an act of mercy that David arrives at more slowly, involves someone called Nabal.

The first act of mercy is in 1 Samuel 24 and takes place near the Dead Sea in an area called En Gedi. Saul is pursuing David with a view to killing him. He goes into a cave to rest but David and his men are hiding in that same cave. Verse 4 states the temptation that lay before David to kill his opponent and persecutor, Saul, and seemingly end all his troubles. His friends wondered whether this was a providence of God to bring his enemy into his hands. In the end, David merely cuts off a piece of Saul's royal robe and does nothing more. Yet even this action David immediately regrets because he has acted audaciously and disrespectfully towards Saul. Yet it is in David's power to kill Saul, but he prefers to show mercy. He realizes what difficulties he would cause for his future reign and for his own conscience were he to murder Saul and refrains from implementing vengeance. Saul, in response to David's demonstration of mercy, concedes that the kingdom will pass to David one day (v20).

The second occasion is narrated in 1 Samuel 26 and also involves Saul. It takes place in the territory of the Ziphites, in the Wilderness of Paran. Saul is again hotly pursuing David and his men. Saul and his men are in a deep sleep from the Lord, and David and Abishai boldly go down to the camp and take the spear and jug that are next to the sleeping figure of Saul. Again, the temptation is put before David to kill the man who is trying to kill him (1 Samuel 26:8) but again David resists it (v9). He is then able to report to Saul and his captain, Abner, that he had refused to exact vengeance on Saul but had shown him mercy again, which gives the lie to all Saul's dark thoughts about him and his motives.

The third situation is different in that here David is looking to repay a snub, by a wealthy man called Nabal, against him and his band of companions (1 Samuel 26). Nabal has refused to give any provisions to David and his men, despite the help that David's followers have given Nabal in protecting him. David is bent on killing Nabal and every male in his household. It is strange that David is more agitated, and his judgment overthrown by this relatively minor incident than by all the very bad actions of Saul. We can often react worse to smaller offences and personal wrongs than to more major ones! But Abigail, Nabal's long-suffering wife, intercepts David and speaks wisely to him, laying it on his conscience whether he really wants to come to the throne with the death of Nabal and others on his conscience (1 Samuel 26: 30-31). David is brought to a right response by Abigail's wise counsel and, eventually, reaches a position where he is willing to show mercy.

It is remarkable, when David is under such pressure, that his character has not disintegrated but that he is willing to obey the Lord and to do His will by showing mercy to enemies, even if there might be some short-term benefit from exacting vengeance.

2. God delights in showing mercy...so must we!

Mercy is not to be some act done in a bad spirit as if we are grudgingly foregoing the opportunity to get revenge. It must come from a generous spirit. Vengeance would involve gaining personal recompense from others for the wrongs they have committed against us. This would involve inflicting some damage on them and, at its most severe, would lead to us murdering them. There might be some satisfaction being able to say, 'They deserved it', but it would not lead to a peaceful conscience.

The Lord delights to show mercy and we have to follow Him in this. He suffers immense wrong at our hands but responds with forgiveness and blessing. We can see this in the Lord's treatment of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-12. The Lord tells the people God's heart in Matthew 9:12-13. Paul experiences mercy as he reports in 1 Timothy 1:15-16. Matthew 5:7 tells us that the Lord blesses people who are merciful to others.

Our salvation depends on the mercy of God. He is patient with us and willing to forego taking vengeance despite the fact we have broken His laws and angered Him. Instead, He shows us mercy as we can learn from, among other places, Ephesians 2:4; Romans 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. Showing mercy is the wisdom that comes from above (James 3:17).

David has experienced mercy from God as a fugitive and now is in a position to show mercy to others. He is even willing to show mercy to people who have not said 'Sorry' to him but are still antagonistic. David refuses to inflict harm on others to right the wrongs against himself and other people. He leaves it to the Lord to be the Judge to right all wrongs as we find Paul instructing us in Romans 12: 17-21.

In showing mercy, David clearly thinks about the consequences of not showing mercy. He would be guilty of murder and this would weigh on his conscience that he had so clearly broken the Commandment of God. We see him reasoning along these lines in 1 Samuel 24: 7, 10; 1 Samuel 25: 31-33; and 1 Samuel 26:9. He would have to live with a troubled conscience that he had done wrong in the sight of God and that was an unbearable thing to have to take into his future life as king. Furthermore, he would expose himself to the accusation that he had come to the throne by murdering his predecessor. It would make his hold on power tenuous and weaken his legitimacy. Besides that, David was able to see that any personal satisfaction gained from defending his 'honour' was empty and not worth having at the cost to his conscience.

To show mercy, like David did, requires great self-control. We have to be gentle in spirit and full of long-suffering otherwise we will more often choose vengeance over mercy in our dealings with other people. When we show mercy, we are able to see others, less as mortal enemies, and more as fellow sinners in need of the same mercy that we are in need of too. We can see that they are creatures of poor judgment, lacking self-control, capable of spectacular failure, just as we are. Showing mercy also shows, in our case, that we are humble, not standing on our pride, expecting recompense because we feel we deserve it. We see David speaking of himself as being a dead dog and a flea, not the future heir to the throne (1 Samuel 24:14; and 1 Samuel 26:20). He is not a proud man. But he knows that he too needs people to be merciful to him (Matthew 7:12). We need people to be patient with us too and this will help us to be patient and merciful towards them in return.

3. God keeps an accurate record of wrongs.

We remember again (Romans 12:17-21) that it is for the Lord to right all the wrongs. And the Lord assures us that He will. God does care about all the wrongs that are done to us and to people that we love. God will avenge us of all the wrongs committed against us and we can be confident of this, just as David is (see 1 Samuel 24:12; 1 Samuel 25:39; and 1 Samuel 26:10). If people do not repent of their wrongdoing, whether against us personally or against anyone else, then Lord will judge them, just as He will also judge us of or wrongdoing.

We must be patient. If people do not repent of their wrongdoing, whether against us, or anyone else, then the Lord will judge them. We must leave it to the Lord's appointed time (Revelation 6:9-11) which He will surely bring to pass. We leave it in His hands knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do right.