

“Sending Your Enemy Back Home” 1 Samuel 24:1-22
Sunday 11/13/19 - Jeff Lyle

One of the most challenging things that Christians deal with is how to respond to the attacks of those who choose to treat us as their enemies. If we do not fight back at all, we become doormats. If we fight back in the wrong manner, we forfeit the covering of God and may end up making a difficult situation much worse. Jesus commands us to turn the other cheek, but does that mean we passively tolerate mistreatment, abuse or lies? What exactly does it mean to leave all vengeance to the Lord? In this season from David’s life on the run, we are impacted by several important Kingdom principles that all appear in one tense scene. David has an opportunity to wipe out an enemy who is clearly wicked. It seems like God is giving Saul into David’s hands to defeat. People encourage David to aggressively put an end to the fight, but David’s heart is not so sure it is the right thing to do. From David’s actions, we find ourselves instructed on how to submit to human authorities, how to show honor to those who may not deserve it, and how to rest in trusting God with His perfect timing to bring a holy end to our battles with others. In the end, we learn how to send our enemy back home.

I. David’s Opportunity to Get Even (1-4a)

A. David was outmatched (1-2) - “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...”

David was still living as a fugitive on the run from King Saul. Fully demonized now, Saul was consumed to destroy David whom he viewed as his enemy. Though David now had a trained militia of 400 warriors, Saul had the entire army of Israel at his disposal. In this chapter, we see Saul leading 3,000 soldiers to hunt down David and his mighty men. The odds were stacked against David again as the calculations were 3,000 against 400. In the natural realm, things were not looking optimistic for David. Few things are as discouraging as looking at a spreadsheet and recognizing that you simply do not have enough resources to overcome your challenges. Fortunately for David,

he had learned not to trust in the spreadsheets. He would believe God for the impossible victory.

B. David was empowered (3) - “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.”

Was this the moment for which David had been waiting? Was God delivering his enemy into his hands? In a nearly comical fashion, the scriptures indicate that Saul found a cave where he could privately enter in and go to the bathroom. It just so happened that this exact cave was where David and his soldiers were hiding themselves from Saul and his men. Alone and squatting down in a vulnerable position, Saul was defenseless. David could put a decisive end to this manhunt right here. For a few moments, David was empowered and held all of the cards. Would he seize the moment and strike down the man who had ruined his life?

C. David was tempted (4a) - “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.’””

Throwing fuel on the fire, David’s faithful men began to whisper to him to step up and kill Saul on the spot. It is hard to blame these men. They also were fugitives and living on the run. Spending months in the Judean wilderness in caves would have been exhausting. The fear of never knowing if today might be your last day would have resulted in major stress on a daily basis. It appeared to the men that God had just delivered wicked King Saul into David’s hand for execution. They even told David that this moment was a God-ordained opportunity to kill the demonized king and take the throne which rightfully belonged to David. We can only imagine the intensity of this temptation in David’s heart. So much of the scenario could be viewed as God giving David a way of escape. Yet, something inside of David caused him to slow down and think about what he was going to do. Was there any way that God presented Saul to David in order for David to kill him? Or was this a deeper test of David’s trust in the Lord to handle David’s enemy?

II. David's Conscience Governed by Honor (4b-7)

A. His conviction (4b-5) - "Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe."

Before using the bathroom, Saul removed his outer robe and set it aside. David silently approaches the same area where Saul and his robe were, and then he cuts off a corner of the robe. We do not know exactly why David did this. Perhaps it was a weak moment of pride where David could prove to himself, his soldiers and even Saul that David held the upper hand. Maybe David snipped off the piece of robe as a trophy. Regardless, he was immediately cut to the heart that he had dishonored the king by cutting his robe. This is a stunning contrast between David's heart and Saul's heart. Saul was so hardhearted that he felt no twinge in his conscience about hunting David down to kill him. Saul was opposing God and felt nothing inside. David, on the other hand, had such sensitivity of the Spirit that he was grieved over the comparatively smaller act of snipping Saul's garment. This is a revelation of the type of heart that David had beating in his chest. David could not live outside of honoring God. David was not allowed by God to harden his heart, justify his wrong actions or violate the human authority placed over him. He felt deeply convicted over what he had done.

B. His confession (6) - "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."

Though Saul was demonized, murderous and wicked of heart, David understood that the sovereign God of Heaven had placed Saul in the highest position in Israel. The wicked man was the appointed king. Until God removed Saul, he was to be regarded as the anointed king of the land. David shares this important principle with his soldiers and refuses to enact revenge on Saul. As we live today in a culture where human authority is despised, resisted and often rebelled against, we do well to learn from David's example. God expects us to recognize and honor rank. The Apostle Peter commands us to obey human

authority (1 Peter 2:13). The Apostle Paul does the exact same in Romans 13:1-5. Additionally, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews commands Christian followers to yield to the authority of those whom God places over them in the Church (Hebrews 13:17). Our flesh may not like it, but it is clear that God places a large emphasis on our responsibility to honor and obey human authority. How we respond to these commands will reveal the level of submission in our hearts toward God. If we disobey the human authority over us that He has established, we cannot think of ourselves as being obedient to Him. David confessed his temporary lapse in this area and recommitted to his men that he would continue to trust the Lord to handle Saul in his timing.

C. His commitment (7) - “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.”

David’s words were backed up with action. He risked the discouragement of his men who clearly wanted Saul dead. David forbid them from killing Saul. This future King of Israel not only taught his soldiers how to live in the wilderness and fight military battles, he taught them how to honor God and the authority that He invests in His human instruments. Saul had no clue how close to death he had come. He finished his business in the cave and walked out, resuming his quest to murder the man who had just spared his life. Because David was committed to trusting God and honoring Saul, there was no execution in the cave that day.

III. David’s Determined Soul Remains Humble (8-15)

A. Note David’s position (8-10) - “Afterward David also 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. 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.’”

Still holding the piece of Saul's robe, David does the unthinkable. Exiting the safety of the cave, David cries aloud to Saul who was a little distance away. David humbles himself and bows down to the ground to visibly display honor and submission to God's anointed leader. David explains to Saul just how close to death he had come. Imagine how Saul must have felt to see David coming out of the very same cave where Saul had just exited. His heart must have dropped as he quickly connected the dots and realized that David had been in there while Saul used the bathroom. David makes sure that Saul understands that David had both the encouragement and opportunity to kill Saul. He also tells Saul why he refused to kill him. He declares to Saul that he regarded the king as God's appointed leader and, because of this, David spared his life.

B. Note his admission (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.”

Holding up the corner of Saul's robe, David proves his case to the startled king. Now, it was undeniable to Saul. The man whom he was hunting down had been so close to him that he was able to cut off a piece of his robe. Saul was now convinced that David had spared his life. Note also that David did not deny Saul's evil actions. Though Saul was sinning against David by seeking to kill him, David made it clear that he would respond by seeking to kill Saul. David did not deny Saul's sin, he just refused to punish him for it.

C. Note his petition (12-15) - “May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes wickedness.’ But my hand shall not be against you. 14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! 15 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.”

David then submitted Saul's sinful treatment of him to the Lord and left it with God. Twice he declares that judgment would be left with God.

David pledges to Saul that he would never seek to kill the king. He then uses descriptions of himself that would convey that he viewed Saul's position as superior to David's position. David was a flea on a dead dog while Saul was the anointed king whom God had enthroned over Israel. David publicly declared his hope that God would convince Saul that he had nothing to fear of David. Even if that did not occur, David would never take these matters into his own hand. David freshly submitted in the public view of his followers, his enemy and all who were in earshot of his speech.

IV. David's Defeated Foe Goes Home (16-22)

A. His enemy was convicted (16-19) - "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. 17 He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. 18 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. 19 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."

Even the wicked King Saul could not deny the depth of nobility in David's heart. In a moment of clarity, the wicked king is deeply moved by the righteousness mercy shown to him by David. He knows now that David could have killed him but, instead, chose to spare his life. Saul temporarily breaks and declares David to be the better man. He even expresses hope that God would bless him for sparing Saul's life. While this moment of broken humility would not last, it was likely genuine as it played out. Temporarily overwhelmed by something other than the demon that regularly afflicted him, Saul saw the goodness of David and it crushed his rage. David was defeating Saul through grace, mercy and honor. What an amazingly rare approach with an enemy!

B. His enemy was corrected (20) - And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand."

Saul confesses out loud what his heart had been privately afraid of. This may have been the moment wherein Saul not only understood that David would be the next king, but he also understood why. David had a different heart than Saul. It simply made spiritual sense to Saul that God would replace his carnal leadership with David's surrendered and honorable leadership. There was no denying it in this moment: David was that better man that Samuel told Saul about many years before. Saul looked towards the cave and saw his replacement bowing down in humility. God would elevate David as he determined to honor Saul.

C. His enemy was conquered (21-22) - "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." 22 And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold."

Almost immediately, Saul reverts back to the default position of his heart: **taking care of his own interests**. He seized the moment and requested that David swear that he would not kill Saul's family when David took the throne. David agreed. I can only imagine how this must have fortified David's heart as he heard Saul publicly acknowledge that David was the chosen King of Israel. David had known it. His family had known it. His 400 men likely knew it.

But now his enemy knew it.

David allowed this reality to settle down deep in his heart as he watched his enemy pack up his stuff and go home. For a short season, David could exhale and rest in the confidence that God was fighting his battles for him. Very soon, however, David would see that Saul may have temporarily retreated, but he had not repented. David's struggles as a fugitive had been paused, but they had not been purged. There was much more to come.