

June 5, 2016  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: The Life of David  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 1 Samuel 23:14-24:22

1. List some ways a friend can encourage a friend to keep on in the will of God.
2. Have you ever agreed to a covenant with another person?
3. Why did the Ziphites expose David's hiding place to Saul?
4. How can we show toward our authorities the kind of respect David showed for Saul?

### **A RIGHT RESPONSE TO INJUSTICE**

#### **1 Samuel 23:14-24:22**

A simple map from the *Holman Bible Atlas* that outlines David's attempts to flee from Saul helps us sympathize with his plight. Up to this point in his story, we have observed David running all over Judah. And we are only about half way through this difficult part of David's story.

So far we have learned that because of Saul's threats against David's life, David fled from Gibeah to the prophet Samuel who lived at Ramah (20:1). A few days later, he had to flee again. This time he ran from Gibeah to Ahimelech the priest who was at Nob (21:1). From Nob David fled to Abimilech the Philistine king at Gath (21:10-15). Running into unexpected trouble in Gath, David ran to the cave in Adullam (22:1). At this point, Saul's aggression against

David affected his family also. Therefore, to protect his parents, David took them to the king at Mispheh of Moab (22:3) where it appears he stayed for a short time.

From Mizpeh David fled to the Forest of Hereth (22:5). While he was in the Forest of Hereth, David learned that the Philistines were attacking Keilah, an Israelite city to the west. David and his band of 400 men marched over to Keilah and delivered it (23:1-5). But Saul made plans to attack David at Keilah and the people planned to turn David over to Saul. Therefore, David ran from Keilah to the Wilderness of Ziph (Horeth) where we find him in our text (23:14-18). In this part of the story, we read how David ran from the Wilderness of Ziph to the Wilderness of Maon (23:25). Then from Maon David escaped to the strongholds (the rocks) of Engedi (23:29).

Try to put yourself in David's sandals. You know that you are going to be the king because God has promised as much. You have experienced God's hand of blessing in the past, which even made you popular with a large number of people. But, now life is all messed up. Though a popular warrior and the future king, you are running for your life. Just about the time that you start to settle down in what appears to be a safe place, the people there betray you and you have to pack up and run again. That sounds like the life of too many modern preachers.

Putting yourself in David's circumstances, what do you think about God? Do we think that David ever wondered if God had forsaken him? What did he mean when he wrote, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest (Psalm 22:1-2)?* Someone will answer that those words are actually prophetic in that they are the very words our Lord cried out while He bore our sins on the cross. Exactly. That is how David felt.

David needed some encouragement. Someone needed to come alongside David and remind him that God had not forgotten His promises. Jonathan did that. He came to David in the depth of his sorrow and trouble to remind him that God is true to His word and would bring His promises to pass. We need people like Jonathan in our lives.

But there is something else that comes to bear in this story. How would you feel about Saul if you were David? There is little doubt that most people would long for the opportunity to get even with this rascal who was causing so much trouble in his life. God reserved vengeance for Himself. It is His responsibility to repay those who harass God's servants. David understood that truth well and gave us a wonderful example of what trusting God to do His will looks like. From this text, let's learn how to trust God, how to encourage others to trust God, so that we don't have to be concerned about payback.

### **Covenant and Betrayal (23:14-29).**

A friend's covenant is encouraging (vv.14-18). Sometimes the servant of the Lord runs for his life (vv.14-15). Sometimes it just seems like life is that bad. For David, life was bad. *And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh (23:14-15).*

In this difficult circumstance, we can say quite confidently that David had nothing to worry about because God would not allow Saul to kill David. Verse fourteen clearly says that God did not give David into Saul's hand. Sure. But to you think David understood that? Well, maybe he did. According to the psalms he wrote, David had amazing faith in God's promises. Consider, for example, what David wrote in Psalm 19: *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward (Psalm 19:7-11).* Sounds like he trusted God's word quite a bit.

But other psalms from David express doubt, fears, misgivings, and misunderstandings. For example, in Psalm 69, it sounds like David doubted that God would answer his prayers. *Answer me, O*

*LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. Hide not your face from your servant; for I am in distress; make haste to answer me (Psalm 69:16-17).*

We must be able to sympathize with David to some extent. When life is unraveling all around us, it is easy to conclude that somewhere along the way we missed a memo. In the heat of the battle, it is easy for us to conclude that someone (God) changed the plan but didn't tell us.

In such times of trouble, discouragement, and doubting God, encouragement from a friend is a huge blessing (vv.16-18). *And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this." And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home (23:16-18).*

Jonathan had already vowed to be David's friend through thick and thin. He loved David. He loved David in spite of the fact that he understood that David would take his place on the throne. He was good with God's will in the matter. Therefore, it was Jonathan's responsibility to find David and "*strengthen his hand in God.*" To that end, Jonathan spoke words to David that would encourage David to keep trusting God's promises. He assured David that Saul would not find him. Okay. That didn't seem too likely at the moment. Yes, but this assurance would be encouraging even if it looked like the opposite would come to pass. Jonathan also assured David that he would be the next king. All of these assurances were rooted not in how Jonathan felt, but what God had said.

In this situation, Jonathan was simply practicing a principle that David's son Solomon wrote down as a wisdom saying several years later. *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17).* When we are in trouble, we long for such friends. But do we serve as such friends when others are in trouble? Fair-weather friends are plentiful and easy to find. The more blessed it appears your life is, the more fair-weather friends you will have.

But real friends are there when all of life turns against you. Real friends are willing to talk even when it is just rehashing old stuff.

Real friends are willing to listen and give no advice. Real friends are willing to sacrifice to help meet a legitimate need. Real friends have your conformity to Christ as the highest goal for your life. Therefore, real friends help us see when we are wrong, and encourage us when we are right. And when it appears that no such people exist any longer, there is still the friend who stays closer than a brother, Jesus (Proverbs 18:24).

Friends are such a blessing in times of testing. They are especially welcome when other people's betrayal makes life difficult (vv.19-29). The citizens of Ziph remind us that people with ulterior motives tend to betray.

*(19) Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? (20) Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand." (21) And Saul said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. (22) Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is very cunning. (23) See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah." (24) And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon.*

People like the Ziphites are hard to explain or understand. There is no record anywhere in the Bible that they would have a reason to hate David, turn against him, or to betray him. It appears that the people just wanted to stay on Saul's good side. Maybe they had not caught wind of the fact that God was going to replace Saul with David. Maybe they concluded that David was a rebel who in some secret way was undermining Saul's authority. If so, they were wrong. The Bible records the witness of Jonathan, Ahimelech, and others

who testified to David's faithful sincerity to Saul. That demands that any conclusion of the Ziphites that David was a rebel were wrong.

Whatever the reason, they sided with Saul and worked to turn David over to him for death. People like that make life difficult for us. The conflict in this story was clearly between Saul and David because Saul was in conflict with God. The Ziphites did not know the real issues and foolishly took up Saul's offense against David. It is nigh unto impossible to convince people not to take up another person's offense, especially when they do not know the root issues. Too often taking up another person's offense results in unnecessary heartache and broken relationships. And the worse part is that the person who was offended was actually fighting against God.

We have no problem concluding with our 20/20 hindsight that the people of Ziph were out of God's will and fighting against God. But no one could have convinced them that they were wrong and that they were actually fighting against God. Their actions made life difficult for David who wrote about his perspective in Psalm 54. Notice the title. *To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, "Is not David hiding among us?"* David penned, *O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might. O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves (Psalm 54:1-3).*

By the way. There is no indication in the Bible that David ever got even with the citizens of Ziph after he became king. Instead of arguing with the Ziphites, David prayed to God.

Sometimes God protects His servants in unusual ways (vv.25-29).

*(25) And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. (26) Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, (27) a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the*

*Philistines have made a raid against the land." (28) So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. (29) And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.*

First, David escaped to the rocks in the wilderness of Maon. While there, Saul nearly captured him. Things looked hopeless. Then an amazing coincidence happened (or at least that is what normal people would conclude). About the time Saul was ready to pounce on David, *a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land"* (v.27). Why do you suppose the Philistines decided to attack right then? God arranged it.

Things had to work out like this because God had already promised that David would be king. Sure, but what about those servants of God who are not so lucky? We can read stories about missionaries who narrowly escape danger because of God's divine protection. But then we read about the five missionaries who the Auca Indians killed. Why didn't God deliver them? Sometimes God miraculously delivered Christians during times of national persecution. Many Christians have become martyrs. Is God faithful to His promises?

Jesus' words of encouragement in the Revelation may well apply to believers in this age. Jesus promised, *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:10)*. Jesus promised, *To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone . . . . (Revelation 2:17)*. Jesus promised, *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne (Revelation 3:21)*.

Oh! Even in death, the Lord is keeping His promises. God has already determined that we will spend eternity with Him. That is His certain promise. At the same time, God has already determined certain ministry opportunities for us while we remain alive. Do we trust Him? Do we trust God to deliver us in life and in death?

All around us are Christian brothers and sisters who are facing various levels of difficulty. Are they losing faith? Are they having trouble trusting God? We need to be busy like Jonathan, giving words of encouragement to trust God along the way. And along the way, we need to be careful not to become vengeful—even if we have the opportunity to pay back.

### **Respect for God-ordained Authority (24:1-22).**

It is right to show respect even to sorry authorities (vv.1-7). That is easy to say and tacitly agree with. But it is possible that, like David, we can find ourselves in a test that will prove whether we actually do this (vv.1-4). The good news was that God delivered David for a few days. The bad news was that David's enemy was relentless. *When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks (24:1-2)*.

Richard Philips offers some good insight into this kind of determination to do wrong that sinners often display. "Like Saul, as soon as God providentially restores him, the unbeliever plows ahead, digging his eternal grave with renewed commitment to sin and self." (Richard Philips, "1 Samuel," *Reformed Expository Commentary*, Phillipsburg: NJ, 2012, p.410).

While Saul was quite sure he was in control of the situation, God led him to a very dangerous place. *And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave (v.3)*. This is a very practical part of the story. Saul simply answered nature's call. He went alone into a convenient cave in order to, as we say in the common vernacular, "go to the bathroom." He laid aside his robe and took care of business.

David's men who were hiding with him in that very cave were ecstatic. They quickly came to the conclusion that this was obviously an "open door" of God's will for David to destroy his enemy and become king as God had promised. *And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem*

*good to you*''' (v.4). Surely something so coincidental as Saul coming into the very cave David and his men were hiding in, taking off his robe, and relieving himself was God's "plan" for David.

However, there is no place in the Bible that we can find a record of God promising David that He would deliver his enemy into his hand to do what he wanted with him. This is more like zealous, but vengeful, men putting words in God's mouth. Their words were equivalent to a false prophecy which God condemns. Here is an important principle for us to learn. Never act on the basis of a misinterpretation of Scripture. Search the Scripture to see if these things are so before you draw your conclusion.

This was not an open door for David to kill Saul. If he took the throne in this way, David would have been no different than hundreds of other powerful warriors who slaughtered their way to the throne. God had other plans that would protect David from such a reputation. Then why did God present this opportunity? This was God's test of David's character. It was an opportunity for David to learn what he was made of. Was he really a man after God's heart? Was he different from the guys who naturally desired Saul's death?

God is not unaware of our temptations to sin. Rather, He allows such circumstances to let us prove our fellowship with Him. The important question is, "Do we stand like David, or do we fall to natural desires of the flesh?"

We need to guard against putting out our hand against God's anointed. The last part of verse four reveals, *Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.* Was that so bad? To David it was. *And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed." So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way (vv.5-7).*

David cut a small piece off from Saul's robe. So what! The royal robe was a symbol of the king's authority. This was like Jonathan giving David his belt and sword which represented his authority to become the next king (18:4). David had just attacked the symbol of the king's authority. In doing so, David rebelled against

the obvious expression of God's will. Saul was king for now. That was God's will.

No doubt the men were shaken by David's failure to kill Saul and his remorse for simply cutting a piece from his robe. Notice that unlike the false "Scripture" advised by his men, David appealed to the clear authority of God's word. *"The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed"* (v.6). Maybe this came from Exodus 22:28: *You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.*

David's response does not teach us that we must sit back and allow people in positions of authority to run roughshod over the people under their care, or break the law, or make decisions that will damage others without confronting them about their sin. Rather, it is acceptable to confront sorry authorities about their error (vv.8-22).

In that process we need to expose the facts in order to convict the person who is in error.

*And David arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. (9) And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? (10) Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.'" (11) See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it (vv.8-11).*

We have to wonder how David could bow and speak to such a wicked man with honor and terms of respect. How can we ever do such a thing? David had committed himself to God which meant he trusted God to take care of the evil man. David was willing to let God be the judge. He told Saul, *May the LORD judge between me and*

you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you (v.12).

Saul, on the other hand, could not respond like David but could only do wickedly. *As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you (v.13).* Therefore, because of this contrast, David was more than willing to allow God to judge the difference. *"After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand" (vv.14-15).*

If we are going to commit ourselves to God's judgment in relational conflicts, we need to order our thoughts and actions in line with what God has already said in the Bible. At least when we lay out the evidence that we are trying to follow God, we can hope for conviction for the person doing evil (vv.16-22).

I wonder how Saul must have felt when he looked down and saw the corner of his robe cut away? His response gives us a little idea about that. *As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept (v.16).* It does seem like Saul sort of repented here. He spoke of righteousness. That's a good thing, right? But notice that Saul never confessed that he was unrighteous. He just pointed out that in comparison David was more righteous. *He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil."* There was no true repentance of personal sin, but simply acknowledging that he didn't measure up to David.

In fact, Saul didn't even realize that his admission that David was righteous was a tacit confession that God should pour out His judgment on him for persecuting an innocent man. He admitted, *"And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day" (vv.18-19).*

More than that, Saul acknowledged that he knew the truth about what God was doing. *"And now, behold, I know that you shall surely*

*be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand" (20).* He followed that admission with a pitiful plea for protection of his family indicating he knew what the final outcome was going to be. *"Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house" (21).*

Notice that in all of his response Saul responded like a religious man who knows in his intellect and memory how he should feel or respond. The problem is that his heart won't let him conform to his proper words. He had understanding without conviction. A friend said to me one time that he found that the most difficult sinners to try to restore were pastors who had fallen into sin because they know all the right words to say.

David, unlike Saul, could swear a genuine oath to Saul. But at the same time, he did not trust a word Saul uttered. *And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold (v.22).* Saul made a confession under duress. Those are seldom genuine or from the heart. David had heard all this before. Therefore, he did not return to Gibeah with Saul.

The lessons here are clear. We must commit ourselves to the Lord. If we are committed to the Lord, we trust what He says and what He does. Sometimes we need real friends to encourage us to keep staying committed. Never should we take matters into our own hands in order to exact vengeance. If we are really committed to the Lord, we trust Him to make matters right in His way and His time.