

1 SAMUEL 24

INTRODUCTION

Chapters 24-26 all hang together. All three chapters recount different situations but they all share a common theme which is the restraint that David shows as he waits on God to fulfil his promise by bringing David to the throne.

David knew he was God's anointed King but he is prepared to wait patiently as God works out his purposes; he refuses to take things into his own hands and snatch the kingship for himself even when he has a clear opportunity to do so. Our chapter begins with Saul once again being told that David and his men are in En Gedi (v 1).

Even though Saul has only just got back from pursuing the Philistines he is immediately off on his travels again this time he takes 3000 of his best men in order to seek out David near the Crags of the Wild Goats (v 2). Saul needs to relieve himself and so he enters a cave in order to do so and perhaps also he was in need of a rest (v 3). But of all the caves to choose from in order to use the Loo he chooses one that unbeknown to him; David and his men were hiding in although they were much further back in the cave. But what will happen now, the scene is set and drama is unfolding what but happens next?

1. THE TEST THAT DAVID FACED (vs. 4-7)

While Saul relieves himself in the cave David and his men debate what they should do. We might say they are debating "what is the Lord's will in this situation" it looks like the Lord has given David and his men a golden opportunity to kill Saul and his men and at last David could then inherit his rightful position as King over Israel.

David's men are very keen to take Saul life for they have interpreted this situation as being the Lord's will; after all did the Lord not say "I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish" (v 4). This is not a biblical quotation but it may well be that they are quoting an unrecorded message spoken by the Lord through a prophet to David on a previous occasion or it maybe that they are simply interpreting this circumstance as the Lord speaking to them.

Whatever the case may be; they are clear in their minds what the Lord's providence is clearly saying to them; this is it David, this is the opportunity that we have all been waiting for. No longer will we have to run away, now is the day for you David to grasp that promised kingship. It seems that David is not as sure as his men for he creeps up to Saul and cuts off the corner of Saul's robe (v 4). This was a symbolic gesture; David is staking his claim to the kingdom (15:27-28); he is saying I am rebelling against the King and I am now staking my right to be king. This is why David is so conscience stricken by what we may consider such a minor act (v 5).

David is filled with guilt and remorse for as far as David was concerned this symbolic action was going too far for God appointed and anointed Kings and therefore to rebel against God's anointed king was to rebel against Almighty God and David knew that his actions were actions of rebellion (v 6).

But although David was remorseful his men wanted to kill Saul (v 7) for the word that is translated "rebuked" (v 7) is I think a mild translation for the Hebrew text says that "David tore apart his men with the words" in other words his men were not persuaded and apparently David had to get quite forceful with them; perhaps he even had to threaten them.

David's actions (v 7) saved Saul's life and once again Saul is oblivious to the fact that David his arch enemy has saved his life and so Saul leaves the cave and continues his pursuit of David. He was so close to David and yet so far but thankfully David passed the test and learnt a very important lesson that day. The lesson is that there are no short cuts to the fulfilment of God's purposes.

Open doors are not always God revealing his way to us but they are at times as in this case a test to see if we will obey God's word and principles even when providence seems to be pointing in another direction. God is saying to David are you prepared to trust in me rather than take things into your own hands even though the opportunity to do so is presented to you. A young girl finds a young man or it could be the other way around showing interest in her or him.

She is flattered as many of her friends would love to date this particular young man. But she is a Christian and he isn't. What should she do? The opportunity is there for her to go on a date; could this be the Lord's will? That's a real test but the test is about trust. Will that person trust the Lord's will about being unequally yoked with unbelievers or will she use the providential opening as an excuse to do her own thing?

The test being presented to David is one of doing what is right over the providential opening that has presented itself. The open door was there for David and sadly many a Christian today may like David's army have interpreted this as God's will, for after all everything is working out; this must be the Lord's leading. But we need to be clear that an open door is not on its own proof of God's will. Circumstances are not a substitute for the principles laid down in God's word. The open door is always susceptible to serious misinterpretation.

The most we can say about an open door is that this is a test of our faith; it is the means used by God to get us to think about his leading and direction; it ought to drive us back to his word in order to think through his principles. Every one of us is open to the temptation of taking short cuts in our Christian life. We all want to be like Jesus; but there are no short cuts in the process it is a matter of daily following after the Lord in obedience and a daily repenting of sin.

But there have been many who have offered short cuts. It is usually in a form of a new experience that if we seek it, we will be on a higher spiritual plane than everyone else. This is also true when it comes to building God's church. Jesus Christ is head of his church and He will build it through the proclaiming of his word and through the prayer of his people. But so often the test comes for us to be patient. We may see other churches using all sorts of entertainment and strangely they seem to be growing and attracting people. But there are no short cuts to church growth; it is the persistent preaching of Christ to our world backed up by fervent and earnest prayer for God to use the means that He has ordained to build his church. One of the greatest temptations that we all face is the temptation to be impatient.

God is never in a hurry and He may chose to allow some churches to become small and even cease to exist but we can be sure that He will build his church and we must keep on believing that and act on what we know to be true rather than acting according to circumstances even if those circumstances seem favourable towards us.

2. THE REASONS BEHIND DAVID'S REFUSAL TO KILL SAUL (vs. 8-22)

We are given two reasons why David refused to heed the advice given to him and chose not to kill Saul

a) He Believed God Is Just (vs. 8-15) – Imagine the scene as Saul leaves the cave and continues his search for David he hears a voice that sounds like David's. "Surely it can't be David" must have

been one of his thoughts. The words are strange to Saul's ears they are words of respect "my lord and king" (v 8) when he turns round he sees David prostrate on the ground as a mark of respect to Saul the king (v 8). But David gives Saul no time to respond he launches into an extended speech in which he argues his case of innocence (vs. 9-10). David says don't listen to those who are advising you and are claiming that I am out to harm you Saul.

If I wanted to harm you I had the opportunity to do so and here is the evidence (v 11) and he then produces the piece that he cut off from Saul's robe. David assures Saul that he will never do him any harm but then come the key verses David leaves justice with God; and he is confident that God will avenge him for the harm that Saul is attempting to inflict upon David (vs. 12 & 15).

David is showing how foolish Saul is for pursuing him; for David has not sought to do Saul any harm, he sees himself as a harmless dead dog or as a flea, he will never do any harm to Saul (v 14) but he will leave justice in the hands of God (v 15) and in doing so he believes that God will uphold David's cause and vindicate him by delivering him from the hands of Saul.

You see this is why David can let an opportunity to kill Saul pass him by for he knew that ultimately it is not up to him to take revenge but knew that he was to leave room for God's wrath because it is the Lord prerogative to avenge his name, his people and his cause for it is the Lord that repays and that is where we too must leave justice.

It is the most natural thing in the world to want revenge; we all want to get our own back on those who have done us harm we want our enemies to be harmed and suffer just as they have made us suffer. Retaliation is the reflex action of injured pride which is why it is a shock to us when someone we have wronged responds with a serene and humble spirit (Proverbs 15:1). Such a response disarms us for it is natural to want revenge and to get even.

This is why David presents to us all a lovely model of the way in which believing people need to handle our hurts and wrongs. We often do not get justice in our places of work or in our families or even in church. If we live in this world we will all get hurt and sometimes that hurt comes from those we love and those that we worship with in church. But how do we react to such situations. Perhaps an open door presents itself to us to get our own back.

Perhaps we have an opportunity to say something that is hurtful to the person who has wronged us. Perhaps we are presented with an opportunity to embarrass that person in front of others and put them down. What do we do? Do we take that opportunity? Let us learn from David who left justice and revenge in God's hands. But this does not mean that when we are wronged we should be passive.

We can pray for justice to be done and for our cause to be upheld for that is what many of the Psalms do (Psalm 54:5 & 58:6-9); and therefore it is right to seek justice by praying that God will do what He promises to do which is to avenge and repay but in the meantime we are to do what we are instructed to do which is to do good to our enemies and in doing so we will be heaping burning coals on their head. We are to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19-21).

But there was something else that enabled David to pass this test by refusing to kill Saul.

b) He Believed That God's Purposes Would Be Fulfilled (vs. 16-22). – David knew that he was God's anointed king and although he had the opportunity to quicken the process by killing Saul he knew in his heart that God's purposes would eventually be fulfilled. In this final section David is reassured of this fact by Saul himself who knew in his heart that the game was up and that David would one day be King (v 20). What reassuring words they must have been to David, they assured him that he did the right thing in not killing Saul for he knew God will always fulfil his purposes.

But let us complete the story. Saul is clearly impressed with David and with his restraint and once Saul has composed himself from the shock he gives us an emotional speech (tears v 16), which although acknowledges certain things; it is not a speech of repentance. First of all Saul acknowledges that David is more righteous than he is although notice he does not acknowledge his sin (v 17).

Saul acknowledges that David had treated him well whereas he has treated David badly (v 18). David's goodness towards Saul is seen in the fact that he had an opportunity to kill him but spared his life (v 18) something which Saul acknowledges is very unusual (v 19). Then Saul declares what Jonathan had already said Saul knew, which is that David will be king (v 20 cf. 23:17).

Therefore knowing this to be the case Saul seeks to get David to promise that when he comes to power he will not liquidate his family line which is something that would normally happen when a new king came to power (v 21). But David had already made this promise to Jonathan (20:12-17), so David gave his oath to Saul and Saul returned home (v 22); but David is not stupid he does not trust Saul; he is unable to return to the king's court but instead he goes and hides in the stronghold (v 22).

But what does David receive from all this; there is no reconciliation between David and Saul so what is the purpose of this encounter. As I have already said this incident reassures David that God will indeed fulfil his promise that He will make David king one day. However this assurance comes from an unusual source for it comes from his enemy Saul (v 20). David is told once again what he knew to be true that he will one day inherit the kingship.

But that is often the case with God's people we know what is true and we often know how we should act and react in the various situations of life but we all need to be reassured that God's word is true and dependable; we all need to be told again and again what we know to be true. David should be encouraged that even his enemy knows that God's promise will be fulfilled and so although David's situation has not changed for he is still on the run from Saul he has been reassured that his action in refusing to kill Saul was the right one. It was right because God is just and will see that justice is done but God is also faithful and will make sure that his promise to David about kingship will be fulfilled in his time. My dear friends how often have we acted in a way that was right but in a way that did not make our life easier?

But then God came to us by his Spirit and reassured us through his word that we did the right thing. He does this by reminding us of what we know to be true. This is why reading the bible personally and attending the meetings of the church where the word of God is proclaimed is so important.

I will rarely tell you something that you do not know to be true, but you will hear from this church things that you know are true and therefore God will reassure you that what you believe is true and how you act is right and that alone will help us to carry on in our faith and persevere even in the most trying of circumstances.

Often our circumstances may not change and they may even get harder but because God comes to us and reassures us from his word we are given the grace to persevere and to keep trusting in the God that we know is true and we are enabled to live in the way that we know is true.

May God reassure us through his word of what we know to be true and may He enable us by his grace to do what we know is right.

Amen