

***DAVID: A MAN AFTER
GOD'S OWN HEART***
*Notes of a Series of Sermons
on the life of David*

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1. DAVID – A MAN CHOSEN BY GOD

1 Samuel 16.1-13

As we take a journey through David's life we will notice how the Lord helps and deals with him in a variety of situations. We will see the truth of the promise of God to His people in that He assures them that He will never leave nor forsake them (*Hebrews 13.5*). We will see the wisdom of God in evidencing, time and time again, His overruling hand to protect and sanctify His servant.

There will be times when we will think, 'I have been where David has been, and I trust in the same God as David.' There will be times when it is clear that in David's experience there is a foreshadowing of the Messiah Who was to come. It is my prayer this series will prove enriching to the soul, and encouraging and challenging in our own walk with the Lord.

Background

When Samuel was old, like Eli before him, his sons were corrupt and brought dishonour on the Lord's name. This recurrence of a bad example caused the Children of Israel to become disillusioned with the system of leadership. So they came to Samuel and requested a king. Their request seems to be understandable owing to the corruption of Samuel's sons, whom he had appointed as judges. However, behind the request was actually a rejection, not only of Samuel and his sons but of the Lord – see *1 Samuel 8.1-9*. They had a desire to be like other nations around them.

If they had come to Samuel with their justifiable concerns about his sons, asking the Lord for guidance, it would have been fine. But they came with their own solution to the problem – 'Give us a king!'

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Despite the warning of the Lord through Samuel, the people insisted on being given a king. So it was that the Lord appointed Saul, a man He knew would be acceptable and admired by the people as a king. Apart from some rebels, Saul was provided with a band of men to support him, and his influence grew. It seemed all was going according to the people's plan and desire, and Saul was admired and followed. God, through His Spirit, gave him courage, and he led the Children of Israel in a battle to slay the enemy, the Ammonites. He was confirmed as king over Israel and there was much rejoicing among the nation.

But Saul had only been reigning a short while before his pride and presumption got the better of him. God commanded him, as an act of justice and judgment, to lead the Children of Israel in destroying the Amalekites. God had given time for repentance but there was only rebellion and idolatry. One of the purposes of the nation of Israel was to demonstrate both God's justice and His mercy.

However Saul only partially obeyed. Instead of utterly destroying the Amalekites as God had commanded (*1 Samuel 15.2-3*), he and the people spared the king, Agag, and the best of the sheep, oxen and the lambs. All that took their fancy in material goods they kept; everything they despised and seemed worthless they destroyed. Then, to add to this disobedience, Saul made himself a monument and had a hypocritical service of sacrifice.

'And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." So Samuel said: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than

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sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king” 1 Samuel 15.20-23.

So we see two problems here with Saul – pride in disobedience, and presumption in setting himself up as a priest. For this gross act of disobedience of the law and clear commandment of God, Saul was rejected. The Spirit of the Lord, given for leadership, departed from him, and he now lived apart from God and apart from Samuel.

The Lord had given the Children of Israel the desire of their heart, but their king had proved a disappointment. He would increasingly become unhinged in his behaviour, and eventually be despised even by his family. From this we learn how important it is to have pure motives and desires before the Lord in guidance. The Lord provided providentially for the nation, but He did not provide in Saul spiritually for the nation.

If you read the appointment of Saul, you will notice a different type of wording being used to that of David’s appointment (see *1 Samuel 9.27-10.1*). We are going to consider how God chooses a man to lead and equips him practically and spiritually.

When mourning must cease

Now the Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons” 1 Samuel 16.1.

In the context of this chapter, the Lord intervened in the life of His servant Samuel as he was constantly mourning over Saul. Samuel was distressed because Saul had proved a disappointment, determined to govern by his wisdom, not God’s. The Spirit of the Lord that enabled Saul to rule wisely had now departed from him because of his pride

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and arrogance. Samuel was distressed for the spiritual state of Saul, for the nation's future, and because his own authority was diminished.

Samuel was evidently now stuck in the cul-de-sac of worry, despair and disappointment, particularly about Saul. But Samuel should have been encouraging himself in the Lord. So the Lord appeared to Samuel and admonished him for his prolonged mourning over Saul. The Lord had rejected Saul; the need of the hour was for Samuel to learn from the past and look to God for the future.

To understand this account of David we need to view it in the truth of God's sovereign will overruling in all things. God had rejected Saul and had chosen another, a man after His own heart who would obey the Lord and be a blessing.

'But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you' 1 Samuel 13.14.

From this we learn that to mourn over a disappointment, and not move on trusting in the Lord, can be dishonouring to Him. What was required here from Samuel was to seek the Lord for a new king according to God's plan and wisdom. So the Lord told Samuel to go to the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite, for one of his sons was God's provision for a king.

Note again here the sovereignty of God. God had chosen a man to rule; God's purposes must prevail and continue. Failure on the part of one man does not mean failure on God's part. His will must be accomplished and not hindered.

The key words in these verses are 'I have', referring to the sovereign purposes of God. His will is best; His will is right.

'This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise' Isaiah 43.21.

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‘And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of The Lord it shall be provided”’ Genesis 22.14.

As we look to the future, let this principle sink deep into our understanding – God’s choice, God’s will. This ‘I have’ of God will affect our approach to hearing, discernment and leadings. It is our responsibility to submit to the ‘I have’ of God.

Fear of man

‘And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me”’ 1 Samuel 16.2a.

Samuel’s first reaction to God’s direction was fear. He had rebuked Saul for his proud rebellion and separated from him, never to meet him again physically. Samuel had told Saul that to obey God is better than sacrifice, *‘for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft’ (1 Samuel 15.23)*. Because Saul rejected the Word of the Lord, the Lord rejected Saul from being king. Samuel by now would have been Enemy Number One to Saul, who would have no hesitation in killing him.

But the Lord instructed him to press on for the future good of the nation and anoint another to be king. The Lord’s response is to remind Samuel that to obey Him is to be seen as an act of worship.

‘But the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you”’ 1 Samuel 16.2b-3.

Invite Jesse to the sacrifice – it is to be first and foremost an act of worship. Worship of the Lord is an antidote to the fear of man. The fear of man brings a snare (*Proverbs 29.25*), while the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (*Psalms 111.10*). Worshipping the Lord helps us to view men whom we fear as they compare with the Lord in His greatness and majesty.

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'So Samuel did what the Lord said, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, "Do you come peaceably?"' 1 Samuel 16.4.

When Samuel entered Bethlehem the elders were extremely nervous. We read they trembled at his coming. Note the respect for Samuel at Bethlehem. Here was a man of God, a prophet, who spoke the Word of the Lord. One is reminded of Robert Murray M'Cheyne. When he entered his pulpit in revival times the people began to weep. Here was a man coming from the Lord's presence with the Word of the Lord to preach to them!

Here at Bethlehem they wondered why Samuel had come. How should they receive Samuel into town, for he was now an enemy of King Saul – did he come peaceably? 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord' is the response.

'And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice' 1 Samuel 16.5.

'Prepare yourself to worship the Lord – sanctify yourselves. Come with me to the sacrifice with reverence and godly fear. Change your clothes, and wash your bodies in pure water, and prepare your minds by meditation, reflection, and prayer; that, being in the spirit of sacrifice, ye may offer acceptably to the Lord.' Adam Clarke Commentary.

'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' (Psalm 29.2). It is at such a time of true worship that the Lord reveals Himself to us. This was the Lord's promise to Samuel – *'I will show you what you shall do'.*

From this we are reminded of two points: the worship of the Lord is an antidote to fear, and the Lord reveals Himself and His will by His Word in worship.

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Samuel had instructed the elders to prepare themselves, but now Samuel takes a personal interest in Jesse and his sons. This was the family from whom God had chosen a king – he must take special care to ensure they are prepared. This would have involved washing, changing their garments, instruction in the Word of the Lord and prayer.

Preparation for worship is an important part of our obedience and respect for the Lord. If we want to enter into a deeper relationship with God, then appreciate the need to be clean. Now when we speak of being cleansed in relation to the forgiveness of our sin, we know only God can wash us clean through His Son Jesus Christ.

‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ 1 John 1.9.

But here the meaning is fellowship; worship is primarily to be an experience of communion and fellowship with God. To enjoy fellowship and communion with God we need to respect the act of consecration.

‘Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God’ 2 Corinthians 7.1.

‘Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith’ Hebrews 12.1-2.

This is an important consideration in the believer’s life. We have to appreciate the need for consecration in our lives, that is, if we really want to know God’s blessing and a closer walk with God.

‘If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear’ Psalm 66.18.

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'It does not take great men to do great things; it only takes consecrated men.' Phillips Brooks.

God's choice

'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'
Isaiah 55.9.

'So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him!" But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"' 1 Samuel 16.6-7.

Jesse's sons were brought before Samuel in order of age. Eliab, the eldest, stood before Samuel, and his first reaction was, 'Surely this must be the Lord's anointed!' Eliab was tall and of good appearance; what a king he would make – strong, handsome, very acceptable and likely to be popular. We know how much emphasis is put on appearance with our own royal family – image counts in a secular world.

But Samuel was immediately instructed by the Lord not to anoint Eliab, and with the instruction is timeless teaching: do not look on the outward appearance as the only criteria for guidance. God had refused Eliab.

The Lord does not see as man sees – God looks at the heart. This does not mean that God rejects good-looking people, because David himself was good looking. The point here is that looks are not the issue – the real issue in choosing the right person is the heart. This is true of leadership, and it is also true of marriage – the character is the key. Such a fact alerts us to the reality of our own weaknesses in discernment. Left to ourselves we get into trouble. Beware of the danger of being impressed with external appearances, and being impressed

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by personality alone. Even Samuel, the experienced prophet, got this one wrong! What a mercy God intervened.

Jesus taught: *‘Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment’* (John 7.24). Let us beware of choosing according to the flesh rather than according to the Spirit.

‘So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these”’ 1 Samuel 16.8-10.

After Eliab, all the other sons of Jesse passed before Samuel. He received the same verdict – the Lord has not chosen these!

In the time of the Welsh Revival there was a minster who was severely disabled in his spine so he was bent over. It was a tough time to live when such were despised and neglected. However, it was such a man who was anointed of the Lord to preach with great power and unction. The world despised his outward appearance, but God had chosen him to be one of His mighty men.

‘The Lord constantly stands human logic on its head and is not a slave to our conventions.’ Dale Ralph Davies.

Think of the Lord Jesus, Whose face was marred more than any man (*Isaiah 52.14*), and of Whom it was said: *‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’* (John 1.46); and *‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him’* (Matthew 27.42). But God looks at the heart! Here is His only beloved Son, living and suffering on earth as the perfect Man. God looks at the heart, and even when the face and body of His Son was totally disfigured in agony, the heart of Jesus is pure and holy, without one stain. Man looks on the outward appearance – God looks on the heart.

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'And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all the young men here?" Then he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here." So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!" Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah' 1 Samuel 16.11-13.

When all the sons of Jesse present had passed by Samuel and been rejected, he asked the obvious question: 'Is there another son?' Yes, but he is out tending the sheep – we have not even considered him. Samuel was not even given his name. Surely it is so obvious; he is just a youngster, just growing up, not of age, at the bottom of the ladder in our family. Surely he cannot be the one! But God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts (*Isaiah 55.9*)! The point here is to humble ourselves before the Lord, and say, 'The will of the Lord be known and done.' David was brought before Samuel, and the Lord said, '*Arise, anoint him; for this is the one*'.

Standing before Samuel was David, a strong young man of handsome countenance, a man consecrated to the Lord. He may well have still had his shepherd's garments on – he probably smelt of sheep and grass and was grubby. But the Lord looks on the heart, and here was a young man already walking with the Lord – a believer.

Samuel anointed David in the presence of his brothers. David was God's choice, not man's. All the Lord's people have been blessed because of God's choice of David, though his psalms, his life, his confessions and his soul's experience. This is so often God's way. He takes the most unlikely people and equips them for His work and will. Let us pray for spiritual discernment and spiritual direction in our guidance from the Lord – His will be done.

2. DAVID – FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

1 Samuel 16.14-23

‘But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul’s servants said to him, “Surely, a distressing spirit from God is troubling you. Let our master now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is a skilful player on the harp. And it shall be that he will play it with his hand when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well.” So Saul said to his servants, “Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me.” Then one of the servants answered and said, “Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skilful in playing, a mighty man of valour, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord is with him.”

‘Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, “Send me your son David, who is with the sheep.” And Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a young goat, and sent them by his son David to Saul. So David came to Saul and stood before him. And he loved him greatly, and he became his armourbearer. Then Saul sent to Jesse, saying, “Please let David stand before me, for he has found favour in my sight.” And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.’

Anointed of the Lord

After the anointing with oil by the prophet Samuel, the Spirit of the Lord had come upon David from that day forward. He had been anointed to serve the Lord, to lead, to write Scripture and for suffering.

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He was now going to suffer at the hands of Saul simply because of his anointing of the Lord – his life was to be in danger.

From this we learn that following the Lord brings us into direct conflict with Satan. Taking up our cross and following the Lord means joining the army of the Lord, being called to be a soldier of the Lord. It will not be long before a javelin is hurled at David and he will live as a fugitive in dens and caves of the earth. It is not long before Satan hurls a javelin at any person following the Lord to shake them, to create fear and disturb the mind. Remember how our Saviour and Lord was anointed with power from on high for ministry, and then went into the wilderness.

'Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him' Mark 1.12-13.

But always remember that, despite the conflict in the battle, the Lord delivers us from it all.

'But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said to them, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all adversity"' 2 Samuel 4.9.

David, filled with the Holy Spirit, ministered to Saul who was beset with an evil spirit. Saul had no idea at this stage that David had been anointed as his replacement. Here is God's anointed one ministering to God's rejected one. In other words, Saul was benefitting from the peace and serenity of a servant of God.

It is a fact of history that the world has benefitted the most from the influence of Christians walking with God. There is the well-known comment that behind wars is often religion, but this is a statement that really shows the world's ignorance of the nature of true Christianity. True Christianity is not like any other religion; in fact, in reality

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it is not a religion – it is the faith, the truth and the way. Nobody is born a Christian. Jesus said, ‘*You must be born again*’ (*John 3.7*). You must be called and saved by God’s grace in Christ. Once this miracle has taken place in your life, then you will become a blessing to this world in your witness and works. The people who are of greatest blessing to this world, in terms of influence, love and character, are true Christians. Jesus says we are to be the salt and the light (*Matthew 5.13-16*). Christians pray for their enemies and those who spitefully use them (*Matthew 5.44*).

This attitude is evident later in David’s life, when Saul was pursuing him and David could have killed him but restrained himself. Here is the point; David, a believer filled with the Holy Spirit, is the one who brings peace to Saul. Let us never underestimate the wonderful power of the Holy Spirit in a person, enabling them to be a blessing. God brought His anointed one into the palace of Saul to show the distinct difference between the serenity of a man under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the distress of a man under the influence of an evil spirit. This is our world today; with the dabbling in video games based around killing and darkness, what else do we expect? God looks at the heart, for the heart is what affects our words, actions and commitment to the work of the Lord.

David was pleased to avail himself of providential blessings, using the talents God had given him. Apart from looking after the sheep, David had two specific providential interests – music and sling shooting. Both these interests could be exercised and improved while keeping the sheep. He was an occupied man. David strengthened himself in the Lord, and in God’s strength overcame a lion and a bear (see *1 Samuel 17.33-37*). When Satan grabs a new believer to destroy him, the Lord Jesus Christ will overcome.

David already had a reputation of bravery, and as such was considered suitable as a man of war. Do we respect the fact that Christians

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are in a warfare with the flesh and the devil, though they are to be more than conquerors?

'Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us' Romans 8.37.

David was prudent in matters. He did not 'shoot from the hip'; he considered and decided, using wise judgment. The description of him has not only to do with appearance but with his character – he behaved decently and in order. Here is the secret of his godliness, wisdom, character and courage – the Lord was with him.

When called to the king, David was faithfully working in the position God had appointed him for that time. He used his position as a lowly shepherd boy as an opportunity to grow and develop in God's timing and way. David stood before Saul and was received, accepted and even loved by Saul. He became closely attached to David to the extent that he was made Saul's armourbearer. So Jesse was asked by Saul to release his son into fulltime service because he had found favour in his sight.

What are we to make of this? Saul now lived a life of two extremes. One part was reasonably peaceable, but another part was absolutely distressing. The evil spirit, permitted by God in judgment to attack Saul, undoubtedly caused extreme distress of mind. But the other part of Saul's life was lived normally, but without any recourse in repentance to God – he just carried on.

Saul was attracted to David because, in his right mind, he recognised serenity and prudence in David, a man he could trust. It was only later, when a spirit of jealousy overcame him, that he became bent on hatred and murder. It seems at this moment that God gave Saul time for repentance, also warning him of danger by permitting an evil spirit to trouble him. But even at such times God provided His Spirit-filled servant David as a means of grace to Saul, delivering

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him in distress. God used the blessing of music and the gift of playing music as a means of helping Saul in his distress.

Let us just pause here and remind ourselves of the blessing of music that we can enjoy for our wellbeing. There will be music in Heaven because there will be singing there. Music is a very precious gift from God to be used as a means of helping, not hindering. Especially important is the use of music in worship as a means of helping the soul in worship. We are to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (*1 Chronicles 16.29*).

Now let us consider this situation with Saul in his distress caused by an evil spirit. The answer to helping people troubled by evil is not to introduce more worldliness, but a sense of holiness. Imagine if David had come into Saul with a set of drums and played loud beat music to Saul to try and help him! Would such music quieten his spirit, or stir up his spirit, troubling him? Satan would have thought such action to be great. Rather, David played soothing music on his harp. The music seemed like a flowing river of peace to Saul's mind. The evil spirit departed when confronted with music played with beauty and harmony.

Surely there is a message for today's pressure to play rock and rap music in worship services. Does such music confront evil and worldliness, or does it simply confirm it and further establish it in the mind? Here David played on the harp, an instrument mentioned as a picture of playing music in Heaven. Through the ministry of the music Saul was delivered and the evil spirit departed.

Conclusion

David is a man filled with the Holy Spirit of God. He is a young man already being used by God in significant ways. From this we learn the potential of a Spirit-filled person who exercises the talents given to them by God. There is a blessed partnership between the spiritual and the practical in a born-again Christian. They learn how to enjoy the blessings of the Lord in a profitable manner and use their gifts for God's glory.

3. DAVID – MOTIVATED FOR GOD’S HONOUR

1 Samuel 17

The account on record of David’s victory in the Lord over Goliath serves to teach many spiritual lessons. The key issue to remind ourselves of in this account is that one man, David, was concerned for God’s honour. Fundamental to the walk of the believer is their concern, first and foremost, for the honour of the Lord. If His name is being despised or rebelled against it causes grief.

In the camp of the Children of Israel there was fear; in the camp of the Philistines there was aggression. But there was only one young man, amidst the thousands, who had grasped the real issue and problem. On both sides the name of the Lord was despised, either through lack of faith on the one side, or idolatry on the other.

This account also serves as a most remarkable testimony to the blessing of faith, in partnership with works. We can be encouraged to learn how faith with works overcomes the greatest enemies. The principles of faith taught here, regarding overcoming Goliath, apply to all issues that have to be overcome: ‘Goliaths’ of temptation, fear, unbelief, pride, worldliness, care, anxiety, our old nature, rejection, failure and disappointment, to name a few.

First, then, we focus on the context and note that the chief problems and evils in this account are much greater than Goliath himself.

1. Goliath and the Philistine army were arrogantly defying the armies of the living God – that is the fundamental evil. The Philistines were, under the guise of Goliath’s challenge, actually using the opportunity to defy the living God. The fact that Goliath was a mighty giant was not the main problem – it was what he represented and said.

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And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together" 1 Samuel 17.10.

'So the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be that the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father's house exemption from taxes in Israel." Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"' 1 Samuel 17.25-26.

'Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God' 1 Samuel 17.36.

2. The Israelites were immobilised, being dreadfully afraid, but they did not call upon the name of the living God. They simply fled and shook with fear of Goliath and his threats. It was not God's honour but their personal safety that concerned them – or even how to gain the reward of King Saul and have a princess as wife, and no longer have to pay taxes!

3. The one young man who did speak and act wisely by faith, was at first despised and discouraged.

When considering this account we do not go straight to Goliath, but discern what is the greatest problem here. It was not Goliath but that God was being despised, and David understood this. Having outlined the context and the most serious issues, let us consider how this giant is to be slain.

Faith

1. Faith is firstly concerned for the honour of the Lord

When David came into the camp the men were dismayed and

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greatly afraid. They only had eyes for Goliath and ears towards his threats. Here was an impossible hurdle – the man was a monster and intent on killing whoever challenged him. They were looking at a man three metres in height. They heard a man with a deep, loud, resounding voice. They looked at his armour – which weighed 57 kilos, the equivalent of two very heavy suitcases. His spear alone weighed 7 kilos – like 7 bags of sugar held in one hand outstretched. As the commentator Ralph Davies wrote, the Israelites were ‘impressed and depressed at the same time’.¹

Into this scene of confusion, despair, doubts and fears, comes a young man who had true faith in God. But please notice the nature of his faith. His immediate and first concern is the honour of the Lord.

‘Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”’
1 Samuel 17.26.

‘Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied”’ 1 Samuel 17.45.

David introduced into the camp a totally different attitude of mind – one that looked up, not across the valley. But when a person witnesses to fearful, doubting people, the first reaction is often disbelief and discouragement. Eliab despised David. He did all he could to put him in his place and make him feel a ‘nobody’ in the camp. So Goliath was not the first to address David with contempt. Actually it was Eliab, the one Samuel was sure was to be the Lord’s anointed.

‘...for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’ 1 Samuel 16.7.

¹ *Looking on the Heart*, Dale Ralph Davis, Christian Focus

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Then later, Saul's first reaction when David went to him was to despise David:

'And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth"' 1 Samuel 17.33.

Then Goliath despised and disdained David, offended by his youth, smallness and apparent weakness. He cursed David by his gods, thinking David came to him with sticks, like a dog he could chase away.

These facts remind us that Satan will ensure discouragement against a faith that first honours the Lord.

2. Faith resists opposition

But notice here how David came through the opposition and kept completely on message. He did it all for God's honour. Notice also the significance of the timing of the verbal assaults of the enemy and Goliath.

'And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening' 1 Samuel 17.16.

The Lord Jesus Christ was tempted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, but resisted by using the Word. Here David, the young man of faith, entered the camp that had been assaulted by the enemy for forty days and forty nights. He was as a forerunner of the Messiah, dealing with the enemy in the same way. He trusted in God's Word and way. When Goliath later threatened he would give his flesh to the birds and the beasts, David resisted in faith.

'And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!" Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have

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defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” 1 Samuel 17.44-46.

3. Faith encourages

The first words of David to Saul were words of encouragement – ‘Your servant will fight the enemy.’

“Then David said to Saul, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine” 1 Samuel 17.32.

This was not bravado, youthful confidence and arrogance; it was a simple, encouraging faith in God.

4. Faith remembers God’s dealings in the past

“But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” Moreover David said, “The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!” 1 Samuel 17.34-37.

This was the fundamental issue with David; his experience in the past governed his attitude in the present. God is faithful, God is gracious, God is almighty and God is the ultimate Deliverer.

Remembering the goodness of God is vital in true and living faith – Moses said, ‘*You shall remember*’:

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'You shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt' Deuteronomy 7.18.

'And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not...And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day' Deuteronomy 8.2, 18.

'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you' Deuteronomy 15.15.

Jesus said, *'Do this in remembrance of Me.'*

'And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me"' Luke 22.19.

*His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.*

John Newton, 1725-1807

Faith, based on the faithful character of God, His promises and dealings says – 'He will deliver me.'

5. Faith goes forward conscious of total dependence upon the Lord

'So Saul clothed David with his armour, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. David fastened his sword to his armour and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them." So David took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch

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which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine’ 1 Samuel 17.38-40.

Saul clothed David with his own armour; surely this was the best protection for this young man! But David could not walk easily in it. He had not proved the armour; it hindered rather than helped him. So it was that David went forth with his staff and sling, and chose for himself five smooth stones.

He went to war with his eyes open. He knew the power of Goliath and his own personal weakness. But here is the key to living faith, that faces the enemy, aware of its power, but calls on the name of the Lord.

‘Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied’ 1 Samuel 17.45.

Here is faith’s hope – in God and in His name. It understands God’s ways are not man’s ways – they are higher. It never moves from the fundamental issue of God’s honour. It goes forward serving under Jesus Christ, the Commander of the Lord’s army. The battle is the Lord’s! When we understand, like David, that the chief issue is God’s honour, we can be sure of a blessed outcome.

‘Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give you into our hands’ 1 Samuel 17.47.

Works

Faith always has the fruit of works. Here David understood that, while the battle was the Lord’s, God intended him to do battle with Goliath. So David placed into God’s hands a talent God had given him – that of slinging a stone. Many hours had been taken up practising with his sling, probably while keeping the sheep. But David knew the success, accuracy and outcome depended upon the help of the Lord in this battle.

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Faith understands that God is pleased to bring about His will through the faith and works of believers. If David had just 'talked the talk' in the camp and before Saul, and had not gone to battle, it would all be vapour. But David's God-given faith talked, walked and worked. He used the talents God had given him for God's glory and honour.

Conclusion

Faith:

- is firstly concerned for the honour of the Lord;
- resists opposition;
- encourages;
- remembers God's dealings in the past;
- is always based upon the Word of God;
- goes forward conscious of total dependence upon the Lord;
- always has the fruits of works.

Application

Do you have a 'Goliath' facing you at this time?

- Be of good courage! Give the battle by faith into the Lord's hands. This is where it belongs;
- Be humble – remember our victory is only with God's help;
- Be careful of hindrances in the battle;
- Do not be surprised if you are despised;
- Go forward in the name of the Lord;
- Think of the pebbles in David's bag like the Word of God. David had to go and search for those pebbles. They had to be appropriate pebbles, of the right size and shape. We need to go to the spiritual brook of the Word of God to find some appropriate pebbles for the battle. David knew he had got the pebbles in his bag – he had put them there personally. This can be a picture and help for us. The Word of God used by faith is the best weapon against the enemy. Jesus used it against the enemy, Satan, in the wilderness.

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- Remember our greatest 'Goliath' enemy against us is sin, death and hell. But we can slay this Goliath through Jesus Christ the Lord.

'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' Romans 6.23.

"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law' 1 Corinthians 15.55-56.

4. DAVID – A TRUE FRIEND

1 Samuel 18

Thus far in our consideration of the life of David we have seen him as a man chosen by God, filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and motivated for God's honour. Now we see David in his office as a true friend, even in adverse circumstances.

What impresses you most when choosing a friend? Jonathan's soul was knit to the soul of David – why? David's testimony revealed to Jonathan that here was a wise man who could be trusted as a true friend. Their friendship developed upon the basis of trust, loyalty and spiritual union. The Word of God says:

'As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend' Proverbs 27.17.

David's testimony

'Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armour, even to his sword and his bow and his belt' 1 Samuel 18.1-4.

1. Speech

It is likely Jonathan would have heard David's conversation with Saul prior to his battle with Goliath (*1 Samuel 17.32-39*). In that conversation it is clear David stated his confidence and faith in God and ascribed praise unto His name. After the battle the only element of his conversation with Saul recorded is confirmation that his father was

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Jesse. Yet Jonathan must have heard in detail all the communication of David with Saul in this later meeting. He heard enough to confirm in his soul that here was a man of God whom he could fellowship with. Here was humility and meekness displayed, even after a great victory with Goliath. Jonathan's soul was knit to David based upon the content and manner of his dialogue with Saul.

The humble manner in which we speak and the content of our speech, if they are going to be effective, need to harmonise together. We are exhorted to speak the truth and to give our testimony in a spirit of meekness and engagement. How different is David's manner of speaking in this chapter to the modern-day approach of self-advancement! For example, when Saul rewarded David by giving him his daughter:

'So David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my life or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?"'
1 Samuel 18.18.

Yet notice the outcome of the testimony of humility and meekness.

'Then the princes of the Philistines went out to war. And so it was, whenever they went out, that David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed' 1 Samuel 18.30.

In the previous chapter we noticed the manner of David's communication with Goliath, again bringing honour to the name of the Lord.

'Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all

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the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands” 1 Samuel 17.45-47.

The outcome was victory over the enemy of the Lord. If we are going to get the victory over the enemy, Satan, we need to keep on message in our communication. God's honour needs to have the pre-eminence.

Notice when Saul was trying to ensnare him with the intention of destruction, David continually took a meek approach in his speech. This was despite the fact that Saul had by this time thrown a javelin at him on two occasions with murderous intent. He was a man kept by the power of God, whose prayer is found in *Psalm 19.14*:

‘Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.’

2. Wisdom

‘So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants’ 1 Samuel 18.5.

The Word of God teaches us that wisdom is the principle thing – above all get wisdom.

‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ Psalm 111.10.

‘My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and

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understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly' Proverbs 2.1-7.

Several times the issue of wisdom is mentioned regarding the testimony of David. Here we can see the impact not only of wise speech but of wise behaviour. David's words went with his behaviour, and as a consequence his testimony had an impact. Later, when Absalom went in and out among the people, he did so to curry favour and popularity. Here, when David is going among the people, he is speaking and acting with wisdom for God's honour.

Notice here the obedience of David: he went wherever Saul sent him. David behaved wisely in all his ways. Wisdom is a wonderful fruit that can be used in all walks of life. Wisdom is knowledge applied. It is evident that David knew God and applied his understanding wisely. He understood the times and applied his knowledge wisely.

'And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him' 1 Samuel 18.14.

'Then the princes of the Philistines went out to war. And so it was, whenever they went out, that David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed' 1 Samuel 18.30.

David was proven to be a man who could be trusted and was promoted to be a leader of men (verse 5). It is significant that it is stated that David was accepted among all the people and Saul's servants. His background was humble, his family were insignificant; therefore David's authority arose from his testimony.

3. Humility

'Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical

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instruments. So the women sang as they danced, and said: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?” So Saul eyed David from that day forward’ 1 Samuel 18.6-9.

David was undoubtedly being kept at this time by the power of God. Left to himself to hear the women singing his praises would have fed his pride and self-esteem. It was a huge test for a young man. It was after this praise that later David said to Saul’s servants, *‘I am a poor and lightly esteemed man’* (verse 23). We see this developing combination in David’s testimony of sound speech, humility and wisdom.

4. Perseverance in adversity

‘And it happened on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played music with his hand, as at other times; but there was a spear in Saul’s hand. And Saul cast the spear, for he said, “I will pin David to the wall!” But David escaped his presence twice. 1 Samuel 18.10-11.

There is a stark contrast between the state of mind of Saul and that of David. The difference was this – the Lord had departed from Saul but was dwelling by His Spirit in David. There are significant areas in Saul’s testimony that should alert us to the danger of the influence of evil.

- **Jealousy** – that is as cruel as the grave. Instead of thanking the Lord for David as a deliverer, Saul hated him.

‘Now Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and made him his captain over a thousand; and

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he went out and came in before the people. And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him. Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them' 1 Samuel 18.12-16.

- **Fear** – manifested as a fear of David, rather than esteem for him as the Lord's servant. This fear of Saul was increased the more he observed that the Lord was with David. The reason for this fear was that Saul knew that a man under divine influence is a mighty man indeed. Mary Queen of Scots said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than an army of ten thousand men. Saul was fearful of the reality of losing his throne and was fighting against that inevitability. Samuel had warned him that, owing to his wilful pride and disobedience, this would be the outcome. Saul was desperate to hang on to his throne whatever, and considered David a threat. It is a sad reality that Christians, left to themselves, can become fearful and jealous of spiritually-minded people.

There is a statement in this chapter relating to Saul that needs to be considered to avoid misunderstanding. It is stated in verse 10 that a distressing spirit came from God to disturb Saul. This is not saying that God is the Author of evil; it states that, when in judgment God left Saul, evil came. The judgment that came upon Saul meant his mind was now open to a distressing spirit that disturbed him.

It is a fearful outcome to be left to ourselves under the judgment of God; our minds are open to another spirit. If this is our experience there is only one way forward, and that is to repent and return to the Lord in humility. Saul did not do this but continued to fight against God, and his hatred and jealousy grew within him.

'Then Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "Let my hand not be against

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him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” So David said to Saul, “Who am I, and what is my life or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?” But it happened at the time when Merab, Saul’s daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife. Now Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. So Saul said, “I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” Therefore Saul said to David a second time, “You shall be my son-in-law today.” And Saul commanded his servants, “Communicate with David secretly, and say, ‘Look, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now therefore, become the king’s son-in-law.’” So Saul’s servants spoke those words in the hearing of David. And David said, “Does it seem to you a light thing to be a king’s son-in-law, seeing I am a poor and lightly esteemed man?” And the servants of Saul told him, saying, “In this manner David spoke.” Then Saul said, “Thus you shall say to David: ‘The king does not desire any dowry but one hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king’s enemies.’” But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. So when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to become the king’s son-in-law. Now the days had not expired; therefore David arose and went, he and his men, and killed two hundred men of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full count to the king, that he might become the king’s son-in-law. Then Saul gave him Michal his daughter as a wife’ 1 Samuel 18.17-27.

- **Deceit** – Saul gave Michal to David with a dowry challenge, intending to kill him. Yet Saul instructed his servants to tell David he delighted in him. The opposite was actually the case.

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'Thus Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him; and Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul became David's enemy continually. Then the princes of the Philistines went out to war. And so it was, whenever they went out, that David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed'
1 Samuel 18.28-30.

- **Hatred** – Saul became David's enemy continually; he became obsessed with David's demise. Despite the opposition, when Saul twice threw a javelin at David, and his ongoing instability, deceit and hatred, David persevered in the way of wisdom and served Saul as his servant for the honour of the Lord.

5. Love

Jonathan loved David, all Israel and Judah loved David and Michal loved David. Love was the key to the strength of David's growing respect among the people. Hatred always destroys, while love always builds.

6. The Lord was with David

Here is the secret behind David's prosperity and consistent walk – see verses 12, 14 and 28. He walked before Saul with the greater understanding that he was actually walking before the Lord in Heaven. The Lord's presence is vital if we are going to make a spiritual impact for good on the world in which we live. Several times in this chapter it is mentioned that the Lord was with David, to remind us this is the key.

Jesus said: *'Without Me you can do nothing'* (John 15.5). This is one of the most solemn and searching statements in Scripture yet it is the key to a godly testimony.

Application

How do we choose our friends? David was a true friend whose

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godly character attracted him to Jonathan. Jonathan chose his friends wisely. These are three essentials we need to consider when choosing our friends to fellowship with: wisdom, love and that the Lord is with them. Are they going to help our Christian walk or hinder?

Now when we speak of friendship, we need to go the Friend Who sticks closer than a brother.

*A Friend there is, your voices join,
Ye saints, to praise His name!
Whose truth and kindness are divine,
Whose love's a constant flame.*

*When most we need His helping hand,
This Friend is always near;
With heaven and earth at His command
He waits to answer prayer.*

*His love no end or measure knows,
No change can turn its course:
Immutably the same it flows
From one eternal source.*

*When frowns appear to veil His face,
And clouds surround His throne,
He hides the purpose of His grace,
To make it better known.*

*And if our dearest comforts fall
Before His sovereign will,
He never takes away our all;
Himself He gives us still.*

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*Our sorrows in the scale He weighs,
And measures out our pains;
The wildest storm His word obeys;
His word its rage restrains.*

Joseph Swain, 1761-96

David was a type of Christ. As Jonathan's soul was knit to that of David because of his testimony, as one who is a true friend, may the Lord knit our soul to that of Christ, Who is an eternal, trustworthy and wise Friend to His people. When we read the accounts about men of God, as those chosen by God, let their testimony lead us to Christ.

Christ

- Speech: No man spoke like this Man (*John 7.46*). He was not as the scribes – He had authority in His words (*Matthew 7.29*).
- Wisdom: Where did He get this wisdom from? *'In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'* (*Colossians 2.3*).
- Humility: He humbled himself and became a servant even unto the cross (*Philippians 2.8*).
- Perseverance: He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem (*Luke 9.51*).
- Love: He loves with a perfect, eternal love, and all the Lord's people love Him.
- God's presence with Him as the perfect Man: The Spirit as a dove descended upon Him (*Matthew 3.16*); He was filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Esteem among His followers: *'To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life'* (*John 6.68*).

5. DAVID – A MAN PROTECTED

1 Samuel 19

In this chapter four events are recorded wherein David is protected and delivered from the enemy. A believer should never live presumptuously; nevertheless they are immortal until God takes their last breath. Every child of God, however small, has a work to do for the Lord, and until that is done they will remain in time. David could not be killed, as God had ordained he should reign as king. All Satan's efforts would fail.

However, there is a great deal of suffering involved as a child of God is attacked and persecuted as David was. I would like to consider four deliverances from persecution in the life of David, with their teaching. Each provision is an encouragement to believers to trust in a God Who can use whom He will and what He will.

God's provision of Jonathan

'Now Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David; but Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted greatly in David. So Jonathan told David, saying, "My father Saul seeks to kill you. Therefore please be on your guard until morning, and stay in a secret place and hide. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you. Then what I observe, I will tell you."

'Thus Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good toward you. For he took his life in his hands and killed the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great deliverance for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to kill David without a cause?"

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'So Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be killed." Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these things. So Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as in times past' 1 Samuel 19.1-7.

Jonathan was called to a leaders' meeting with other army servant leaders, led by King Saul. At this meeting Saul revealed his intention, and gave his instructions that David should be killed. This placed Jonathan in a difficult place between loyalty to his father and loyalty to David his friend. Jonathan decided to warn David and go against his father, because his father was acting against God.

Here we are taught the importance, first and foremost, of loyalty to God and to His people. Saul was acting in a sinful manner in this instance. God's Word and way is above human relationships. Jonathan was at a crossroads as a believer, and was called to make a difficult decision about where his loyalty lay.

Let us look at some Scriptures to support this principle being taught here in the testimony of Jonathan. Jonathan decided, as guided by the Lord, that his loyalty was with the Lord's people and with the Lord's way. Jesus taught in this context:

'He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me' Matthew 10.37.

Jonathan was protecting David, a servant of the Lord who said -

'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me' Psalm 27.10.

The Apostle Paul taught in the context of employment:

'Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as

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bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men’ Ephesians 6.5-7.

and in the context of the Church:

‘Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith’ Galatians 6.10.

and an abiding principle of the Christian life:

‘Therefore be imitators of God as dear children’ Ephesians 5.1.

Now let us consider how Jonathan reasoned with his father on behalf of David and the positive outcome. While afterwards it all went wrong again, at least Jonathan had acted according to his conscience. Jonathan was walking before the Lord while reasoning with his father; as a consequence his testimony was true. Jonathan delighted in David as a believer in the Lord whose testimony resonated with his own – a true friend. His love for him in the Lord inspired protection, warning and intercession on his behalf with his father. He spoke well of David to his father; he gave good advice to him; and he exalted the Lord. He reminded Saul of how David had risked his life to serve Saul and the army of Israel; and how Saul had rejoiced in the victory of the Lord through David.

Then there comes that question, ‘Why?’ There was not a real cause for this hatred of Saul’s, no reason to reject, to kill and to destroy David. Here is a vital point in Jonathan’s advice to Saul: *‘Why then will you sin against innocent blood?’* So we see the faithfulness of Jonathan, not only seeking to protect David but his father also. So it was that Saul swore in the name of the Lord that David would not be killed and David returned to Saul.

From the testimony of Jonathan we learn that loyalty must always be first and foremost to the Lord – what is the right step to take before

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the Lord and His Word? This is what determines where our loyalty lies.

God's provision of agility

'And there was war again; and David went out and fought with the Philistines, and struck them with a mighty blow, and they fled from him. Now the distressing spirit from the Lord came upon Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing music with his hand. Then Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away from Saul's presence; and he drove the spear into the wall. So David fled and escaped that night' 1 Samuel 19.8-10.

David was called again to the battle field, and he went forth leading in the strength and ability given to him by God. To avoid misunderstanding that these were just battles for supremacy for the Israelites, we need to remember that the battles fought in the land against the Philistines were battles fought against the enemies of God. The armies of Israel were simply tools of justice in the hand of God to fulfil His perfect justice against idolatry.

The enemies of God had for many years acted in an atrocious manner, even against their own children. They were evil idolators who had no respect for the sanctity of life, as are those of the abortion lobby of today.

David was a mighty man of war and, under God, was an incredibly successful battle commander and leader. Under his leadership the Philistines were dealt a mighty blow, and fled defeated to their land. Saul remained as a man unrepentant of his actions, away from God and open to the assaults of evil. Under the judgment of God Saul was helpless to resist the distressing spirit sent to him.

Again I remind you this statement does not mean the Lord is the Author of evil – God forbid! What it means is that when God's Spirit

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departs from a person there is a consequence of judgment. The judgment here is that Saul was helpless to resist a distressing spirit manifesting itself in jealous rage. This is one of awesome consequences of being left to ourselves – we are left to the influences of evil.

Here David, under the providential permissive will of the Lord, was seeking to sooth Saul's mind; an act of kindness and of concern, a visible call for Saul to repent as he saw the peace of David. Instead Saul again cast a javelin at David who, in his agility and protection of the Lord, escaped. Saul threw his javelin with such anger and malice the force of its throw resulted in it sticking into the wall.

David's experience of keeping and guarding the sheep and lambs from predators made him alert to danger. So while playing the harp David would have kept his eyes on Saul and on his movements. David would not have presumptuously said, 'I am for the throne; therefore I will not be killed.' No, David understood we are responsible human beings before God and proper care of ourselves is required. So David was ready for the javelin – he was ready to move with agility and skill to avoid it. God prepared him to protect him, and David used the skills he had to preserve himself from the anger of Saul.

Spiritually this teaches us a lesson in our defence against the javelins of Satan. We need to be spiritually agile and alert to the sudden javelin of Satan. We need to be those who watch. Christians should develop spiritual skills in the warfare against Satan. They must be alert to the wiles of the devil; they must be ready to avoid the javelins hurled at them. Here it was the javelin of jealousy and rage that Saul hurled at David. In avoiding the assaults of the enemy, the javelin of jealousy and rage becomes fixed to the wall – stuck. It is where it belongs, fixed to the wall and not to the person. The agility of the Christian in avoiding the javelin of Satan is centred in his faith in the promises of God. As a javelin is hurled, the agility of faith moves into one of the promises of God. So the javelin gets stuck in the wall not on the person.

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'Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one' Ephesians 6.16.

God's provision of Michal

'Saul also sent messengers to David's house to watch him and to kill him in the morning. And Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." So Michal let David down through a window. And he went and fled and escaped. And Michal took an image and laid it in the bed, put a cover of goats' hair for his head, and covered it with clothes. So when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." Then Saul sent the messengers back to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him." And when the messengers had come in, there was the image in the bed, with a cover of goats' hair for his head. Then Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this, and sent my enemy away, so that he has escaped?" And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go! Why should I kill you?'"
1 Samuel 19.11-17.

The marriage of David to Michal was, at its root, a marriage ordered to suit the evil intentions of Saul. However, it is evident that it was a marriage based on their natural love towards each other. There is, though, no evidence that David married a believer and as such it later proved an unequal yoke. But here, at a happier time in the marriage, Michal does all she can to protect her husband David.

Michal somehow had prior knowledge of her father's intention to kill David the next day. She aided David in his escape, showing that her loyalties were first to her husband as being unjustly persecuted. She then placed an image in the bed to make it look occupied, claiming that David was sick. Sadly there was an idol in the house, appropriately used as a dummy, for really they are nothing more than this.

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Do we have an idol in our house? An idol is something which takes the place of God in our first affections.

Under the command of Saul, when the soldiers came to take David they realised the deception and reported back. It is at this point we see how Michal, while protecting David physically, does not protect his character. She accused him before her father of threatening to kill her if she did not aid his escape. From this we learn that deception in the example of a parent flows through to deception in children. Jacob had a problem with deception as a besetting sin, and the example carried on to his sons. In the end it was deception that caused Jacob tremendous grief in his latter life.

Now Saul is faced with two testimonies; both his son and his daughter had preserved the life of David. A wise father would have been alerted to a significant fact – there must be something here worth saving. But Saul was blind to the warnings and the testimonies and was hellbent on the destruction of David.

We continue in our consideration now of how God uses whoever and whatever He wills in the course of His providence.

God's provision of Samuel, a prophet filled with the Holy Spirit

‘So David fled and escaped, and went to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth. Now it was told Saul, saying, “Take note, David is at Naioth in Ramah!” Then Saul sent messengers to take David. And when they saw the group of prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as leader over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. And when Saul was told, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. Then Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also. Then he also went to Ramah, and came to the great well that is at Sechu. So he asked, and said, “Where are Samuel and David?” And someone said, “Indeed they are at

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Naioth in Ramah.” So he went there to Naioth in Ramah. Then the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he also stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”” 1 Samuel 19.18-24.

David fled to Samuel at Ramah to unburden his heart and tell him all that Saul was doing to destroy him. It is good to have a trusted man of God to resort to in times of trouble, a person who will give sound, biblical and Holy Spirit-led advice and comfort. Together they moved on to Naioth, but spies conveyed to Saul that David was with Samuel there. Messengers of Saul came to capture David and barged in on a service of worship. They came under the subduing influence of the Holy Spirit and joined in the worship.

Saul sent some more messengers to deal with David, but they also came under the influence of the Holy Spirit. After the same effect on a third set of messengers, Saul in anger ran out of patience. He decided to take matters in his own hand to sort David out personally. But at Naioth Saul himself was lain prone on the floor under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This was not a sanctifying experience either for the messengers or for Saul. It was an experience of their impotence when overwhelmed by the Spirit of God. Saul lay naked, stripped to his undergarments, his robe of authority cast on the ground before Samuel. He was totally out of his mind and helpless to resist, a picture of man's impotence against the omnipotent God.

Now this should raise a very important issue in our mind regarding the influence of the Holy Spirit. God can come upon a person whenever and however He chooses. The fact that the person undergoes such an experience as Saul did, does not mean that it is a saving experience. It simply means that God has the ability to empower, disable or affect whomever He will. He is no respecter of persons and

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can disable Saul as easily as He can his messengers. The test of the experience, as to whether it is in judgment or in grace, is the fruit of the experience. God can use His Holy Spirit as a blessed, sanctifying experience, as with David, Samuel and the prophets, or God can use His Holy Spirit as a disabling, humbling power in judgment.

For Saul it was in judgment and used to protect God's servant David from harm. In fact, David could, when Saul was prone upon the floor, have taken revenge. But the Spirit of God was working in David graciously and protecting his body, mind and soul; whereas with Saul and his messengers God was simply restraining them. Saul lay prone all day and all night, so it was that David was given enough time to escape. God preserved David through both Samuel, and through the Holy Spirit's power restraining Saul, rendering him helpless.

Conclusion

We noted at the beginning of this chapter the loyalty of Jonathan and Michal to David. 'As unto the Lord' obedience and loyalty have authority over a human relationship if the person concerned is not acting according to the Word of the Lord.

John Kenneth Galbraith was a noted economist in the early 1900s who was called upon by many dignitaries to help sort the economic markets. He wrote the following story in his autobiography about his housekeeper:

'It had been a wearying day, and I asked Emily to hold all telephone calls while I had a nap. Shortly thereafter the phone rang. Lyndon Johnson was calling from the White House. "Get me Ken Galbraith. This is Lyndon Johnson." "He is sleeping, Mr. President. He said not to disturb him." "Well, wake him up. I want to talk to him." "No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you." When I called the President back, he could scarcely control his pleasure. "Tell that woman I want her here in the White House.'" Source: *Reader's Digest*, December, 1981.

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Emily the housekeeper understood an important truth – she was a servant to one man and obeyed his wishes explicitly. Her loyalties were to Mr. Galbraith alone. What a great example of a true servant.

However, the key theme in this chapter is the manner of the Lord's preservation of His servant David. The Lord ensured His will in the life of David, using the trials to prepare David for his future role as king. Whatever Saul and David's enemies did, they could not thwart the purposes of God for David.

Psalm 2 deals with this fundamental truth about the purposes of God and the response of God to rebellion. God's deliverances instruct and assure us that:

- God is able to deal with any situation;
- God uses diverse means and diverse people to accomplish deliverance;
- at any time, at any moment, God can intervene in a person life by His Spirit;
- God's deliverances require our praise and adoration.

'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!' Romans 11.33.

You can spend all your life fighting against the omnipotence of God but each attempt will fail. The answer in your life is not rebellion but recognition, recognition of Who God is and who you are, and if this is real you will repent and be reconciled to God.

Until the end of time the world will fight against God, His Church and His people, but God is in control. *'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us'* (Romans 8.37). This is the testimony of David protected by God.

6. DAVID – BLESSED WITH A COVENANT

1 Samuel 20

Chapter 20 teaches us the significance and effect of a true covenant of promise and the exercise of keeping it. A true covenant means security, assurance, peace, stability and union – it is a solemn promise of commitment.

When we consider the nature of a covenant, we need to move to the ultimate covenant for absolute security. This is the everlasting Covenant of Grace, wherein sinners are chosen, called and saved eternally. It is a covenant made by the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – wherein They undertake to save sinners. There is no greater privilege for a person than to be secured in this everlasting Covenant of Grace.

*‘Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen’
Hebrews 13.20-21.*

A covenant made by men, however true and sincere, is but a pale reflection of the supreme Covenant of Grace. However, there are helpful lessons to learn from the covenant found between Jonathan and David. It was a covenant made in the fear of the Lord and adhered to solemnly and with true commitment.

‘Therefore you shall deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you. Nevertheless, if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?’ 1 Samuel 20.8.

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It is to this covenant we now turn. Its heart and nature is described in 1 Samuel:

'Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armour, even to his sword and his bow and his belt' 1 Samuel 18.3-4.

'Then Jonathan said to David: "The Lord God of Israel is witness! When I have sounded out my father sometime tomorrow, or the third day, and indeed there is good toward David, and I do not send to you and tell you, may the Lord do so and much more to Jonathan. But if it pleases my father to do you evil, then I will report it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And the Lord be with you as He has been with my father. And you shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live, that I may not die; but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth"' 1 Samuel 20.12-15.

There are four events in this chapter that describe the nature and the blessing of the covenant. They teach us important principles of how we ourselves should keep our word and our promises.

A covenant giving help in times of hurt

'Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and went and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity, and what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" So Jonathan said to him, "By no means! You shall not die! Indeed, my father will do nothing either great or small without first telling me. And why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!" Then David took an oath again, and said, "Your father certainly knows that I have found favour in your eyes, and he has said, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.' But truly, as the Lord lives

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and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.” So Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you.” And David said to Jonathan, “Indeed tomorrow is the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third day at evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked permission of me that he might run over to Bethlehem, his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.’ If he says thus: ‘It is well,’ your servant will be safe. But if he is very angry, be sure that evil is determined by him. Therefore you shall deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you. Nevertheless, if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?” But Jonathan said, “Far be it from you! For if I knew certainly that evil was determined by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you?”” 1 Samuel 20.1-9.

David fled from Saul in Naioth in Ramah while Saul was rendered helpless under the power of God’s Spirit. David met with Jonathan and had three questions troubling him, matters now deeply hurting him: What have I done? What is my iniquity? What is my sin before your father?

This is not David presenting his case in a self-righteous fashion, but with heartfelt, willing examination of heart. Perhaps Jonathan had observed something in his testimony that had been sinful before his father. So David spoke with openness of heart and mind to his close and trusted friend, Jonathan.

On this occasion Jonathan defended his father’s intentions, assuring David that he would not die. He was undoubtedly sure that Saul would confide in Jonathan as his son if he still had evil intentions upon David. But David, on an oath, was convinced that Saul did intend to kill him, but was hiding his intentions from Jonathan. The

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reason for this was that Saul now realised that David had found grace in the eyes of Jonathan. Because of this grace Saul knew that to reveal his evil intentions would undoubtedly grieve Jonathan. But as far as David was concerned, he remained convinced there was but a step between him and death.

The question is, what to do in such a situation? Jonathan assured David that whatever his soul desired, he would do for him. Note Jonathan's wording. He appealed to David's soul, not his heart, not his mind, wisdom or feelings. The only safe direction must come from the spiritual leadings of the soul as David was being led by the Lord.

David's direction was to absent himself from the king's table for three days. When Saul enquired as to his absence, Jonathan was to say that David had gone to his home at Bethlehem for the annual family sacrifice. Jonathan was to ascertain the reaction of Saul as to whether it was one of anger or of peace.

But in the final part of this section we come to the heart of the teaching of the covenant. David appealed to the covenant as the basis of grace towards him in verse 8: for the sake of our covenant made in the fear of the Lord, deal kindly with me. Alternatively, if I have done iniquity, destroy me now rather than place me in the murderous hands of Saul. Only the covenant provided assurance for David as a basis for security in his dealings with Jonathan.

So it is that the everlasting Covenant of Grace provides the foundation of all God's dealings with sinners. But for God's Covenant of Grace towards sinners, we have no assurance to presume God will be gracious to us.

The Puritan Thomas Brooks writes: 'The Covenant of Grace is the saint's original title to Heaven.' For God to be both just and true He must work by a covenant. It is the Covenant of Grace in Jesus Christ that provides satisfaction for God's justice and the avenue for love.

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As David appealed to the covenant with Jonathan for friendship, so sinners appeal to the Covenant of Grace in Christ as the basis of their salvation.

David was hurting, and help came from resorting to the covenant for support. This is the basis upon which David turned to Jonathan, the son of Saul, for help – the foundation of a covenant witnessed by God from Heaven, a covenant that involved a promise and a commitment of friendship. Here was a basis of certainty, a safe haven in a hurtful, volatile time.

David appealed to Jonathan to deal with him in covenant kindness, love and grace. It was love that first inspired the covenant, and it was love that oiled the wheels of the covenant and kept it alive. So with the Covenant of Grace; it was inspired by the love of God – *‘God so loved the world’ (John 3.16)* – and it continues in the love and faithfulness of God.

When seeking help in hurting times, resort to the Covenant of Grace. Then and only then you will find yourself in the haven of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth’ John 1.14.

C H Spurgeon said: ‘Faith always sees the bow of Covenant promise whenever it sees the cloud of affliction.’

‘I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth’ Genesis 9.13.

A covenant giving opportunity to show faithfulness

‘Then David said to Jonathan, “Who will tell me, or what if your father answers you roughly?” And Jonathan said to David, “Come, let us go out into the field.” So both of them went out into the field. Then Jonathan said to David: “The Lord God of

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Israel is witness! When I have sounded out my father sometime tomorrow, or the third day, and indeed there is good toward David, and I do not send to you and tell you, may the Lord do so and much more to Jonathan. But if it pleases my father to do you evil, then I will report it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And the Lord be with you as He has been with my father. And you shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live, that I may not die; but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “Let the Lord require it at the hand of David’s enemies.”

‘Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul. Then Jonathan said to David, “Tomorrow is the New Moon; and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. And when you have stayed three days, go down quickly and come to the place where you hid on the day of the deed; and remain by the stone Ezel. Then I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target; and there I will send a lad, saying, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I expressly say to the lad, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you; get them and come’—then, as the Lord lives, there is safety for you and no harm. But if I say thus to the young man, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you’—go your way, for the Lord has sent you away. And as for the matter which you and I have spoken of, indeed the Lord be between you and me forever”’ 1 Samuel 20.10-23.

The grace and kindness of Jonathan is a significant factor in his testimony to support and protect David. He promised David he would most assuredly tell him if Saul was still determined to kill him. Surely this is a sign of true friendship, a keeping of the covenant, adherence to the fear of the Lord not man.

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It is easy to glance over this testimony of Jonathan without considering the depth of its grace and faithfulness. Jonathan was the crown prince who, normally speaking, would have taken the throne of his father Saul. It is highly unlikely that Saul would have told Jonathan of what Samuel had prophesied about his demise. Yet being a spiritual man, a believer, Jonathan discerned something significant about David and his leadership. It is evident that, led by the Lord, Jonathan was submitting himself to David's wellbeing and authority.

This is not the action of the old nature – it is the action of a man led by the Spirit of God. As a believer, and in the fear of the Lord and in true obedience to the covenant, he supported David. Being faithful to the covenant brought forth a fruit that showed that Jonathan sought the principle of God's Kingdom of truth and justice, and a love that never fails, that is faithful to the end.

As a believer trusts and follows the principles of God's Covenant of Grace, the fruit will be truth and love. It will show our first priority is the wellbeing of God's Kingdom, the furtherance of the work of the Lord. God's Covenant of Grace gives us the opportunity to demonstrate loyalty to God. Right at the heart of the motivation for faithfulness is God's Covenant of Grace towards us in Christ Jesus. How can we be unfaithful to such a demonstration of love and sacrifice as the gift of God's only Beloved Son?

Jonathan now told David how he would find out the true attitude of Saul towards David. Notice again the wording used by Jonathan: his whole being was given over to serving the Lord – see verses 12-13.

Then we can see that Jonathan does have some understanding of the future, for he sought his own safety. He asked David to show kindness to him, as David requested of Jonathan earlier. Notice in verse 14 Jonathan was seeking from David the kindness of the Lord. He knew that the Lord was on the side of David, and in the judgment of his enemies, he sought his family's welfare – verse 15.

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Notice how the word 'kindness' keeps appearing. Kindness is a Covenant blessing. Lovingkindness is one of the great characteristics of God's dealings with His people. Again we can see how the covenant outweighed human politics and the normal behaviour of a future king. Jonathan asked David to show kindness to his family, the head of which, Saul, had shown hatred to David. David committed himself to show kindness to the family of Saul, going against culture and politics.

Both these men were men of courage who broke the boundaries of the fallen nature and lived by the Spirit. This is what it means for a believer to be governed by the principles of the Covenant of Grace. It should show a different, a better way – the way of kindness, love and faithfulness. It goes against the grain of fallen nature. Both Jonathan and David made commitments to a covenant that conquered the politics of man.

A covenant that required costly commitment

'Then David hid in the field. And when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast. Now the king sat on his seat, as at other times, on a seat by the wall. And Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him; he is unclean, surely he is unclean." And it happened the next day, the second day of the month, that David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to eat, either yesterday or today?" So Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked permission of me to go to Bethlehem. And he said, 'Please let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there. And now, if I have found favour in your eyes, please let me get away and see my brothers.' Therefore he has not come to the king's table.'

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‘Then Saul’s anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die.” And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, “Why should he be killed? What has he done?” Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully’ 1 Samuel 20.24-34.

Here we see how an unbeliever or backslider cannot comprehend the ways of a believer at times. Saul flew into a rage when David’s absence was explained by Jonathan. The issue was one of choice for Saul: You are choosing David to your own detriment. Do you not see this means the loss of your future kingdom? To take up our cross and follow Christ is folly to the unbeliever. Why suffer for Christ’s sake and take loss?

But the difference between Saul and Jonathan was which kingdom really mattered to them. For Saul all that mattered was his kingdom and the future kingdom of Jonathan, an earthly kingdom. For Jonathan his choice was based on a spiritual Kingdom, being faithful to the Lord.

‘These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to

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return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them' Hebrews 11.13-16.

Jonathan understood that life was not about securing himself and his kingdom – it was about being in God's Kingdom. Life does not depend upon fulfilling your goals but being faithful to God's Covenant of Grace as a basis for life. But beware! Jesus warns us the pathway is costly– not in terms of money but in terms of putting ourselves last. It is a pathway of humility, sacrifice, tribulation and separation, yet in the midst of this it is a pathway of joy and peace.

At the outset of the meal David's place was empty, and by the end of the meal Jonathan's place was also empty. This speaks to us of separation – it speaks to us of sacrifice – it speaks to us of cost. Jonathan had a righteous anger over the injustice and ungodly behaviour of Saul. He was grieved for David! In this he was a type of Christ, our great High Priest Who is touched with the feelings of our weaknesses.

'For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin' Hebrews 4.15.

A covenant that provided peace in a hostile situation

'And so it was, in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad was with him. Then he said to his lad, "Now run, find the arrows which I shoot." As the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. When the lad had come to the place where the arrow was which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried out after the lad and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?" And Jonathan cried out after the lad, "Make haste, hurry, do not delay!" So Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows and came back to his master. But the lad did not know anything. Only Jonathan and David knew of the matter. Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad, and said to him, "Go, carry them to

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the city.” As soon as the lad had gone, David arose from a place toward the south, fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times. And they kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so. Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘May the Lord be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.’” So he arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city’ 1 Samuel 20.35-42.

David was a wise man who understood the times and showed due respect to Jonathan who was the king’s son. David was not yet king; Saul remained king and Jonathan as the king’s son should be respected as such. Here is a man who was not running before God, but walking with God, waiting upon Him for God’s time, not his.

In their meeting David, having so much to lose by departing and fleeing from Saul, was overwhelmed with grief. It is not wrong or faithless to weep; the issue is, where does the weeping lead us to? For Jonathan and David it led them back to the covenant, for only the covenant could provide peace in this hostile situation. Jonathan says, ‘Go in peace’, which seems somewhat insensitive to a man so distressed. But Jonathan did so on the basis of the covenant between them made in the name of the Lord. They remained brothers in the Lord and the covenant provided assurance and peace between them.

This brings us back to the everlasting Covenant of Grace in Christ Jesus. Jesus said,

‘These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ John 16.33.

A Christian has peace not because circumstances are peaceful, but because we have peace with God in Christ, peace with God through the blood of the everlasting Covenant.

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Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen'
Hebrews 13.20-21.

Satan promises much and delivers nothing but eternal banishment with him in hell. God has a Covenant promise that is applied to all who repent of their sin and put their trust in Jesus Christ. God's promise never fails, and ultimately finds its fulfilment in perfect peace in Heaven. Is your life based on the everlasting Covenant of Grace, or upon the false promises of Satan?

7. DAVID – THE DIFFICULTIES OF DESPERATION

1 Samuel 21

Up to this point we have seen many positive aspects of the life of David. However, David was a man subject to passions as we are. He was a sinner, saved by grace, being sanctified. In this chapter we will see David speaking and acting with deceit, but nevertheless preserved by God.

God used David's weaknesses to teach him in a deeper way his need to trust in the Lord at all times. The fruit of this lesson and David accepting its teaching, is found in *Psalms 34* and *56*, to which we will refer later. From this we learn that even when we are in desperate straits and not behaving wisely, God remains faithful.

Deceptive words to Ahimelech

Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one is with you?" So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place. Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found." And the priest answered David and said, "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women." Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the

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vessel this day.” So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.

Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul. And David said to Ahimelech, “Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king’s business required haste.” So the priest said, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here.” And David said, “There is none like it; give it to me” 1 Samuel 21.1-9.

Going to meet Ahimelech the priest could have been a most profitable time for David spiritually. However, in his desperation David focused only on the material, and in doing so spoke deceitfully to the priest. He came to Ahimelech as an ambassador of King Saul, making out he was on a secret mission.

Now it is probable that David used deceptive talk to protect Ahimelech from blame before Saul in the future. But man’s way is never as secure as God’s way, and the Word of God does not condone David’s words.

David’s demeanour, and the fact he came to him in desperation, caused the priest to fear, for David was a famous warrior. David needed bread urgently, but the only bread available was that consecrated to the Lord in worship. Here we see the overruling power of God working in the minds of these two men. It was agreed to feed David and his men as the need of the hour dictated, but with respectful use of the showbread. We know this to be the case because the Lord Jesus Himself used this event to teach this principle.

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Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grain fields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands. And some of the Pharisees said to them, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?” But Jesus answering them said, “Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?” And He said to them, “The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” Luke 6.1-5.

But we are then reminded of how Satan has his people to serve him in all places, and Doeg was there ready. He was Saul's chief herdsman and was detained in the town. He saw David coming to Ahimelech. Later we read Doeg informed Saul and, together with Saul, wrought terrible bloodshed on the priests and their families. Doeg was used as a spy and tool of Satan in stirring up Saul. This is typical of the persecuted Church in other lands where people are actually losing their life for Christ.

David asked for a spear and received willingly from Ahimelech the sword of Goliath. This was the sword with which David had cut off Goliath's head as he was slain by the sling and stone. The sword would become like a sword of faith for David. Every time he looked at it and handled it there was a reminder of the power of God.

Although David, in his desperation, reverted to his own wisdom, God, in His holy dignity and grace, overruled and provided for David. From this we learn that, even when our behaviour is not the best, God still sustains and provides. I receive my provisions from God not because of my goodness but all because of His grace.

Desperation leads David to Achish

“Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went

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to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. So he changed his behaviour before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"
1 Samuel 21.10-15.

When we become desperate in our thinking through fear we take unreasonable and irrational actions. Whatever was David thinking of? He went into the enemy camp into the land of Gath, the place where Goliath came from. I am sure Goliath's family were none too pleased to see David in town, especially with Goliath's sword! The word soon got around that David was there, the one who had killed his ten thousands.

The point here is to show how desperation because of fear causes us to cease thinking straight. When David came into his right mind he reflected on his behaviour and was moved to follow a better way. David ran from Saul because of his fear, and now was doubly fearful of Achish, King of Gath. David entered into the deception of being a madman and eventually was thrown out of the land. King Achish may well have been suspicious of the sincerity of David's condition, but let him go in anyway. Why? Because the hearts of all men are in God's hands.

But David's behaviour shows us how vulnerable we are when left to ourselves. As Sir Walter Scott put it, 'Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive.' Here is the man who in the

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strength of the Lord killed Goliath, and won many of the Lord's battles. But here is the very same man in desperate straits driven by fear. But what is so marvellous is how God takes a desperate situation and man driven by fear, and sanctifies this experience to him causing him to write two blessed psalms.

The world would view this as a 'lucky escape'. David saw it as God's merciful deliverance despite himself. In the cave of Adullam David reflected on his behaviour and God's overruling providence. He was taught by the Holy Spirit abiding principles for the believer's life that would stand him in good stead.

When we wonder what good can come out of a messy situation, when the fear of man becomes a snare, consider *Psalm 56* for an example of how God sanctifies our lives, and takes our mess and moulds us again.

The pain of fear cured by the medicine of faith

'Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You' Psalm 56.3.

Maybe we do not like to admit we are afraid! But remember, David was honest with himself – he was afraid. Fear is something which grips us like a vice. It severely affects our thinking and judgment. Fear is a natural reaction arising out of our need for protection. Fear and worry are like a rocking chair – they give you something to do, but do not get you anywhere!

Consider just for a little while some of the practical realities of fear. A little boy in the school assembly who was asked to recite the words of Jesus saying, 'It is I, be not afraid', in his fear came to the front and said, 'It's me and I'm scared!' You may be afraid of the pain of loneliness, the present, or the future. You may be afraid because of illness, pain, death – where are we heading? Fear is painful; it can overwhelm us, captivate us and it can disable us. So there are times when we each have to say we are afraid!

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The medicine of faith

One of the points for us here is the basis of this trust that David speaks of. It is not blind faith; it is not trusting irrationally; it is not thoughtless faith; not just a feeling that everything is going to work out all right in the end; not a glib, meaningless statement, such as 'Smile, things could get worse!' Here we have the testimony of David looking by faith to God.

This is David's firm conviction of faith based assuredly upon the faithful God. David tells us why and how he is trusting by faith in the faithful God.

1. Faith based upon God's Word

In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?...In God (I will praise His word), in the Lord (I will praise His word)' Psalm 56.4, 10.

Here is one of the fundamental principles of trusting in God. David's confidence in God is based upon his belief in God's Word. It is a wonderful testimony to simply trust what God has said!

2. Faith based upon God's sovereignty

'In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?...In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' Psalm 56.4, 11.

Here is a tremendous and liberating statement of faith. David by faith commits his life into God's hands. God's will is best.

'He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord' Psalm 112.7.

3. Faith based upon God's divine care and understanding

'You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?' Psalm 56.8.

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Consider here the essence of God's care. It is important to realise that God's care is an understanding care.

'As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him' Psalm 103.13.

God remembers our tears; God understands our needs; God comes alongside us in our difficulties.

4. Faith based upon God's faithfulness

'When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me' Psalm 56.9.

David was assured because he believed by faith the Lord was on his side.

'For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"' Hebrews 13.5-6.

5. Faith based upon the salvation and security in God

'For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?' Psalm 56.13.

David believed by faith in the Messiah Jesus Christ as His Saviour. He looked forward by faith to the Messiah. *Psalm 22* is proof of this. The great blessing for David was being delivered from spiritual death. He knew the security of the keeping power of God.

Conclusion

Corrie Ten Boom once had someone say to her, 'You must have a mighty great faith.' She replied, 'No, but I do have faith in an Almighty God.' Our security is not measured by the strength of faith but by the Object of it.

8. DAVID – A LEADER TO THOSE IN NEED

1 Samuel 22

At the beginning of chapter 22 we have the record of David finding secure refuge in Cave Adullam. While he was at Cave Adullam many people gathered to David and sought refuge under his leadership. David was respected as a man of God, a man of courage and inspiration, a man greatly loved. The secret behind David's leadership gifts was that he had been anointed of the Lord.

In many ways David is a type of Christ who prefigures His wonderful work of salvation to the needy. In these verses we are given a picture of David as a leader to whom those in need are attracted. I would like to bring to your attention two Bible references which point us to the same theme.

'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people' Genesis 49.10.

Christ Himself said,

'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself' John 12.32.

'David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him' 1 Samuel 22.1-2.

In the account of David at Cave Adullam we have a God-given picture of this in-gathering of people to Christ as Deliverer. Using poetic

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language these verses describe three types of people who came to David at Cave Adullam: those in distress, those in debt and those who were discontented. Viewed from a spiritual perspective, these three descriptions accurately portray those who come to Christ. It is true that if we have no sense of our need, there will not be any point, in our minds, in coming to Christ. However, if the Spirit of God impresses upon our mind something of our state, then Christ will be sought. So often the Spirit of God deals in conviction under these three headings: distress, debt and discontentment.

Distress

This word in the original has the meaning of being oppressed, the feeling of being compressed and squeezed. These people came to David feeling enslaved, trapped, unwanted, trodden down, worthless and hopeless. The people that came to David had no doubt about their own desperate state and condition. These people were burdened about their condition and in their distress they came.

So it is spiritually for sinners coming to Jesus Christ. They come distressed over their condition. They come distressed because of the burden and guilt of their sin. They come distressed because they feel oppressed and trapped by the enemy of souls, Satan. The truth has dawned upon them – they are not really free; they are not really fulfilled; they are enslaved.

In the end the distress actually proved a great motivator to compel men and women to go to David. The Holy Spirit of God can use the distress of depression, the distress of despair and the distress of dependency about the futility of life to bring us to Christ. In any event, as we are drawn through distress, we come with a realisation that we are sinners before God.

Debt

There were those who ran to David deep in debt, possibly facing terrible repercussions and imprisonment. These people were fearful

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and ashamed of their debt. They realised their vulnerability and inability to sort it out. This debt was not something they treated lightly but sought David's protection and help to overcome. David would not have advocated undermining lawful creditors but would defend against debt oppression.

These people, in the context, were being abused by aggressive debt collectors charging extortionate rates. The word being used here for 'debt' is in connection with a loan. These people had come under the power of 'loan sharks'. Debt is an issue that is on the lips of most people in this day and age. It is a problem that has to be dealt with. The nation's debt is staggering and is getting worse. I understand the annual interest payment alone is £43 billion!

However this issue of debt serves to remind us of a far greater burden of debt than a financial one. It is the tremendous debt of our sin, a debt common to us all, rich or poor. Out of Christ it is a growing debt. Each day the account goes deeper and deeper into the red; each sin is known to the Lord. When the Holy Spirit of God reveals to us something of the nature of this debt and our inability to pay we come to realise that we need a person who can deal with the awesome debt of our sin.

'For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him' 2 Corinthians 5:21.

An illustration may serve to help us see how we fail to bring our debt burden to the Lord. The driver of a lorry was on his way to market when he overtook an old man on foot carrying a heavy load. Having compassion on him, the driver invited the old man to ride in the back of the truck. Gratefully the old man accepted. After a few minutes, the driver turned to see how the man was doing. To his surprise, he found him still straining under the heavy weight, for he had not taken the burden off his shoulders but sat in the back with his burden

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still on his shoulders. Remember our burden of sin cannot be both on our shoulders and Christ's!

Discontentment

These people had been dealt with harshly by Saul who, in his state of mind, was becoming irrational and callous. These people had been driven to despair. In their distress they had no one to turn to but David. We might think of those in other lands who have stood for freedom from oppression.

Saul himself was beset with an evil spirit that drove him to distraction. He took his anger out on others. He had become something of a tyrant in his leadership style, even turning against his own son Jonathan.

But then there may have been those who came to David who were simply discontented with their situation. They had no peace of mind. They needed direction; they needed compassionate yet disciplined leadership. It is clear that David received these people, and through his influence their lives were transformed. They found leadership, guidance, example, purpose, hope and fellowship; they were appreciated and were part of a family. Note the testimony of their reformed behaviour and lifestyle.

‘Now one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, saying, “Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep”’ 1 Samuel 25.14-16.

So it is spiritually when people come to Christ – their lives are transformed from discontentment to contentment. They have an example in Christ to look to. They have the Church to join and to fellowship

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with. They feel part of a family, loved, appreciated, valued and useful. In Christ our lives can be transformed, liberated and renewed.

David became commander over them

David took responsibility for their wellbeing, their security and their provision practically and spiritually. They responded with loyalty to their leader. They were inspired by his example, his strength and his wisdom.

David was a type of Christ as the captain and commander of his people. Christ is described in the New Testament as the Captain of salvation (*Hebrews 2.10*) and in the Old Testament as the Commander of the army of the Lord:

‘And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?” So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?” Then the Commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so’ Joshua 5.13-15.

- Joshua’s question – God had commanded Joshua to be courageous; there was a God-given clarity in his approach;
- The answer of Christ – I am the Commander of the army of the Lord;
- Joshua’s response – he worshipped Christ and was in complete submission to Christ. Joshua was a leader, but before him was the supreme Commander, Christ;
- Joshua’s attitude – the revelation of Christ as his supreme Commander humbled Joshua;

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- Joshua's reverence – Joshua had to learn that his relationship with Christ was a holy relationship.

The distressed, debt-burdened and discontented came to David at Cave Adullam looking to him as commander. As commander David was a type of Christ to Whom distressed, debt-burdened and discontented sinners can go. Have confidence in the supreme Commander Jesus Christ as both Joshua and David, as leaders, did.

'Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you' Isaiah 55.5.

'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' Isaiah 9.6.

Cave Adullam teaches us about the power of David's Christ-centred testimony attracting not detracting. People in need felt welcome, cared for and understood. They respected David and followed him as their commander. In this David was a type of Christ, the Commander of the Lord's army.

The second part of the chapter is in total contrast and teaches us about the danger of developing hatred. If unchecked hatred will ultimately develop into deeper hostility and murder, either in heart or in actions. Jesus warns us of this in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5.21-26*) – hatred is first in the mind and heart, and then in actions. Hatred can be evidenced in the destruction of a person's reputation, as with Christ Who was made of no reputation. Hatred is evidenced in the destruction of a person's testimony, as with Christ Who was called 'Beelzebub' (*Matthew 10.25*).

Here in this chapter we have the ultimate darkness of hatred

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evidenced in physical murder by Saul. Hatred so hardens the heart that it makes us fearless of God – ‘There is no fear of God before his eyes’ (Psalm 36.1).

Saul heard from Doeg that Ahimelech had helped David

‘Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, “I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.” So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father’s house, the priests who were in Nob. And they all came to the king’ 1 Samuel 22.9-11.

Ahimelech defended David as being honourable, but denied having enquired of the Lord for him and taking sides. Saul commanded his servants to kill the priests of the Lord but they refused. Why? God has given to every person a conscience, and that conscience can be activated at a moment’s notice. We are not told whether the servants of Saul were believers or not; what we are told is they refused to kill.

Here is an example of when obedience to authority must always be as ‘unto the Lord’. If our conscience is telling us this is wrong and against the Word of God, then we are called to obey God rather than man (Acts 4.19).

But Doeg was a man whose conscience had been seared, as it were, with a hot iron, hard as rock. He was an ambassador of Satan and had no scruples about killing eighty-five of the Lord’s anointed priests. Not content with that atrocity, he then destroyed the inhabitants of the city of Nob.

Conclusion

The response of David the man of God:

1. He acknowledged his own part in bringing the wrath of Saul through Doeg onto Ahimelech and his family.

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2. We might say the fault was Doeg's, and this is true. But David realised that in his desperation he had been uncharacteristically indiscreet in the manner of his coming to Ahimelech not under cover.

3. He directly aligned himself to the surviving son of Ahimelech, and promised him safeguarding protection.

Here we can see the true evidence of a child of God, ready to examine his own heart responsibly. We might wonder why David did this rather than defend himself before Doeg. He acted this way because he was assured in the Lord. In his right mind he walked in the fear of the Lord, and in so doing was open about his own faults.

Assurance of our relationship with the Lord has the fruit of humility and courageous self-assessment. This is not a negative exercise as long as the pathway leads us to Christ and His merits and righteousness.

9. DAVID – LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S DIRECTION

1 Samuel 23

When we consider this chapter as a whole we can see how David sincerely and earnestly sought God’s will, as these verses show:

‘Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?” And the Lord said to David, “Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah” 1 Samuel 23.2.

‘Then David inquired of the Lord once again. And the Lord answered him and said, “Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand” 1 Samuel 23.4.

“Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.” And the Lord said, “He will come down” 1 Samuel 23.11.

So the key principle for our teaching in this chapter is – living according to God’s direction.

Guidance is probably one of the key challenges for the Christian, and it is an issue that requires meekness. Remember first of all our calling of God is as His servants, who are adopted as His children into His family. As a child of God called to serve, we wait on the Lord to do His will, and this requires our submission. The Psalmist picks up this theme in *Psalms 123* – waiting on the Lord, ready to obey and ready to serve.

Guidance requires an open heart to accept God’s will for us in a spirit of meekness. It requires a humble submission to the teaching of the Word of God, even if this requires a change of mind. Paul wanted

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to go to Bithynia, but God directed him in a dream that he needed to go to Macedonia (*Acts 16.6-10*).

'The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way' Psalm 25.9.

David was a man whose first priority was, 'What is the Lord's will in this matter?' This is the theme that runs through the first half of the chapter, a chapter which concludes with David being preserved.

There are two main characters in chapters 22-23 – David and Saul – and their testimonies contrast greatly.

David – Friend of God

Deliverer

Directed

Encouraged in the Lord

Supported by a priest and Jonathan

Saul – Now behaving as the enemy of God

Destroyer

Distracted

Encouraged by those betraying David

Supported by Doeg, an evil man, and eventually by a witch

David trusted in the Lord

'Then they told David, saying, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors." Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah." But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the Lord once again. And the Lord answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went to Keilah and

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fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand' 1 Samuel 23.1-6.

Now this may sound an obvious statement, one repeated at other times – this is true, but when we say a person trusts in the Lord there needs to be some evidences of how they are trusting. We have seen how, when David was desperate and distracted, left to himself, he behaved irrationally; but he was restored into his right mind. Calling upon the Lord to help he says, *'In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid' (Psalm 56.11)*. But here the trust of the Lord in David's testimony is evidenced by his desire for guidance.

Jesus taught us that one of the most profound ways we can pray in is to use the great prayer of faith:

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' Matthew 6.9-10.

May the divine will of God be done here on earth, and specifically in my life as I pray personally to the Father. Our respect for God, and the depth of our spiritual life, are tested by our respect for God's Word and His will.

Here men came to David for help. The Philistines were fighting the people of Keilah, robbing their fields. Note what David did first of all: he sought the Lord, not the wisdom and counsel of men. Note also the 'therefore' here. There was a crisis; therefore I must turn to prayer. So often the 'therefore' has a different outcome in our lives, an outcome that does not start or end with prayer. But let us learn from David. There is a problem – therefore I must pray!

David was a spiritually-minded man, and as such was open to the

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guidance of the Lord. When we read of the answer as *'the Lord said'*, this does not always mean the Lord spoke with an audible voice. We say, 'The Lord spoke to me through His Word.' It may be that the Lord spoke to David audibly, but maybe in prayer the Lord impressed His will on his mind.

So David was led to go to battle to deliver the people of Keilah from the oppression of the Philistines. But there was a problem. His mighty men of war were afraid. Were they not in enough danger already, chased by Saul? Surely David had enough on his plate without going off on a dangerous mission of deliverance. But God's ways are not our ways; His ways are higher than ours, and His thoughts higher than ours (*Isaiah 55.8-9*). Sometimes our faith is stretched by the Lord.

Note here how David seeks the will of the Lord for confirmation to go ahead. The next answer from the Lord includes the divine promise of His power to be made manifest – *'I will deliver'*. So David and his men went to battle with the Philistines. Because the Lord was with them, they struck the Philistines with a mighty blow and took the livestock.

David the man of God was guided by God, strengthened by God, he trusted in God and was a deliverer to Keilah. So in the work of the Gospel, if we apply these principles of guidance, dependence and trust in prayer, there will be fruit.

David continually trusted in the Lord

'And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O Lord God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for

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my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.” And the Lord said, “He will come down.” Then David said, “Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?” And the Lord said, “They will deliver you.” So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition.

‘And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand’
1 Samuel 23.7-14.

‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths’ Proverbs 3.5-6.

So here again we have David resorting to prayer for guidance. Now it happened that Abiathar the priest had fled to David at Keilah with the ephod. The ephod was as an elaborate garment worn by the High Priest upon which the breastplate, containing Urim and Thummim, rested. It was used in connection with seeking the Lord for guidance through the High Priest in intercession in prayer. Asking for the ephod in the Old Testament is like a New Testament Christian asking for the Bible to be used as our guide.

Here, with Abiathar and the symbolism for guidance of the ephod, David earnestly sought the Lord in prayer. Now we might think that David was specifically favoured to have the priest alongside him with the ephod. We might say that David’s position is far removed from ours in seeking guidance. Actually the priest and the ephod with David is simply a symbol, pointing to the great High Priest in Heaven.

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'We have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...Let us therefore come boldly' (Hebrews 4.14,16).

Moving on, note particularly the emphasis shown revealing the sincere trust of David in the Lord. 'O Lord God of Israel' – David is using here the most solemn, reverent address possible to God in Old Testament times. 'I pray', or 'I plead' – 'Tell Your servant.' Notice his manner of prayer. The Lord replies – 'Saul will come down to capture you'; and, 'The people of Keilah will deliver you into his hands.'

The Lord told David a most uncomfortable truth, in some ways hard to comprehend. The people of Keilah had been delivered by David and his mighty men under the good providence of the Lord. Yet these very same people were prepared to deliver them into the murderous hands of Saul. From this we need to learn that past support must never be the assurance relied upon for present support. Sometimes the Lord permits disappointments with behaviour, to teach us to trust only in Him and Him alone.

So David escaped from Keilah and eventually dwelt in the mountainous wilderness of Ziph in a forest. Here we have the true characteristic of a servant guided by the Lord.

- David had been told to go to Keilah – he went.
- David had been told to depart from Keilah – he departed.

David strengthened in the Lord

'Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods 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. Even my father Saul knows that." So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house' 1 Samuel 23.16-18.

A friend in need is a friend indeed. Jonathan, as a true friend, sought

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out David to encourage him in the Lord. We are taught by Jonathan’s example the importance of true fellowship in the Lord. Fellowship is when we converse together, either admonishing or encouraging one another in the Lord. When Jonathan left David, he left behind an encouraged, strengthened believer. David was not strengthened by positive statements from Jonathan about survival and tenacity, but led by Jonathan to be strengthened in the Lord and His might.

It is good to examine the nature of conversation with one another as to whether we are helping or hindering. Jonathan’s intention was to help, not hinder, and this should always be our own objective in conversation.

It is clear that Saul now realised that, in addition to his kingdom days being numbered, David was to be the future king. Not only this, but Jonathan desired to be next to him in support. But the realisation of the inevitable did not mean Saul would stop pursuing David; he remained determined to overthrow him. He that sits in the heavens shall laugh at how foolish we can be sometimes, to think with can resist God’s will (*Psalms 2.4*).

Whenever spiritual good has been done, we can be sure the devil is not far behind to spoil and resist. So the people of Ziph betrayed David’s whereabouts to Saul and sided with him, currying his favour.

“Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king’s hand.” And Saul said, “Blessed are you of the Lord, for you have compassion on me. Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where his hideout is, and who has seen him there. For I am told he is very crafty. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides; and come back to me with

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certainty, and I will go with you. And it shall be, if he is in the land, that I will search for him throughout all the clans of Judah." So they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. But David and his men were in the Wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon' 1 Samuel 23.19-24.

I want us to note here the danger of spiritualising wrong actions. Saul is seeking to destroy and to kill, yet he speaks in spiritual terms to the people of Ziph. It is really all about Saul, for he thanks the people of Ziph for having compassion on him. It is a bit like Herod saying to the wise men, 'Go and find where the young child is and come again and tell me so I can worship him' (*Matthew 2.8*). He spiritualised it by suggesting he would worship, but what he really meant was he would go and kill the Child.

We may be in a backslidden state and knowingly going against the Word of God. Do not take the name of the Lord in vain and spiritualise this. Saul needed correction, not comfort and compassion. Had he received correction he may have repented. In their folly the men of Ziph told Saul exactly the place David had gone, to the Wilderness of Maon at the rock.

David secured by the God's providence in the rock and the strongholds

'When Saul and his men went to seek him, they told David. Therefore he went down to the rock, and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon. Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!" Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the

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Rock of Escape. Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi' 1 Samuel 23.25-29.

There, at the rock in the Wilderness of Maon on the mountainside, it seemed that David was encircled. But God is God, and He was in control. He can intervene at any time to deliver His servants in danger. A message came to Saul to come quickly as the Philistines had invaded the land, so Saul returned to do battle.

They called the place the Rock of Escape. In the original Hebrew this is rendered as the Rock of Division. How accurate is that description – Christ is the Rock of Division as manifest on the cross at Calvary. As He was in the centre as the Rock of Division, there was a saved man on one side and an unsaved man on the other. For one Christ was the Rock of Refuge, the escape from Hell; for the other Christ was the Rock of Judgment. For David the rock became a place of escape; for Saul the rock was a hindering place that hid David.

It is good for us to have our places and experiences of remembrance for the praise of the Lord. How often God is referred to as our Rock – the Rock of refuge, the Rock of escape, the Rock of the Church. We are taught in Scripture *'that Rock was Christ' (1 Corinthians 10.4).*

*'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble'
Psalm 46.1.*

'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him' Nahum 1.7.

David used times of danger and adversity to prove God's help, and as occasions of remembrance and praise. David then went from there to dwell in the strongholds of Engedi.

Conclusion

This chapter is filled with the wonders of God's protecting and guiding providences. The trial for David with Saul was not yet over, but what he had experienced was encouragement in the trial.

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'He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust." Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler' Psalm 91.1-4.

Sometimes the shadow of the Almighty can be mistaken for darkness when actually it is a shadow of protection.

'Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God' Isaiah 50.10.

10. DAVID – LIVING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

1 Samuel 24

In this chapter the focus of teaching from the life of David reveals to us characteristics of a godly fear of God.

A tender conscience

‘Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, “Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.” Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats. So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) Then the men of David said to him, “This is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.’” And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. Now it happened afterward that David’s heart troubled him because he had cut Saul’s robe’ 1 Samuel 24.1-5.

The first thing that may strike us is the fact that Saul has only just been at war with the Philistines. However, he seemed to be obsessed with David’s demise, and returned to chase David directly after that battle had been fought. It was this battle with the Philistines that had been the means of preserving David, yet this providence and warning to Saul went unheeded. He is just determined to kill David. His evil intent is clear because he took with him three thousand chosen men – Saul’s ‘SAS’ men.

In the providence of God’s permissive providence Saul entered the mouth of the cave that David was sheltering in. Saul took rest, and

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it seemed he was there for the taking. Now humanly speaking, like David's men of war, we might straightway jump to the wrong conclusion: surely the Lord has placed Saul into our hands – it is obvious he is here for the taking – this is the day of the Lord!

David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Now here is the test of where we are spiritually. We do make errors of judgment and take wrong actions in our Christian lives sometimes, but if we have a tender conscience it will immediately trouble us and disturb our conscience. David demonstrated such an attitude, and it is one we need to seek in our own lives, for a hardened conscience is a potentially fearful weapon in the hands of a Christian as it can deceive. Afterwards David's heart troubled him because of what he had done.

A restraint against evil deeds

And he said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way' 1 Samuel 24.6-7.

Whatever this providence may have seemed to the natural mind, the spiritual mind read it differently. David felt convicted of the fact that he had taken such action against Saul. Whatever Saul's behavioural pattern was, or however aggressive and hateful, he had been anointed as king. Samuel had poured oil over him at the outset of his call to the kingdom in the name of the Lord. This was the issue that troubled David: he had taken an action against one of the Lord's servants.

The biblical principle of response to persecution, as God's grace enables us and we are kept, is – do not revile in return; pray for your enemies; bless those who persecute you and do not curse; commit it to Him that judges righteously (*Matthew 5.44; 1 Peter 2.23*).

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So here now the grace of God shone in David's heart. He used a godly restraint over his natural tendency. He was a man of war, and he was surrounded with men of war, but he restrained them from attacking. *'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord'* (verse 6). So David did not allow his servants to rise against Saul.

The Word of God says, *'Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm'* (1 Chronicles 16.22). This does not mean they are perfect, but it does mean that to purposely attack them is wrong.

A willing faith to leave judgment and providence in the hands of the Lord

'David also arose afterward, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down. And David said to Saul: "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm'? Look, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea? Therefore let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand'" 1 Samuel 24.8-15.

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David had shown restraint, confessed his wrong and would not allow attack. He spoke with a clear conscience. How can this be, when David had just confessed he was wrong even to cut off the corner of Saul's robe? The action of cutting Saul's robe had been done without respect for the fact that Saul was anointed of the Lord. David realised afterwards that, left to himself, he could easily have killed Saul, and he trembled at the thought.

From this we learn that what seems a relatively small issue can easily grow unchecked into something worse. But David checked himself, restrained himself and confessed his wrong actions and attitude. He took that very same action, recognising God's restraining hand over him, and used it as evidence. David could now take this event and say, 'I cut off your robe but did not kill you. Under God's restraining hand surely can you not see, Saul, I mean no evil against you? I stand before you as a man under God's authority and restraining hand, and will not do you harm. Wickedness proceeds from the wicked but my hand shall not go against you.'

The proof of his spiritual state of mind and right thinking is in verse 15: 'The Lord is my plea, the Lord is my deliverer.' From this testimony we learn one of the tenets of living faith – a willingness to restraint against vengeance, a willingness to place our whole life in the hands of the Lord.

Before the throne of God above

I have a strong, a perfect plea.

Charitie Lees De Chenez, 1841-1923

Actions of goodness towards his enemy

'So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. Then he said to David: "You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. And you have shown this day how

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you have dealt well with me; for when the Lord delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand' 1 Samuel 24.16-20.

As David stood before Saul with such a powerful testimony of goodness under the grace of God, Saul was reduced to weeping. David's righteous, godly testimony did much more to affect Saul than any angry words or actions. This teaches us to love one another, however tough that seems to be at times.

David was more righteous than Saul because he returned hatred with mercy and restraint. He was more righteous than Saul because, under God's restraining grace, he rewarded evil with good. Saul could not comprehend how the Lord had seemingly placed him in David's hands, yet he was alive. This is not man's way but God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than ours (*Isaiah 55.9*).

From this we learn that God's providence must always be discerned by God's standards, not our own. The deliverance of Saul into the hands of David was God's opportunity for witness, not revenge. By God's grace David recognised this and restrained himself and his men from doing harm to an anointed man.

Notice how David's testimony is speaking to Saul in a number of ways; not only restraining grace bringing the fruit of mercy and goodness, but revealing to Saul clearly that God had destined David to the throne.

A willingness submit to God's providence

"Therefore swear now to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house." So David swore to Saul. And Saul

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*went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold'
1 Samuel 24.21-22.*

Saul pleaded for the family name to be preserved by David, and to this David solemnly agreed. Whatever the failings of Saul, Jonathan came from this family and David had a covenant with Jonathan.

In conclusion, there is an action of David that is repeated and shows his submission to God's providence.

'Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi' 1 Samuel 23.29 .

'And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold' 1 Samuel 24.22.

I am sure on both occasions David would have preferred to have returned to the comfort of his home. But David determined to live according to God's timing and God's providence for him. God does not always determine the most comforting pathway for us, but allows discomfort at times. David went to the stronghold for, in the end, the comfort of the Lord is better than any other comfort.

'The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him' Nahum 1.7.

The word 'stronghold' has the meaning of a secure fortress in which to dwell in safety from the enemy. The meaning is for us to take refuge in the Lord and in His gracious ways towards His people. This promise is pointing us to the Saviour Jesus Christ. We know this from the truth of *Nahum 1.15*:

'Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!'

This truth is given a Gospel application in *Isaiah*.

'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings

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of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”” Isaiah 52.7.

The preacher and hymnwriter John Kent (1766-1843) expressed this truth so beautifully:

*A refuge for sinners the gospel makes known;
'Tis found in the merits of Jesus alone;
The weary, the tempted, and burdened by sin,
Were never exempted from entering therein.*

I hope you will not mind me using picture language to describe the structure of the stronghold. It is a secure stronghold, the sure and safe fortress in which to take refuge. It has for its foundations the eternal Covenant of Grace, God’s divine, saving, unalterable purposes. Its walls are made by the Word of God that endures for ever, impenetrable truth that cannot be destroyed. Its gates are made of mercy which is from everlasting to everlasting. Its roof is made of an inseparable love that covers, protects and secures. Inside the stronghold is an atmosphere of peace, the peace of God which passes all understanding. It is set up on high, separate from worldliness and sin, an unassailable fortress assured by God.

This day of trouble has the meaning of being stressed, enclosed by trials. It means to feel trapped and pressed upon by circumstances, attacked by the enemy of souls. It means to feel so burdened with the situation there seems no way through, it is impossible.

This text is designed to comfort and assure a person in their soul as the Spirit applies the Word, so the words move on to personal application: *‘And He knows those who trust in Him’*.

This statement is both comforting and challenging. It means that the Lord knows all about us, nothing is hidden, and He knows exactly how to deal with us. But the manner of the Lord’s dealings with us depends on our relationship with Him. The promise is to those that

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trust in Him. This trust is a complete dependence upon Him. Such faith takes its assurance from the fact that the Lord is good.

We have this evidenced in the life of Job at a particular time when faith was victorious over circumstances. He had lost everything and was sitting by the waste tip, despised, rejected of men, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. In the midst of this deepest trial he made some of the greatest statements of faith ever spoken by a saved person. For example,

'But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold' Job 23.10.

Here is supreme confidence in the sovereign God and His goodness and grace.

'And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold' 1 Samuel 24.22.

11. DAVID – EXPERIENCING GOD’S PREVENTATIVE PROVIDENCE

1 Samuel 25

The chapter commences with the announcement of the death of Samuel, the prophet of the Lord. David undoubtedly mourns the loss of Samuel together with the Israelites. But then we move on to consider God’s restraining power.

In the last chapter we considered the way that God restrained the hand of David from killing Saul directly. In this chapter we see the way in which God restrains David from evil by using the wisdom of Abigail. These verses are the key to understanding this chapter:

‘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!”’
1 Samuel 32-34.

This type of restraint is called God’s preventative providence, when God uses His providence to hold back. God is the God of providence and the God of grace, and He intertwines both in His dealings with His people. God is far greater in His goodness towards His people than we will ever realise in time. So much behind-the-scenes goodness of God is bestowed upon His people, protecting and preparing for Glory.

Nabal, an enemy of God

Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel, and the man was very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a

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thousand goats. And he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. The name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And she was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings. He was of the house of Caleb. When David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep, David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus you shall say to him who lives in prosperity: 'Peace be to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have! Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favour in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David.'"

'So when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and waited. Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?"' 1 Samuel 25.2-11.

The simplest and most profound description of an unbeliever is that they are an enemy of God. That is the stark reality of the true state and condition of a person by nature – an enemy of God. Nabal is an example of a person's fallen nature ruling their behaviour as an enemy of God. There was no room left for the conscience in Nabal's life. It was rendered hardened through abuse.

But notice how the Holy Spirit inspires the wording about Nabal

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in a specific manner. His name is not mentioned at first, but he is referred to as ‘*a man in Maon*’, a business man, very rich with three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. It is written like this because this was his life – materialism, business and wealth were his idols. They were the epicentre of his life; it was who he was; but it consumed him and made him a very selfish, little man. That is what greed does for you; it consumes you and develops you into being utterly selfish in your dealings.

After this introduction we are told that his name was Nabal. The meaning of the name ‘Nabal’ means ‘fool’. Whatever were his parents thinking of to name him like this? However, in Scripture the names of people are often prophetic regarding their future character.

Although he was rich Nabal was actually a very foolish and evil man. Although he was blessed with a wise wife he was evidently too proud to learn from her.

‘Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him!’
1 Samuel 25.25.

Abigail was not only beautiful in countenance but she was a person of good understanding, which was wasted on Nabal. Nabal, we are told, was harsh and evil in his doings. He was truly a nasty piece of work under Satan’s power. Pride and selfishness together shrink the mind and make a person cynical and suspicious of others. We assess people through the lens of our own pride and selfishness, and this causes harshness. It actually makes us very insecure in our being and means we need to constantly put up barriers and fight.

Nabal’s character is confirmed not only by Abigail, but by others also. His servants in verse 17 refer to him as ‘*such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him*’ – another sign of folly. A sign of wisdom is being ready to listen; a sign of folly is being unwilling to listen and take advice.

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David, through his servants, approached Nabal on a feast day for some provisions. Previously he had protected Nabal's servants and flock, so he felt one good turn deserved another. This is the logic of the human mind when the moral voice of fairness is speaking within a person. But such reasoning is disappointed when asking of a person with a hardened conscience and an evil attitude. David's request was reasonable, but he was not dealing with a reasonable person.

David sent his men peaceably. He knew these ten young men could testify to the integrity of his dealings. They requested provisions politely with evidence of sincere intent and behaviour. Nabal's response was rude and discourteous, cynically dismissing their leader David as a runaway nobody. Nabal was so consumed with himself and his business that he was deaf to the outside world and its events.

Notice the emphasis of Nabal on the 'me' in life!

'Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?' 1 Samuel 25.11.

David was well-known. He had killed Goliath; he had been a leader in the army of Israel. If Nabal had any sense at all he would at least have treated David with caution, for David was a mighty warrior. But this is what selfishness does to a person. Eventually it becomes their undoing and the cause of their demise. Selfishness caused Nabal's life to so centre around himself, that he was blind to others and their significance.

From the testimony of Nabal we see the all-consuming problem of living in pride and selfishness.

David's response

'Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword." So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies' 1 Samuel 25.13.

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David immediately prepared for revenge and bloodshed in his anger at such rudeness and injustice from Nabal. This is the wisdom of the human mind; it is so obvious that Nabal must pay the price for his rejection of David. Our immediate response to a problem is not always our wisest response. Here David was digging himself into a seriously difficult hole in pursuing the pathway of revenge.

We may think that Nabal had a big problem, but note here that David had also now made himself a problem. David was a believer; he knew a better way, and was therefore sinning against light, knowledge and experience. He was intent on murder, and the flesh was governing his mind.

‘Every man gird on his sword’ is the response of human nature but not the new nature. From this we learn how easily even a believer can react quickly and in anger rather than resorting to prayer.

Nabal’s servant’s response to his master’s folly

‘Now one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, saying, “Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. But the men were very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him”’ 1 Samuel 25.14-17.

He is not given a name here but his testimony is placed in Scripture as an example of wisdom. He did not reason with Nabal, an unreasonable man, as he knew this is a waste of time. You cannot speak to him. He went straight to Abigail, a wise person whom he knew would respond with maturity to save lives. His first concern was

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to establish the integrity of David in the mind of Abigail: 'David has been very good to us; David has protected us as a wall both day and night; David has not taken anything from us, but David is now intent on revenge for the rudeness and rejection of our master who is such a scoundrel. This will not only result in the death of Nabal, but all his servants are in great danger.'

From this we learn of the blessing of being a faithful, interceding servant in the work of the Lord. We may not have a high position, but never, ever underestimate the value of faithful service for the Lord. This faithful servant, together with Abigail in God's providence, was used to save lives. This reminds us of the value of intercessory prayer inasmuch as we can be used of the Lord in saving souls. The issue for us in our life is not of position but of faithfulness and usefulness wherever God has placed us.

Abigail's response

Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground. So she fell at his feet and said: "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him! But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, since the Lord has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal. And now this present which your maidservant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord. Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the Lord will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my

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lord fights the battles of the Lord, and evil is not found in you throughout your days. Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, as from the pocket of a sling. 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” 1 Samuel 25.23-31.

Abigail responded with urgency, taking provisions from the store to give to David as a free gift. She was given the courage to go and meet David who was deeply offended and bent on revenge.

‘Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light” 1 Samuel 25.21-22.

Abigail:

- humbled herself before David whom she knew was to be king, the ruler of Israel, and spoke wisely;
- took responsibility for the offence caused by her wicked husband;
- was polite and measured in her approach to David, viewing him as her ruler;
- wisely told David not to regard this scoundrel Nabal – ‘he lives up to his name for he is foolish’;
- was unaware before of the offence Nabal had caused;
- solemnly pleaded for mercy in the name of the Lord (verse 26);

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- praised the Lord for restraining the hand of David from bloodshed;
- presented before David her gift of provisions;
- sought forgiveness on behalf of her husband and for her apparent forwardness in coming like this to David;
- encouraged David in the Lord – the Lord would certainly make an enduring house for David, who fought the battles of the Lord in sincerity of heart.

She said: 'Your life will be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God. He will sling out your enemies. When the Lord has put you on the throne, do not avenge yourself to cause you grief of heart later on. When the Lord has dealt well with you remember your servant Abigail.'

A wise and godly woman is a tremendous blessing to the cause of God. In God's preventative providence He used Abigail to protect both her evil husband and the man of God, David. As David later acknowledged, God used Abigail in a powerful manner to prevent him from sinning.

God gives to both men and women wisdom in His sovereign will, and He can use either for His glory. Never limit usefulness by confusing it with the roles God has ordained to men and women.

David's response to Abigail

A true believer always places the praise where it truly belongs. David said, 'Blessed is the Lord God of Israel. He sent you to meet me; He gave you wisdom and courage to intercede. Blessed is your advice.' A godly man will always accept advice, whether it be from a man or a woman. There was none of the 'macho' male saying, 'Who do you think you are?' No; David was truly thankful to the Lord for using Abigail to prevent him, and for giving him wise advice. 'The Lord God of Israel has kept me back from hurting you by your intervention. You have kept me from bloodshed and from avenging myself.'

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Go in peace to your house. I have heeded your voice and respected your person.’

From this we learn to respect one another as believers with esteem, and learn from one another.

12. DAVID – LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S WAY

1 Samuel 26

We have considered in the past two chapters how David was restrained by God from taking revenge upon Saul by the direct influence of God on his mind, and then by God through Abigail. When God teaches through experience, He calls us to use that experience wisely in our future pathway. There are no wasted or boring lessons learned in God’s school – they are all for a purpose and are useful in life. In this next chapter we see David exercising the teaching he has received from God in his handling of Saul.

The life of David mirrors the life of the Christian seeking to serve the Lord, through victories and failures. Here we are considering a victory in the life of David in the face of hostility, danger and persecution, but in the next chapter we will need to consider a failure in the life of David; yet he was still preserved and delivered by God.

The relentless pursuit of the enemies of God’s people

‘Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is David not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?” Then Saul arose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped in the hill of Hachilah, which is opposite Jeshimon, by the road. But David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness’ 1 Samuel 26.1-3.

Satan acts against the people of the Lord either in persecution or deception. This will be constant until the end of time. The Church goes through periods of time when it feels surrounded and under

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a barrage of assaults. Suffering and persecution are signs that Satan realises there is something he needs to oppose. A worldly church can seem appealing, not because of godliness, but because it does not merit assault. The lack of attacks makes for a seemingly peaceable and joyful atmosphere, but it is mistaken for prosperity.

If David had been a man of the world destined for the throne, Satan would have left him alone, but because he was actually a man after God's own heart, he was a real threat to Satan's evil purposes. Please remember when you suffer persecution for Christ's sake that it is a badge of honour, not failure.

Saul's treatment of David, knowing that God had anointed him as king, reminds us of Satan's attacks. It is clear that Saul now knew David was destined for the throne according to God's purpose, yet he still fought against him. Satan knows that God is more powerful – he knows that nothing can separate a believer from God's hand. Yet he still attacks as though he can defeat the Lord's will and God's purposes. Why is this?

Before his fall from Heaven, Satan was an angel who had sought the same glory as Christ. Satan knows his time is short and uses every opportunity to attack Christ. He attacks the followers of Christ as the means of attacking Christ. Because he so often does this through using other people, his personal involvement is disguised.

Suffering for Christ's sake is the Christian's badge of honour, being counted worthy to suffer for His name.

'So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name' Acts 5.41.

Now here, despite his previous speech of reconciliation with David (see *1 Samuel 24.17*), Saul remained against David. One would have thought that David, after showing restraint in not harming Saul, could have expected to be left alone. But David was aware of the effect

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bitterness and hatred had on the mind of Saul, and was wise to its reality. He continued to endure the hostility of Saul and the opposition of nations seeking to gain the favour of Saul. So in chapter 26 we find David once again under severe threat, humanly speaking, at the hand of Saul. Despite David preserving Saul’s life, Saul still sought to kill David. This is often the experience of the Lord’s people. They show a kindness to their enemy and get rebuffed.

Saul was tipped off about the whereabouts of David by the Ziphites. Saul responded to this information by gathering again his three thousand chosen ‘SAS’ men to pursue David. Without grace working, previous attempts to be at peace with enemies have a temporary, not permanent, effect. A Christian needs to accept the reality that, as he walks according to God’s way, relentless opposition will come. The Apostle Paul, in his teaching to Timothy, confirms this fact that persecution of God’s children is inevitable.

‘Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution’ 2 Timothy 3.12.

David’s God-given courage to walk in God’s way

‘David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come. So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp, with the people encamped all around him. Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, “Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?” And Abishai said, “I will go down with you.” So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner and the people lay all around him. Then Abishai said to David, “God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let

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me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!" But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" David said furthermore, "As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go" 1 Samuel 26.4-11.

David was led to give Saul and his followers, his enemies at this time, a lesson in showing mercy. To do this required great courage as it meant going into the enemy camp and taking Saul's spear. What is the significance of specifically taking Saul's spear? The spear spoke of where Saul was in his mind. He was now a man consumed by hate, living by his spear. When a distressing spirit came upon Saul he had his spear in his hand. He had thrown it at David on more than one occasion in his palace.

We noted in *1 Samuel 22.6* that Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand. Now here in *1 Samuel 26.7* his spear is stuck in the ground at his head as he lays in a deep sleep. The spear displayed the state of Saul's intention and his mind – where Saul was, there was his spear. So David decided to take from Saul what he valued most in life – his spear – for that is what he lived by.

David required one of his brave men to accompany him into the enemy camp and get the spear. It would be a truly exciting expedition, but one that without God's preservation would result in certain death. 'Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?' Note the question from the Lord in *Isaiah 6.8*: 'Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"' This is a question that God asks of His people – 'Who will go for Us? Who will reach out to the enemies of God with the Gospel? Who will do outreach for Us?'

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Those with God-given courage will say with Isaiah: *‘Here am I! Send me.’*

So here Abishai said, ‘I will go down with you.’ When they arrived under the cover of darkness, they found all sound asleep in the enemy camp. The Lord had caused a deep sleep to come upon them. In a way, this picture is typical of the unbeliever’s state regarding their own soul’s eternal future. Spiritually they are asleep, laying around, totally unaware of the presence of the Lord looking at them.

Abishai’s reaction, when he comes into the camp, is so similar to the previous time he encountered King Saul: ‘God has delivered your enemy. Surely this is the day. Surely this must be God’s will. Let me strike him at once on your behalf. I have no qualms about it, this is so obviously rightful vengeance.’ But we must remember that God never contradicts His Word. Walk by faith and not by sight! Remember the example of Jonah (see *Jonah 4*).

*‘Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm’
Psalm 105.15.*

‘Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord’ Romans 12.19.

One of the great deceits of Satan is to make us think feelings and wisdom are of equal validity with God’s Word. But David learned from past experience and responded according to God’s Word and way for him. He gave the command, *‘Do not destroy him.’* The reason he gave was: *‘For who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?’* The doctrine behind this was, *‘As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish’*, which turned out to be a prophetic statement. David felt the restraint of God’s Word and power: *‘The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed.’*

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Whatever our situation, decision and actions, nothing changes the eternal principles of God's Word. Even if it seems providence is smiling on us and we feel ok about something, it does not make it right. So David does not allow bloodshed, even though it seems Saul is now for the taking with God-given sleep. David could have killed Saul at a stroke; the opportunity was there and it seemed obvious, but God's Word said 'No!'

David's God-given wisdom to take an action that would affect the heart, not the body of a person

“But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go.” So David took the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head, and they got away; and no man saw or knew it or awoke. For they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them. Now David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off, a great distance being between them. And David called out to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, “Do you not answer, Abner?” Then Abner answered and said, “Who are you, calling out to the king?” So David said to Abner, “Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was by his head.” Then Saul knew David's voice, and said, “Is that your voice, my son David?” David said, “It is my voice, my lord, O king” 1 Samuel 26.11-17.

'Please take the spear and the jug of water that are by his head and let us go.' Note here the disciplined, polite manner of David's leadership; he is clear, concise and definite. David went to the other side of the valley. Then he shouted to the people and to Abner who should

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have been guarding Saul. There was a great distance between them and yet Abner clearly heard the words of David.

David had previously stood before Saul at the mouth of the cave. Here he purposely set a clear distance between them before his communication, for this was to be the time of final separation, the final time of communication between them.

He first seriously rebuked Abner for not adequately guarding the Lord’s anointed. There was the evidence for Abner to see; David had Saul’s spear and water jug by his side.

When Saul responded to David’s wise words, he did so with an apparent confession of heart: ‘I have sinned – return, my son David. I will harm you no more. You have shown my life was precious in your sight. I have played the fool, I have erred exceedingly.’ But David did not return to Saul. He said, ‘Let one of the young men come and fetch it.’ Why was this?

One of the reasons has to do with the fact that Saul did not speak of sinning against God in his behaviour. No mention was made of God in Saul’s communication. Remorse is not repentance; repentance is Godward. David realised that for all Saul’s words there was no real sign of a change of heart before the Lord, as he himself experienced in *Psalm 51*. For example:

‘For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight’ verses 3-4.

When David sinned, he made a practise of reminding himself he had sinned against God.

Here is one of the key evidences of repentance – a realisation of the reality and folly of sin. Alongside repentance goes faith, and we see this faith exercised in the words of David to Saul: ‘Let my life be valued in the eyes of the Lord. Let Him deliver me out of all tribulation’ –

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Heaven at last! Here is David witnessing before Saul: 'I live to please the Lord. I trust Him to deliver me.'

This was the time of separation. There was a great distance between them. So, David went on his way, walking in the way of the Lord. Saul went to his place, the place of selfishness and separation from God.

Conclusion

What we find in this chapter is a testimony of David walking by faith in the way of the Lord and His Word. When faith is exercised under the power of the Holy Spirit it is true, sincere, holy and God-honouring.

We are called to walk by faith and not by sight. Faith will always find its foundation and guidance for action and words in accordance with the Word of God.

Faith will always act in a way that seeks the honour and wisdom of the Lord, and not of man.

Faith will always submit to the timing of the Lord, and not be swayed by apparent opportunities to short circuit events.

Faith will always rest its case in the hands of the Lord and say, 'Your will be done in Heaven and on earth.'

Faith will always separate from evil and use discernment when it is dealing with the enemies of God.

When we pray for an increase in our faith, we are praying for an increasing Christlike faith. Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and He endured, walking by faith and obedience to His Father. While here on earth Christ could have called down legions of angels at any time to destroy His enemies, but instead He walked in faith, and endured tribulation and suffering, and made Himself of no reputation. In so doing He perfectly fulfilled His calling, and returned triumphant into Heaven as our Saviour and Lord.

13. DAVID – THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

1 Samuel 27-30.5

What we found in chapter 26 is the testimony of David walking by faith in the way of the Lord and His Word. In chapter 27 we find a different testimony from David – fear and unbelief holding sway, resulting in bad fruit. David went in the wrong direction, with the fruit of deceit, compromise and ultimately the capture of his family at Ziklag. At the end of this period of David's life we find God again intervening to encourage him, and grant him deliverance.

The power of discouragement

‘And David said in his heart, “Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me anymore in any part of Israel. So I shall escape out of his hand.” Then David arose and went over with the six hundred men who were with him to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. So David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow. And it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath; so he sought him no more’ 1 Samuel 27.1-4.

Discouragement is one of Satan's chief weapons of attack. Its genius as far as Satan is concerned is in the fact that the believer rarely sees discouragement as an attack. He simply sees it as a state of mind caused by circumstances, but not in the context of Satan's influence. But Satan uses discouragement many times and is an expert in its timing and effect on the mind.

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In chapter 26 David evidenced God-given courage and faith in his actions and communication with Abner and Saul. Now his mind had done an 'about turn' and he reasoned with the wisdom of the old nature and the flesh. The outcome is that of running into the land of the Philistines, the enemy of Israel, and once again going to Achish.

From this we can learn that even the strongest of believers, like David and Elijah, left to themselves are vulnerable. Why did David, and later Elijah, react in the way they did after such victories of faith?

- mental exhaustion could have been the reason;
- despondency, with a sense of failure in witness, leading to repentance – Saul remained insincere;
- the disappointment of not seeing the evidence of true repentance – remorse is not repentance;
- the reality coming home to David of the stubbornness of unbelief – unbelief is a brick wall, oblivious to mercy;
- turning in on oneself, when human reasoning takes control over the spiritual mind.

Notice the language of David in his spiritual mind –

'Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance... Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God' Psalm 42.5,11.

Now notice here in our opening verse – David '*said in his heart*'; he spoke discouragement and fear. When we speak to our heart with fleshly reasoning we are either fearful or presumptuous, as the rich man in Christ's parable.

'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry"' Luke 12.19.

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We have no criticism to make of David, simply to acknowledge that if left to ourselves we are all vulnerable. What is remarkable is that these backward steps often come after a step of faith and courage has been taken. Elijah had a great victory at Carmel, but when he considered the opposition of Jezebel he fled for his life. He asked God to take his life as he felt a complete and utter failure and overwhelmed by the opposition (*1 Kings 19*).

Remember Peter confessed that Jesus was the Son of God (*Matthew 16.16*), and was approved by the Lord Jesus. Yet soon after, that same Peter had to be rebuked by Jesus for making a foolish statement about Him not dying.

David had been promised the kingdom; he had been restrained from evil and then he had shown great courage and wisdom. Yet straight afterwards he was saying, *‘Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul.’* Despite the promise, the provision and the restraint of God, because of Saul *‘I shall perish someday.’*

See what has happened here. He had taken his eyes of faith from the Word and focused on Saul! *‘There is nothing better for me...’* Human reasoning says – escape the trial.

This chapter and episode has been described by Dale Ralph Davies as ‘the Godless chapter.’² Important decisions are being made, significant actions are being taken, and even a liaison with an unbelieving king. The language of unbelief is terrifying in its speech against the faithfulness of God, when spoken by a believer. *‘There is nothing better for me.’* There are times when we feel just like David in trials – there is nothing better for me than to escape. The plans of men often have short-term gain, but long-term pain.

‘Here is my plan’, David says. ‘I will go to the Philistines and there Saul will despair of me and stop his search.’ Now this plan of David’s actually worked for him providentially. Saul gave up in his pursuit of

2 Looking on the Heart, Dale Ralph Davies, Christian Focus publications

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David; and David took his family and choice soldiers into the land of the Philistines.

'Then David said to Achish, "If I have now found favour in your eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. Now the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was one full year and four months' 1 Samuel 27.5-7.

He was given Ziklag because he deemed it better not to live in the royal city. This may have been because the idolatry there vexed his soul, but more likely it was a prudent move to ensure his movements were not so closely scrutinised.

'And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. For those nations were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as you go to Shur, even as far as the land of Egypt. Whenever David attacked the land, he left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish. Then Achish would say, "Where have you made a raid today?" And David would say, "Against the southern area of Judah, or against the southern area of the Jerahmeelites, or against the southern area of the Kenites." David would save neither man nor woman alive, to bring news to Gath, saying, "Lest they should inform on us, saying, "Thus David did." And thus was his behavior all the time he dwelt in the country of the Philistines. So Achish believed David, saying, "He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant forever"' 1 Samuel 27.8-12.

David used his time in attacking the enemies of Israel. Surely, we might say, the end justifies the means. But David convinced Achish by

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deceit that he was fighting for the Philistines and got a permanent job. Now he was known, not as the servant of God, but as the servant of Achish. Providentially the plan worked for David; he had success in battles and he had a quiet town to go back to for rest. But then David hit a very serious problem.

‘Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, “You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men.” So David said to Achish, “Surely you know what your servant can do.” And Achish said to David, “Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever”’
1 Samuel 28.1-2.

The Philistine army gathered together to fight the Israelites, and Achish commanded David to join them. This reminds us that our plans in the short term may seem to succeed, but in the long term disaster can come.

Here David found himself in a terrible fix. Achish trusted him as a friend, and now was sure David would fight for him. So David answered Achish in a non-committal manner; his answer could be taken two ways. This is typical of the speech of compromised believer. You cannot say they have told a lie, but they have knowingly allowed you to be deceived by their answer. This is how David responds to Achish: *‘Surely you know what your servant can do.’* Note when Achish says, *‘I will make you one of my chief guardians forever’*, David allowed him to think this.

We then move on to chapter 29 where we read of David marching on parade with Achish.

‘Then the Philistines gathered together all their armies at Aphek, and the Israelites encamped by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed in review by hundreds and by

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thousands, but David and his men passed in review at the rear with Achish. Then the princes of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to the princes of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or these years? And to this day I have found no fault in him since he defected to me." But the princes of the Philistines were angry with him; so the princes of the Philistines said to him, "Make this fellow return, that he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become our adversary. For with what could he reconcile himself to his master, if not with the heads of these men? Is this not David, of whom they sang to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" 1 Samuel 29.1-5.

It is evident David gained great favour with the king and was trusted by him because of his apparent loyalty. But the Philistine princes, men of war, were more cynical and cautious, and in fact were angry with Achish. They did not trust David, and in fact were the means used of God to deliver David from potential ruin. He had become a marked man in Israel as a traitor, and a man hated by the princes of the Philistines. How kind and gracious God is with his servant David, despite David's protestations to Achish of loyalty.

This is how God has to work with us sometimes. He has to take us in hand and is a merciful barrier to us. So it was that under the sovereign, overruling hand of God, David was sent away from the Philistines by Achish. But David had to experience the chastening hand of God for his folly:

- in aligning himself with Achish and so spoiling his testimony by compromise;
- in leaving Ziklag unguarded while he paraded with his men with King Achish.

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Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way. So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive' 1 Samuel 30.1-5.

What a responsibility husbands and fathers have not to leave their family unguarded. This comes when we do not pray with them, do not care for their wellbeing spiritually and practically.

From experiencing a sense of satisfaction and success at the workings of his ingenuity, David was now weeping.

14. STRENGTHENING OURSELVES IN THE LORD

1 Samuel 30.6-31

The Lord had delivered David in His merciful providence from compromise with and destruction by the Philistines. But in chapter 30 he entered into a time of correction and discipline under the wise hand of God.

Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. So David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all." 1 Samuel 30.6-8.

He had returned to Ziklag to find the Amalekites had taken the town and carried off their families and possessions. Yet even in this distressing event the mercy of the Lord was evident – not one had been killed or abused. After the lesson of chastisement from the Lord, David once again operated under God's direction and way.

As we consider this chapter as a whole we can see the focus is upon David, and God's dealings with him. The people had reached the bottom of the pit – they had no more power to weep.

- David was greatly distressed – verse 6;
- He strengthened himself in the Lord his God – verse 6;
- David inquired of the Lord – verse 8;
- He obeyed the Lord – verse 9;

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- He pursued in the way of the Lord – verse 10;
- His kindness was evidenced in the way of the Lord – verse 11;
- David recovered all the captive ones – verse 18;
- He presented some of his spoil as a free gift to those in Judah – verse 26.

We see here that the way of the Lord with His people brings them from despair to deliverance with the fruit of demonstrations of grace.

But now we will focus specifically on verse 6 where we read David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. When the spiritual mind takes control it always directs us to God (see verses 6-9). They had experienced the pain of the loss of everything; before their eyes was only destruction. God uses distress, disappointment and destruction as His opportunity to demonstrate His delivering power. David cast himself upon the Lord his God. In natural distress there was spiritual direction – he strengthened himself in the Lord.

I would like now to suggest to you ways in which we can strengthen ourselves in the Lord, considering other parts of Scripture as well.

Consider the Lord

This was the testimony of Moses at the end of his life in the last message he gave to the Children of Israel. He knew he was at the end of his life here on earth and was strengthening the Children of Israel in the Lord.

'Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He' Deuteronomy 32.1-4.

Strengthening Ourselves in the Lord

After many years of walking with the Lord one thing Moses did know was that God is faithful.

a. The greatness of His power

‘God has spoken once: twice have I heard this; that power belongs unto God’ Psalm 62.11.

The creative power of God is one of the great evidences of His strength. An illustration helps us understand His great power.

During the troubled years of the Second World War, the Italian forces were driven out of Eritrea in North Africa. In an effort to make the harbour unusable to the Allies, the Italians took great barges, filled them with concrete, and caused them to be sunk across the entrance to the harbour. When the Allies entered, their problem was to remove those barges in order that the harbour might become usable again.

They did so in a very ingenious way. They took great tanks – not the kinds of tanks we have in our cars or in our homes, but those huge tanks which are used to hold hundreds of thousands of gallons of fuel in great oil refineries. They sealed the tanks so they would float, and they caused them to be floated over the place where the barges were below and attached chains from the tanks to the barges. When the tide came in, the barges were lifted by the tanks floating with the tide. The barges were pulled from the sucking sand at the bottom of the bay. It was then a relatively easy matter to remove them and make the harbour usable again.

Think of the power in that! The barges were chained to the tanks. The tanks were dependent upon the tides. The tides were pulled by the gravitational attraction of the moon, and the moon was moving in harmony with the whole cosmos. Tremendous, unimaginable, dynamic power belongs to the tides and ultimately to God. What are we depending upon – the power of man or the power of Almighty God?

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b. The greatness of His saving power in salvation

Here is the great evidence of His strength.

'Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since he always lives to make intercession for them' Hebrews 7.25.

God is able to save and to deliver in the most extreme cases. An example of this saving power is John Newton's conversion (1725-1807). He described himself as a 'wretch' who found 'amazing grace'.

John Newton was nurtured by a devoted Christian mother who dreamed that her only son would become a preacher. But she died when John was a child, and he followed his sea-captain father to a sailor's life. John did not care for the discipline of the Royal Navy: he deserted ship, was flogged, and eventually was discharged. He then headed for regions where he could 'sin freely', and ended up on the western coast of Africa working for a slave trader who mistreated him. Newton's life during that period bore the appearance of a modern prodigal son: 'a wretched-looking man toiling in a plantation of lemon trees in the Island of Plaintains. Clothes had become rags, no shelter and begging for unhealthy roots to allay his hunger.' After more than a year of such treatment, he managed to escape from the island in 1747.

The following year his ship was battered by a severe storm. Newton had read *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, and during the life-threatening voyage he was wonderfully converted and changed by God's grace in Christ.

Newton became greatly influenced by George Whitefield and the Wesleys. He was ordained within the Anglican Church, and in 1764 he took a curacy in Olney. Known as the 'old converted sea captain', he attracted large audiences. In his old age, he once said, 'My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Saviour!'

Strengthening Ourselves in the Lord

c. The greatness of His love and care

‘For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ Romans 8.38-39.

David was separated from his dear ones and his possessions. He did not know if he would ever see them again. The awful sight of Ziklag burned to the ground stood before him. The soldiers around him in grief threatened to stone him, but the love of God for him in Christ Jesus remained the same!

*When trouble like a gloomy cloud
Has gathered thick and thundered loud,
He near my soul has always stood;
His lovingkindness O how good.*

Samuel Medley, 1738-99

God’s love for His people remains unchangeable throughout all circumstances.

d. The greatness of His sovereign control

Notice in this account some amazing examples of God’s sovereignty.

- The timing of God in ensuring David was sent home;
- The protection of God over his family;
- The servant who was sick and yet remained alive who was of great help in directing David.

‘Then David said to him, “To whom do you belong, and where are you from?” And he said, “I am a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick. We made an invasion of the southern area of the Cherethites, in the territory which belongs to Judah,

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and of the southern area of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire." And David said to him, "Can you take me down to this troop?" So he said, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this troop" 1 Samuel 30.13-15.

e. The greatness of His providences in the past

*His love in times past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.*

John Newton, 1725-1807

Remember past answers to prayer when you know the Lord has assuredly brought you through. Remember His kindness, compassion and longsuffering towards you.

*He who has helped me hitherto
Will help me all my journey through,
And give me daily cause to raise
New Ebenezers to His praise.*

John Newton, 1725-1807

f. The greatness of His promises

'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus the Lord' Roman 8.38-39.

g. The greatness of His purposes

'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren' Romans 8.28-29.

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The blessing of being conformed to Christ is God's purpose. See the prophet Habakkuk:

'Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labour of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation' Habakkuk 3.17-18.

h. The greatness of His unchanging nature

'For I am the Lord, I do not change' Malachi 3.6.

God will not forsake His people or change in His grace and mercy towards them.

"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness will not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord who has mercy on you' Isaiah 54.10.

Seek the Lord in prayer

'When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek"' Psalm 27.8.

Seek His will, His Word and His wisdom. David clearly sought the will of the Lord in this situation; he inquired of the Lord. The ephod mentioned in verse 7 was an outer upper garment the priest wore as a sign of adoration to God (*Exodus 28.4*). Here David, in all his distress, sought the Lord and signified his adoration of the Lord in prayer. His question to the Lord was: was he to go after the enemy and rescue his people and belongings?

King Hezekiah sought the Lord's will in a similar way.

'And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord' Isaiah 37.14.

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Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tyre?

Trust and obey the Lord

'Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah' Psalm 62.8.

God told David to go and rescue his people and possessions. He was told by God he would recover all without fail! David readily and quickly obeyed. He had no idea of the exact whereabouts of the enemy, and he had no idea of the size of the army. He simply went forward trusting in the Lord.

Praise and thank the Lord for His total deliverance

David recovered all.

'So David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away, and David rescued his two wives. And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all. Then David took all the flocks and herds they had driven before those other livestock, and said, "This is David's spoil"' 1 Samuel 30.18-20.

Note the remarkable preservation of God upon the wives and children! So when Jesus came to rescue us He recovered all; not one of His sheep will be lost. Here is a direction for prayer for our own families. O Lord, as David recovered all and Jesus recovers all of His sheep, may this include my family!

Conclusion

Here we have the answer for the soul in times of distress and even despair. There is one positive exercise that remains in your life amidst all the negatives: encourage yourself in the Lord!

15. DAVID – SHOWING RESPECT IN OUR DEALINGS TOWARDS GOD

2 Samuel 6

We continue on from David encouraging himself in the Lord in *1 Samuel 30*, to *2 Samuel 6*. Just a brief overview of the events recorded in the chapters in between will suffice.

- *1 Samuel 31* records the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in battle;
- *2 Samuel 1* records the gracious distress of David for Saul, and his deep mourning for Jonathan;
- *2 Samuel 2* records the appointment of David to be king of Judah;
- *2 Samuel 3* records David house getting stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul getting weaker and weaker; it tells of Abner meeting David to make a covenant transferring the Kingdom of Israel to David; and also how Abner was murdered by Joab in a jealous and revengeful act;
- *2 Samuel 4* records the fall of Mephibosheth, Jonathan's five-year-old son and his resulting lameness; it tells of the murder of Saul's son Ishbosheth and David's judgment on the murderers;
- *2 Samuel 5* records the appointment of David to be king of Israel.

So now, in *2 Samuel 6*, David is king over two kingdoms – Judah and Israel – according to God's will. At this point in Scripture the life of David continues as before, with his experience central to the text. *2 Samuel 6* records the manner in which David dealt with the Ark of the Covenant, which taught him lifelong lessons about respect for God. The lessons David learned remain true for us today in our own approach to God.

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The Ark of the Covenant was a small rectangular wooden box overlaid with gold. It had a solid gold lid called the Mercy Seat. At each end of the lid were cherubs, made from beaten gold, which faced each other whose wings overshadowed the Mercy Seat. This golden box carried two tablets of stone inscribed with the Law of God.

The Ark was a symbol of God's rule. David described it in *1 Chronicles 28.2* as *'the footstool of our God.'* The Ark was also a symbol of God's revelation, for placed within it were the stone tablets of the law. In addition, the Ark symbolised God's reconciliation on the Day of Atonement, for the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, symbolising forgiveness and peace.

The Ark was very precious in God's sight for it pointed to the coming sacrifice, the Saviour Jesus Christ. It was to be treated with the greatest respect! The Word of God records the journey of the Ark of the Covenant to its resting place in Jerusalem. In this journey there are several lessons we can learn regarding showing respect for God. Particularly in the final part of the Ark of the Covenant's journey, attitudes towards it are revealed. These attitudes reveal the manner of the person's approach towards God and their respect for Him.

1. The superstitious approach

'Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field. And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies." So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of

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hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

‘And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, “What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “God has come into the camp!” And they said, “Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!” So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers’ 1 Samuel 4.1-10.

In this account the Children of Israel had suffered defeat at the hands of the Philistines. They had gone to battle with the enemies of God in their own strength. They were doing the right thing but in a wrong way. In their own lives they had not been walking with God or worshipping God properly. The Ark of the Covenant remained at Shiloh, neglected by the priests. It was irrelevant to Israel!

After their first defeat they had a meeting and considered the situation. ‘Why has God not helped us? Why have we suffered such a defeat? What we must need is the Ark. As long as we get the Ark all will be well! We don’t need to pray, we don’t need to repent of our sin, we don’t need to humble ourselves before God, asking His deliverance. We just need to get the Ark here with all its ceremony.’ So, they sent

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for the Ark, and Hophni and Phineas, the ungodly priests, came with the Ark. When they arrived the Children of Israel gave a great shout! Now they had something visible. But Hophni and Phineas did not lead the Children of Israel in worship. They did not lead the Children of Israel in repentance or prayer to God. They just came with the Ark! The Children of Israel treated the Ark as some type of lucky charm or icon. If the Ark was there with them, they thought they would win. It was the symbol of God's power.

They were extremely superstitious in the way they treated the Ark. The Children of Israel had forgotten one of the main pictures of the Ark. It symbolised not only the power of God, but also the mercy of God. But the Israelites were not interested in their need of God's mercy, only His power.

When we are in trouble and we want God to help us, to deliver us, are we only interested in the God of power to be on our side? Are we material or spiritual? Are we forgetting our first need of the God of mercy in our lives?

From this example we can also see the danger of relying just on the outward form and ceremony rather than attending to the need of the heart. We should worship God in spirit and in truth.

For the Children of Israel it was far easier to call for the Ark and rely on something visible than attend to the real problem – to pray, repent of their sin and plead the mercy of God.

2. The dishonouring approach

'Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face

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to the ground before the ark of the Lord. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it' 1 Samuel 5.1-4.

Having captured the Ark in a second successful battle, the Philistines placed it by their own god. They treated Jehovah God on the same level as one of their own gods. They considered their god, Dagon, and their religion on the same level as Jehovah God. Having no real knowledge of Jehovah God they treated the Ark in their ignorance. But Dagon fell before the Ark twice! Remember, God will not share His glory with another.

From this we can see how every idol and false religion that comes before Jehovah God must fall. Our pride must fall before God like Dagon.

3. The irreverent, casual approach

'Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men of the people, and the people lamented because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter' 1 Samuel 6.19.

The ark arrived at Beth Shemeth. The men of Beth Shemeth rejoiced and worshipped God with the Levites. But then a problem arose. The over-confident men decided to investigate the contents of the Ark and opened it up, showing a total lack of respect and reverence for God's holiness. They were smitten by God's anger as sinful men showing irreverence to a holy God.

This reminds us that the God we worship is indeed a holy God and we must show Him reverence. We need to beware of the casual approach to the worship of God. Beware of an outward reverence that covers an inner casual approach to worship; just bringing our bodies and not our minds; not bothering to listen to the sermon which is an act of worship; dozing off in our minds, not thinking about what we are singing or reading; thinking that just coming is enough; we have

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done our duty and that's it. That is irreverent worship. It is putting the friendship of the people, the social activity, before God.

When we approach God in worship we need to have respect for the holiness of God! We stand on holy ground in worship. Confidence in Christ before God as our Father must remain reverent, never casual.

4. The careless approach

'Again David gathered all the choice men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the Lord of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark. Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the Lord on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God. And David became angry because of the Lord's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day. David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?"'
2 Samuel 6.1-9.

God's righteous anger came upon Uzzah when he put his hand out to steady the Ark. David became angry with God. How could God do such a thing? Uzzah was only trying to do his best to stop the Ark sliding off the cart.

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But the problem here is the way they were transporting the Ark. Again, they were doing the right thing in a wrong way. Instead of following God's instructions, they had found a far easier, quicker and more convenient way of carrying the Ark. But this was treating the holiness of God like the unbelieving Philistines – with no respect.

God had clearly given instructions that the Levites were to carry the Ark on poles. This new cart was not God's way for the Ark to be transported. The Ark of the Covenant must be treated with greatest respect. Consider the situation of the Ark on the cart. It would have been jolted, shaken and insecure, with the stone tables of the law probably sliding about inside. But when the Levites carried it with reverence and care, what a sight; what stability; what smoothness and serenity!

King David should have known better. He should have used the Levites in the first place, but he gathered together all the important people and bypassed the anointed people, using a cart. It was politically correct, expedient and popular but careless. Putting the Ark on the cart represented a careless approach to holiness of God.

5. Respect to His appointed ways

'So David would not move the ark of the Lord with him into the City of David; but David took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his household' 2 Samuel 6.10-11.

"For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order." So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord... And so it was, when God helped the Levites who bore the ark of

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the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bulls and seven rams' 1 Chronicles 15.13-15, 26.

We read David carried the Ark to the house of Obed-Edom, no doubt with respect and reverence. The Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his house. The next time they officially transported the Ark, David acknowledged his mistake. He then ordered all events properly with respect and in the fear of the Lord.

Notice how God helped in His appointed way (*1 Chornicles 1.26*). When we approach, worship and serve God in His way He will help us and bless us. Two examples help us.

- When the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan, the Levites stood in the middle carrying the Ark on their shoulders, firm and resolute with respect and dignity (*Joshua 3.14-17*);
- When the Children of Israel walked around Jericho, in front were the Levites carrying the Ark with respect and dignity (*Joshua 6. 8-11*).

On both of these occasions God blessed and delivered the Children of Israel. There is a definite link between respecting God and His way, and being blessed by God.

6. Joy and humility in praise

'And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep. Then David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. Now as the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart' 2 Samuel 6.13-16.

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Here David danced before the Lord, being overwhelmed with joy at the coming of the Ark into the city. It is clear that what David did, he did in his heart before the Lord in a spirit of humility. It was his way of showing the people they must worship the Lord, not the king. His robes were shed, his crown was taken off – all that was left were his undergarments. The music was before the Lord – the dancing was before the Lord – his gladness was before the Lord.

This expression of joy was a civic celebration of joy outside in the street and towards the Lord. This action of David is not prescriptive of a worship service; it was simply a unique celebration. When Michal showed her cynicism, and revealed the innermost thoughts of her heart despising him, David explained his actions. He was overwhelmed with his deliverance and his exaltation to the throne. His purpose was to show the nation not to rejoice in their new king but to rejoice and praise the Lord.

Remember the danger of cynicism and being judgmental without knowing a person's heart. As Michal's cynicism brought barrenness to her, so cynicism will bring spiritual barrenness to us. The context of an event is always key to the actions of people at the event.

7. Respect to the holiness of God

'Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands (for Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and he stood on it, knelt down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven)'
2 Chronicles 6.12-13.

King Solomon had built a magnificent Temple for the glory of the Lord, which pointed to Christ. The Ark of the Lord had been carried into the Holy Place in the inner part of the sanctuary. The glory of the Lord in a cloud had descended upon the place. Everything that day

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had been done with respect to the holiness of God. Finally, King Solomon, in front of the congregation, went down on his knees. He was pleading for the blessing of God upon the Temple. His father David humbled himself in the street before the Lord with the Ark. Solomon his son humbled himself before the Lord in the Temple in a service with the Ark. God blessed King Solomon and the Children of Israel with His presence as they respected His holiness and majesty, humbling themselves before Him.

8. With thanksgiving and praise

‘When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord’s house. When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshipped and praised the Lord, saying: “For He is good, for His mercy endures forever”’ 2 Chronicles 7.1-3.

One of the essential elements of our approach to God is praise and thanksgiving in humility. Here the Children of Israel learned to praise the Lord on their knees.

9. Pleading the mercy of God

‘Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went

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down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” Luke 18.9-14.

Here we have the Pharisee whose approach to God was full of self-righteous, arrogant pride. He prayed to himself, about himself, to promote himself, and to satisfy himself. He did not consider he needed the mercy of God, but he did think he deserved His favour. He also craved the praise of man. He was desperate to be noticed by man. His approach was totally wrong because it was based upon himself and his own merits.

The tax collector succeeded where the Pharisee failed because the tax collector approached God on the basis of His mercy and love. The original word used here for ‘merciful’ in the prayer of the tax collector is the same Hebrew word as that used for the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant.

In the Old Testament when a lamb was slain the blood was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. God saw the blood and considered His justice satisfied. So the tax collector was pleading the blood of the sacrifice before God. He understood his position of need before God. He knew God was holy, but his prayer also revealed that he knew God was a God of love and mercy.

His way was the right way – pleading God’s mercy and love, to be mercy-seated! So for us to approach God today in the right way we have to come pleading the precious blood of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of God’s mercy and love at Calvary.

Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from

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an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching' Hebrews 10.18-25.

Conclusion

To know God, we must approach Him in His way.

16. DAVID - ALL IN GOD'S TIME

2 Samuel 7

In the previous chapter we considered the lessons David learned about respect for God and His holiness. In chapter 7 we find David the king under the prosperity and blessing of the Lord. The Lord had given him rest from his enemies around him.

Man's intentions

Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies all around, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains." Then Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you" 2 Samuel 7.1-3.

Please note here the Lord had given prosperity. The Lord in His goodness does provide times of prosperity for His children. Wealth in and of itself is not to be considered evil; the evil is in the selfish, materialistic stewarding of it.

Secondly, remember again the Lord had given David this period of time when he could relax and enjoy the blessings. It is important to always keep in mind that we are the Lord's, so what we have is from the Lord. The Lord gives all things richly to enjoy (*1 Timothy 6.17*). To enjoy God's goodness is to engage with His provision wisely.

This brings us to David's concern to do something for the Lord. The desire was right; the idea was right; and the motive was right (refer to *Psalms 116*). But David was going to learn another lesson. Good intentions in and of themselves, assuming what you are doing is right, can lead to presumption in our will. This type of approach could easily have led to David eventually placing a plaque on the front

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of the Temple: 'Built by David for the glory of God'. The plaque would be part David, part God, and God will not share His glory.

Those looking on would remember that '*Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*' (1 Samuel 18.7). 'What a great king we have! He is a man of war, a prophet, a preacher and our king. Long live King David!'

So something that sets out with good intentions, without God's blessing, will inevitably lead to it being mixed with pride. The Lord knows our hearts and the way Satan can spoil a good intention with our pride.

David sat down with Nathan in the splendour of his home and told Nathan of his plan. Nathan immediately gave his blessing on the project and encouraged David in the plan. All the boxes had been ticked; the plan was good; the provision was there. The decision to proceed was obvious.

Here we can see that viewing things from a pragmatic, sincere, circumstantial perspective is inadequate. However right something might seem to us, if God has not been consulted first then our plans are inadequate. So often we can fall into this trap of pressing ahead when everything seems so obvious and right, but at the same time failing to come before the Lord at the outset and ask His blessing and guidance. Man's intentions, however well-meaning and sincere, without God at the centre will lack authority and blessing.

This event also throws light on the need for the Lord's servants to be wise in their advice. Common sense, good ideas and sincere motives do not constitute, in and of themselves, grounds for guidance.

God's intention: His disapproval

'But it happened that night that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, "Go and tell My servant David, "Thus says the Lord: "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in?"'" 2 Samuel 7.4-5.

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God came to Nathan at night and brought him back to the right foundation in this project. God disapproved of David being the person responsible for building a temple for His presence in worship. This must have come as a shock to Nathan. Was not David a man after God's own heart? Had not God prospered, delivered and exalted David to be king? But God did not give His blessing on David being the man to build the Temple.

Here David and Nathan must be reminded that, however good our intentions, God must always be at the centre. God is in control, God always knows best and God's will must be done. God is all-wise and His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than ours (*Isaiah 55.9*). God has a better plan and better way.

God did not immediately reveal His plan, but rather taught Nathan to remember the past to discern the future.

God's condescension

“For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’” 2 Samuel 7.6-7.

He reminded Nathan of how the Lord had walked in a tabernacle with the Children of Israel. Here we are reminded of the divine condescension of God. He came to the place where the Children of Israel were wandering. He is saying, ‘Where they walked I have walked, as the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. I have presenced Myself in the Tabernacle, in a tent! I have condescended to dwell with you and be with you in all your way to provide and protect. At no point did I insist on a house to dwell in, but were with you where you were, as pilgrims tent dwellers.’

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God condescends to be with us wherever we are, to commune with us in all types of surroundings and life circumstances. If we are in a travelling state, as the Children of Israel were, God is with His people. If we are dwelling in a settled state as David was, God is there with His people. We worship a God Who condescends to dwell with His people.

'The Lord is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, Who dwells on high, Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth? He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes—with the princes of His people' Psalm 113.4-8.

God's personal providential dealings

"Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth"'" 2 Samuel 7.8-9.

We may ask, 'Why is God addressing this situation in such a manner? Surely there is nothing wrong in the plan!' In God's order good plans must always correspond to good attitude and adherence to God's ways of dealing. Here David is exalted, at rest and with good intentions, but these intentions could easily slip into legalism. David was a hair's breadth away from considering himself doing God a favour – in control of his dealings with God! So the Lord had to bring David back to basics and remind him Who it was that had put him on the throne.

This was one of the dangers for the Children of Israel; they forgot the Lord their Maker and Provider, and said in their hearts, 'We have

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conquered – we have made ourselves a great nation.' This is the same for us at times when we are being blessed, to forget the Giver and forget our dependence on Him.

Notice here in verses 8-9 the emphasis of the Lord. *'I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel.'* *'I have been with you wherever you have gone – I have never left you or forsaken you. I have cut off all your enemies from before you – I have been your power and defence. I have made you a great name. In My Sovereign purposes I have made you great, David.'* David must never, ever forget he was on the throne because of God's grace, power, mercy and purpose.

See David's testimony in *1 Chronicles 22.5-13*.

Now David said, "Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord must be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it." So David made abundant preparations before his death. Then he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the Lord God of Israel. And David said to Solomon: "My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house to the name of the Lord my God; but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight. Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.' Now, my son, may the Lord be with you; and may you prosper, and build the house of the Lord your God, as He has said to you. Only may the Lord give

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you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill the statutes and judgments with which the Lord charged Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be dismayed.”

This was the reason God dealt with his plan in this manner – to ensure its foundations remained on grace. So for us, let us remember the basis of our dealings, and submit to God's way and God's choice of man. Guidance is one of the greatest challenges and tests for a Christian and the local church.

God's plan and purpose

“Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David’ 2 Samuel 7.10-17.

God is saying, ‘I will do more than you have in mind.’ God's vision is eternal; our vision is time-bound.

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- *'I will appoint a place for My people Israel'* – the earth is the Lord's, and He places Israel as a nation;
- He will plant them – give them a fixed abode;
- He will protect them and will be as a shield to them;
- He has caused them to rest from all their enemies;
- *'The Lord tells you that He will make you a house'*, not the other way round! – all things are to be in order – God first;
- *'I will set up your seed after you'*;
- *'He shall build a house for My name'* – for God's glory;
- *'I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever'*;
- *'I will be his Father, and he shall be My son'*;
- He will chasten him when he backslides;
- His mercy will not be removed from him;
- Your house – your kingdom – your throne shall be established forever.

David had in mind a house for the Lord – the Lord had in mind a house, kingdom and throne. In fact, God had in mind, through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, an eternal Kingdom. Here is a Kingdom that will be everlasting, beyond the time of David, looking to the Lord Jesus Christ. All this is pointing us to the coming Messiah.

Now we see how David responds to the words of the Lord through his servant Nathan. Note how Nathan faithfully told David the word of the Lord, despite it contradicting his own previous blessing.

Prayer

'Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?"' 2 Samuel 7.18.

Note that in verses 1-2 he sat before Nathan. Now he sits before the Lord.

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Humility

'Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. Is this the manner of man, O Lord God? Now what more can David say to You? For You, Lord God, know Your servant"' 2 Samuel 7.18-20.

Who am I? Note how the Lord had worked in David's heart. This is similar to Ruth's question:

'So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"' Ruth 2.10.

This is the 'why' of grace! 'Who am I to have received such blessing?'

Adoration of God

- God's complete knowledge of all things

'Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"' 2 Samuel 7.18-19.

- God's greatness

'Now what more can David say to You? For You, Lord God, know Your servant. For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know them. Therefore You are great, O Lord God. For there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like Your

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people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name—and to do for Yourself great and awesome deeds for Your land—before Your people whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, the nations, and their gods?’ 2 Samuel 7.20-23.

- God's purposes

‘For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, Lord, have become their God. Now, O Lord God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish it forever and do as You have said’ 2 Samuel 7.24-25.

- God's name be magnified

‘So let Your name be magnified forever, saying, “The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel.” And let the house of Your servant David be established before You’ 2 Samuel 7.26.

- God's purposes will come to pass

‘For You, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed this to Your servant, saying, “I will build you a house.” Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You. And now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant’ 2 Samuel 7.27-28.

- God's blessing

‘Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever; for You, O Lord God, have spoken it, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever’ 2 Samuel 7.29.

Conclusion

‘Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge

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of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen' Romans 11.33-36.

17. THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF THE LORD

2 Samuel 9.1-13

The previous chapter records the military victories of David as he served the Lord in warfare. The nations David attacked were those under the judgment of God for their idolatry. The wickedness and cruelty of those nations had also come to the point of God's judgment. The horrors of war were undoubtedly great, but great were the horrors of those nations' rebellion. They thought nothing of sacrificing their firstborn children to the gods; life was cheap; cruelty and oppression was commonplace; there was no fear of God in their eyes .

In one verse, describing these wars, the solemnity of the judgment under David is revealed.

'Then he defeated Moab. Forcing them down to the ground, he measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those to be put to death, and with one full line those to be kept alive. So the Moabites became David's servants, and brought tribute' 2 Samuel 8.2.

A line of death and a line of life, a picture of the Day of Judgment for believers and unbelievers! There was a need for judgment in God's time as these nations totally refused to repent. David was, under God, a mighty warrior and leader of men; great were the spoils of victory. David, the man of God, dedicated all the spoils of victory to the Lord.

Secondly, a new and better kingdom was being established under God's guidance through David. Eventually this would lead to Messiah's Kingdom being established with the incarnation of Jesus. Enemies needed to be subdued either through their repentance or, in rebellion, by judgment. Under God David subdued them, forced them

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to the ground and defeated them. Spiritually our unbelief, rebellion and pride must be struck down and our rebellion subdued.

The Lord preserved David wherever he went in his warfare against the enemies of God. Now David was at rest again from wars and was in Jerusalem reigning with judgment and justice.

We now come to chapter 9, a true-life story which portrays something to us of the majesty of the merciful God. David's kindness to Mephibosheth is a beautiful type of the lovingkindness of God to sinners. Sinners are those who have disobeyed God's perfect standard of life, those undeserving of His mercy and grace. This is true of every human being!

To understand the reason behind David's kindness to Mephibosheth we have to go back to David's life as a young man in the house of King Saul. There he met Saul's son Jonathan, and they become the best of friends. The name 'Jonathan' means 'God is gracious'. Jonathan lived out the meaning of his name in his relationship with David. Jonathan was loyal and kind to his friend David, willing even to risk his life and face the jealous anger of his father Saul in the defence of David. Jonathan even had a javelin thrown at him by Saul because of his loyalty to David!

The foundation of the relationship between Jonathan and David was secured by a covenant promise, a sacred commitment affirming the true love of friends.

'Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armour, even to his sword and his bow and his belt'
1 Samuel 18.1-4.

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“And you shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live, that I may not die; but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “Let the Lord require it at the hand of David’s enemies.” Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul’ 1 Samuel 20.14-17.

When David eventually became king he did not forget his promise. He was faithful to the covenant. Fifteen years had now passed since Jonathan’s death, but the promise remained. So David asked the question:

*‘Now David said, “Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”’
2 Samuel 9.1.*

The promise still controlled and directed David’s behaviour. The state of Saul’s family was now so diminished and so unworthy that David could have found enough reasons to forget or deny the covenant had ever been made. In any case, probably only Jonathan and he knew about the covenant. Jonathan had gone to be with the Lord. Why bother? However David, the man of God, was true to his promise; he was not doing a u-turn. The promise made under a covenant remained. It was confirmed three times by David.

*‘Now David said, “Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”’
2 Samuel 9.1.*

‘Then the king said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?”’ 2 Samuel 9.3.

‘So David said to him, “Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father’s sake, and will restore to you

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all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually” 2 Samuel 9.7.

David was concerned about the honour of God. ‘The kindness of God’ was the governing issue here.

David was told about Jonathan’s only remaining living son.

‘And there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba. So when they had called him to David, the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” He said, “At your service!” Then the king said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?” And Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan who is lame in his feet.” So the king said to him, “Where is he?” And Ziba said to the king, “Indeed he is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar”’ 2 Samuel 9.2-4.

So David sent for Jonathan’s son.

‘Then King David sent and brought him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo Debar. Now when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. Then David said, “Mephibosheth?” And he answered, “Here is your servant!”’ 2 Samuel 9.5-6.

Mephibosheth’s name means ‘he scatters shame’. He was crippled in a fall as a small boy.

‘Jonathan, Saul’s son, had a son who was lame in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel; and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth’ 2 Samuel 4.4.

Mephibosheth was living in a place called ‘Lo Debar’ meaning a ‘a desolate place’. So the man with a name meaning ‘he scatters shame’

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came from a place with a name meaning ‘a desolate place’ to King David who lived in a beautiful house made of the best cedar wood. Mephibosheth was brought into the king and he fell on his face, showing reverence to David. He curled himself up as small as he could before the king showing fear and respect.

His reception by David

This was characterised by:

- His personal call – ‘Mephibosheth!’ which brought out a personal reply – ‘Here is your servant’;
- His protection – ‘Do not be afraid, Mephibosheth. I will certainly act in a covenant way with you on account of Jonathan your father’ (verse 7a);
- His provision: ‘I shall restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather’ (verse 7b);
- His position – ‘but you will always eat bread at my table like one of the king’s sons’ (verses 7, 10, 11 and 13). Mephibosheth was amazed at the kindness of David. He had no right to share in David’s wealth and riches. As he bowed before the king he felt himself to be like a dead dog. He felt worthless, helpless and undeserving. But despite what Mephibosheth thought about himself, the promise was fulfilled. David assured Mephibosheth that he would eat of his table continually, be a permanent guest at his table and be adopted as an honoured member of his household.

Application: God’s grace to sinners

Consider Mephibosheth as a picture of sinners:

- His situation: his lameness (verses 3 and 13b); his helplessness and dependence as a cripple – there were no wheelchairs, ramps or disabled access in his day. Mephibosheth had no rights before David and was dependent upon his mercy and grace.
- His position: he is described as the son of Saul and is therefore the enemy.

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'For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life' Romans 5.10.

- His reception of grace and kindness.

Now consider David's actions and compare them to those of the heavenly Father towards sinners.

- He determined to show kindness to Mephibosheth for the sake of his covenant with Jonathan. Our heavenly Father determined to show great kindness to undeserving sinners for the sake of His covenant promise to sinners through Jesus Christ;
- He found Mephibosheth crippled and living in shame in a desolate land. So our heavenly Father finds us spiritually crippled in a shameful state in a desolate land;
- On meeting Mephibosheth David promised that he could eat bread at his table continually. There is a continual provision from God for sinners. They are invited to the Gospel table to find forgiveness, peace, reconciliation and joy;
- David's promise to Mephibosheth was for life. God's promise in Christ is for eternity;
- Being received into fellowship with David meant more to Mephibosheth than any material possessions. It is just so with repentant sinners who value fellowship with their heavenly Father more than anything else;
- When further judgment came upon Saul's house for their past cruelty Mephibosheth was secure because of David and his promise. In the same way sinners may find security from the judgment of God through Christ.

Praise God for His lovingkindness and mercy to sinners through His Covenant of Grace!

18. DAVID - LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

2 Samuel 11

Introduction

Chapters 9 and 10 commence with describing David as a man living according to the Spirit in God's way.

'Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?' 2 Samuel 9.1.

'I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me 2 Samuel 10.2.

Chapters 9 and 10 testify to kindness – the fruit of the Spirit, living according to the new nature. But chapter 11 testifies to living according to the flesh, the old nature.

'It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem' 2 Samuel 11.1.

So we move from living in the Spirit to living according to the flesh. How may we account for such a change in the attitude and behaviour of David? He may have felt it was time to take time out and have a break; or he may have been exhausted with his leadership responsibilities as king of Israel and Judah. It is more likely that Satan made a pointed attack on David while he was resting and relaxing his guard.

It teaches us, first of all, the danger of losing alertness to evil and allowing ourselves to be ruled by the flesh. We may be thinking, 'This chapter does not affect me – I have never committed adultery or murder.' Turn to the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the so-called 'Sermon on the Mount'. We find there profound and astounding teaching that

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gets right to the heart of the matter of living for the Lord. The Lord deals with the subject of adultery –

'You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart' Matthew 5.27-28.

and murder –

'You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, "You fool!" shall be in danger of hell fire' Matthew 5.21-22.

In God's holy mind adultery is not only the physical act, it is also the engagement of the mind. This means for us that we must consider how we look, what we view, what we watch, what we read and what we picture in our mind. The point is that by nature we all sin and we all commit adultery. Putting the world before God, making a friend of the world (worldliness) in God's sight is a form of spiritual adultery. This statement may seem rather shocking but it is biblical and it aligns us all to the nature of David's sin.

'Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God' James 4.4.

There is no place for 15/18 rated films in a Christian home. If you watch this type of thing on television, DVD or Internet, or listen to or read such material, you are committing violence, adultery and murder in your heart. We rightly take great care of what our children are being taught, but what about what they watch and hear? Do they sit

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on the sofa with us and watch immorality or violence? What are you doing to your loved ones? We have to beware of hypocrisy in these matters in what we allow in our own homes while judging others.

God has allowed this account for a purpose – not to judge David but to confess our own failures. We also need to remember that David was forgiven, but the hurt of this serious sin never left his family. If we allow these things in our home while under grace, it will still have ongoing ramifications of suffering. So our subject in this chapter is the danger of living according to the flesh and the need we have to be kept.

We need to be kept

Robert Robinson had been converted under George Whitefield's preaching in 1752, and later became a Baptist pastor in Cambridge. Towards the end of his life he gave way to frivolous habits. One day during this period of his life he was travelling by stagecoach. Another passenger, a lady and total stranger, was going over some hymns and especially and persistently referred to the well-known hymn 'Come thou fount of every blessing' as one that had been of tremendous blessing to her soul. As she continued speaking suddenly Robert Robinson agitatedly burst out at her. 'Madam, I am the poor, now unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago. I would give a thousand worlds if I could enjoy the feelings I had then!'

We are as vulnerable as David when left to ourselves and need to understand our dependence upon the Lord. Robinson also wrote in that hymn:

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander Lord I feel it,*

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*Prone to leave the God I love;
Take my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it from Thy courts above!*

Robert Robinson, 1735-90

Living according to the flesh when we tend towards delegation rather than commitment

'It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem' 2 Samuel 11.1.

David sent Joab to battle while he stayed at home. The time to go to battle against the enemy had come and David stayed at home – others could do the work. Joab was a man of war, and without David controlling him he would go it alone and show no mercy in judgment. So in delegation David could not really rest in his conscience thinking he had delegated wisely. Joab, left to himself, was a bloodthirsty man who had no problem with going beyond justice to murder. So David was not only guilty of failing to serve the Lord, he was guilty of handing over to an unbelieving man.

When we become selfish and seek to serve ourselves, our judgment and decision-making become selfish as well. They will lack discernment and spiritual guidance and our concern to serve the Lord will diminish. We will also become selfish inasmuch as we will prefer to stay at home and let others go to battle with the enemy. When our first reaction is to delegate rather than serve, then we should beware of where we are spiritually.

Living according to the flesh means we become vulnerable when tempted

'Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof

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he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold' 2 Samuel 11.2.

David's spiritual antenna was switched off and the fleshly antenna was switched on – the lust of the eyes! When we are in such a condition Satan is an expert at providing something or someone with which to sin. We may be feeling despondent, lonely, uncared for, weary, unsettled and wanting some 'me time'. Satan will readily provide you with a Bathsheba to unashamedly parade herself before you – maybe via the Internet.

David could not sleep. He was restless and had no peace in his heart, so he got onto the roof of the palace. He was surveying his kingdom when his eyes rested upon a beautiful woman washing herself. She knew she was in full view of anyone who cared to walk on the palace roof and had made no provision for propriety while washing. In fact she was a person Satan could use easily. David was living in the flesh at this point and therefore the lust of the eyes soon found something to behold.

In *Psalm 119.148* we read of David awake in the night watches, meditating on the Word of the Lord – that was walking in the Spirit. But here we read of David at evening time with his eyes far from the Word of the Lord walking in the flesh. How about you? Are you walking in the flesh or the Spirit? If you are walking in the flesh your condition is perilous and you will fall – you are most vulnerable.

Living according to the flesh means we become selfish and demanding

'So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house' 2 Samuel 11.3-4.

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The pride of life makes us demanding and dictating. Notice here David sent for her, took her and then lay with her. We can order others about and even dictate to them how they should take things, but not the Lord! Living in the flesh makes us live for ourselves – it's all about me, the 'me' factor rules, and we become demanding and selfish.

Living according to the flesh makes us deceitful

'And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child." Then David sent to Joab, saying, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah had come to him, David asked how Joab was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah departed from the king's house, and a gift of food from the king followed him. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. So when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Did you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Wait here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. Now when David called him, he ate and drank before him; and he made him drunk. And at evening he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house' 2 Samuel 11.5-13.

We do not know if Uriah was a believer but we do know he was an honourable man loyal to his calling. When David deceitfully

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attempted to ensure Uriah spent the night with his wife, Uriah slept at the door of the king's house. He would not take home comforts for himself while his colleagues were sleeping in the open field.

Living according to the flesh makes us act like a worlding

A believer, King David, attempted to make Uriah drink to excess, but still Uriah did not go against his conscience and go to his wife. Maybe by now Uriah was suspicious of David's motives; perhaps someone had let on what they knew, for David had sent for Bathsheba by one of his servants. There was knowledge of this in the palace. Manipulation is a sure sign of walking according to the flesh, and here David attempted to manipulate another.

Living according to the flesh makes us hard in our thinking and attitude

In the morning it happened that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die" 2 Samuel 11.14-15.

Here David is writing Uriah's death warrant. Lust, deceit and hardness have overwhelmed David. The way David was behaving was now wilful, determining evil upon Uriah. Joab readily fell in with the evil design. Joab did not send a message back to David, as Uriah had spoken to David in Jerusalem – 'I will not do this thing.' Joab was party to the murder of Uriah.

David demonstrates in his testimony here the danger of living according to the flesh and not the Spirit. Hardness takes over and we seek the overthrow of another. We want them out of sight and out of mind. Instead of confession, there is hardness. Our thought pattern becomes unspiritual and our decisions worldly. Hardness motivates us, covering up our own faults at the expense of another's demise. Left to ourselves the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; who can know it? (*Jeremiah 17.9*). The heart becomes hard.

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Living according to the flesh makes us destructive

'So it was, while Joab besieged the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there were valiant men. Then the men of the city came out and fought with Joab. And some of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite died also. Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war, and charged the messenger, saying, "When you have finished telling the matters of the war to the king, if it happens that the king's wrath rises, and he says to you: 'Why did you approach so near to the city when you fought? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go near the wall?'—then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also'"' 2 Samuel 11.16-21.

The plan worked all according to its design and Uriah was killed. But notice here, not only Uriah but others were destroyed in this plan of murder! When we set ourselves on such a course of destruction it becomes unmanageable. Others become affected by our designs. For example, marriage break up destroys others also. Churches are broken by hardness of heart when love is absent and self takes over. We can lose our heart for the work of the Lord and take a 'couldn't care less' attitude to the needs of others. This is like saying our feelings and our objectives are more important than the Gospel.

The following chapter shows how David, before repentance, was even ready to condemn others for their actions. It was not until Nathan came with a word from the Lord – 'You are the man!' – that David saw sense.

Living according to the flesh makes us unspiritual

'Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one

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as well as another. Strengthen your attack against the city, and overthrow it.’ So encourage him”’ 2 Samuel 11.25.

The news came to David of Uriah’s death. David sent a message back, *‘Do not let this thing displease you.’* Our communication becomes insincere, unspiritual, unhelpful and misguided. We encourage people who are acting according to the values of the world not the Word. David encouraged Joab – *‘The sword devours one as well as another.’* ‘Press on Joab; don’t worry about our sin. Do not let this thing displease you.’

Conclusion

Are we living according to the Spirit or according to the flesh? David said to Joab, *‘Do not let this thing displease you.’* But at the end of the account we read these solemn words – *‘But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord’* (verse 27).

How serious is it to displease God in our lives? If we live and die under the displeasure of the Lord, without recourse to the Saviour Jesus Christ, we will experience the eternal displeasure of the Lord. God has eternal pleasure evidenced by Heaven; He also has eternal displeasure evidenced by hell. The testimony of David here is that of a believer who was overwhelmed by temptation and then backslid, but it also a testimony of how sin displeases God.

But we will see in chapter 12 the wonderful way that one overwhelmed by temptation is subsequently overwhelmed by God’s grace. The God Who delights in mercy, takes pleasure in restoring the fallen sinner who repents. Therein we have the essence of the Gospel to both the repenting backslider and the repenting unbeliever coming under God’s smile through repentance and faith in the Messiah Jesus Christ.

Psalm 51 is David’s testimony of repentance and faith. Conviction leads to confession and to Calvary, where we see Jesus our Saviour.

*There’s a way back to God
From the dark paths of sin;*

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*There's a door that is open
And you may go in:
At Calvary's cross
Is where you begin,
When you come as a sinner to Jesus.*

E H Swinstead, 1882-1950

19. DAVID – LIVING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

2 Samuel 12

The previous chapter and the beginning part of this chapter reveal an example of David walking in the flesh, and we identified some characteristics of which to beware. However, we will see in this chapter the wonder of God's grace to backsliders. We will see how God 'moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform' (William Cowper, 1731-1800).

'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'
Isaiah 55.9.

God's sovereignty

'Then the Lord sent Nathan to David' 2 Samuel 12.1.

Some months had elapsed from the time of David's serious backsliding into adultery and murder. The situation in the palace was reasonably settled, and David was now married to Bathsheba. Sadly, the testimony of David as a man of God who could be trusted had been severely damaged. Maybe at this time David, like a politician in a scandal, kept his head down until matters had died down. It is more likely that David, as a backslidden believer, was extremely uneasy in his soul and could not enjoy life.

In the previous chapter we saw how David considered himself to be the man in control who ordered matters. The word 'sent' appears a number of times relating to man, but nowhere in relation to God. But at the commencement of this chapter the first thing we notice is God's stop time in correction – *He sent!*

This chapter is about the sovereign God in control. The thing David

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had done displeased the Lord, and therefore the Lord dealt with David to correct him. So here we have the Lord taking control of the situation. The Lord sent Nathan the prophet to David. David did not invite Nathan on his own terms; God sent Nathan on His terms and with His message. Probably at this time prophets were not so welcome in the palace, but God sent Nathan with a message.

The first point to make here is that God is sovereign, and can and does intervene whenever He deems it right. God can send a Nathan with a message to you from His Word whenever He chooses.

God's sword

'And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveller came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"' 2 Samuel 12.1-7.

When the Lord deals with His people in correction it is never vindictive but it is always piercingly effective.

'For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden

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from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need' Hebrews 4.12-16.

God wields His sword graciously with His people to bring about a good outcome – the 'afterward' of God.

'Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it' Hebrews 12.11.

Here Nathan gave an account of a matter within David's kingdom that would raise his hackles against injustice. A rich man took the ewe lamb of a poor man to provide a meal for his guest, an unkind act of oppression. David's anger was immediately raised – judgment was pronounced on the rich man – he shall surely die! Not only shall he die, but David pronounced his doom in the name of the Lord!

Another sign of backsliding is the tendency to see the faults in others and immediately judge them. Here the Lord, by His Word through his servant, raised David's emotions. David responded with anger. God, in His wisdom and knowledge of David's heart, had him well and truly where He intended him to be. In God's time, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Nathan said to David: *'You are the man!'* The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God was sent forth under the power of God and it entered his heart.

At this point I would remind you that even though this is the convicting ministry of God, it is still grace. God was convicting David to restore him – it was all of grace. Please remember this in God's

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dealings with you. Under God's convicting power David cried, *'I have sinned against the Lord!'*

God's standard

'Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon'"' 2 Samuel 12.7-9.

Remember in the previous chapter David was in control, organising matters and doing his own thing, whatever. But in this chapter there is a solemn reminder that actually God was in control and was the Lord of David's life. So Nathan boldly stood before David and delivered a message for the Lord. 'I anointed you king; I delivered you from the hand of Saul; I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. If that was not enough for you, I would have given you much more. Why have you despised the commandments of the Lord to do evil in His sight?' Here is the main issue of sin.

God's severe method of sanctification

"Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun."

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‘So David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die”’ 2 Samuel 12.10-14.

Here was God’s assessment of David’s sin as it was in His sight:

- Conviction: You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword;
- Consequence: The sword shall never depart from your family because you have despised God = sin;
- Conviction: You have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife;
- Consequence: I will raise up adversity against you from your own house – secret sin would now lead to open shame;
- Confession: I have sinned against the Lord;
- Comfort: The Lord has put away your sin – you shall not die.

Here is one of the great statements of grace. David had put away Uriah out of sight, out of mind, to attain his selfish desires, but in repentance and confession, and in his brokenness before the Lord he was told, “The Lord has put away your sin.”

Psalm 103, a Psalm of David, illustrates how he had experienced the grace of God.

‘Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to

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anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us' Psalm 103.1-12.

The consequence of David's sin was that it had caused great opportunities for the enemies of the Lord to turn their hatred against the Lord and blaspheme His name. This is one of the most serious aspects to backsliding; it provides the unbeliever the comfort of criticism, to scoff at the person and, in doing so, to scoff at God. Therefore, the Lord intervened and took away the evidence of David's adultery – the child. David pleaded for the life of the child, knowing God is a God of grace and mercy. But when, according to God's Word, the child died, David submitted to God's will. We see David back again in his right mind. David was restored, meek, repentant and submissive. He went into the house of the Lord and worshipped.

He explained his behaviour to his servants.

'So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food." And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me'" 2 Samuel 12.20-23.

God's surprising scheme

'Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to

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her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the Lord loved him, and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: so he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord' 2 Samuel 12.24-25.

God often surprises His people by the majesty and extent of His grace, turning something negative into something positive. Who would have thought of this! David as a forgiven man, now walking in the Spirit, worshipped and submitted, and comforted Bathsheba. The outcome was Solomon of whom it is said, '*Now the Lord loved him.*' Consider the earthly genealogy of Jesus! It includes Rahab, a converted prostitute and now Solomon, the child of a marriage God rebuked David for, yet God remained true to His grace.

Conclusion

The wonders of God's amazing grace:

- Sovereign grace – God's pursuit of David in his sin;
- Strategic grace – using a parable;
- Severe grace;
- Correcting grace – 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear' (John Newton, 1725-1807);
- Comforting grace;
- Saving grace – God raised David up out of the pit;
- Sanctifying grace – God removed David's sin but sanctification would involve trial in the family;
- Surprising grace – God's grace is truly amazing.

20. DAVID – FAITH EXERCISED IN REJECTION AND IN GRIEF

2 Samuel 15

King David had been restored into fellowship with the Lord following his serious backsliding. The Lord had given Nathan a message of conviction to bring before David, which he did faithfully. David responded in the way that a true believer should respond – a broken heart bringing forth repentance. The Lord assured David he had forgiven his iniquity and overruled all according to His marvellous grace.

But God had also told David that, as a result of his backsliding, the sword would not depart from his house. Here in this chapter we find God's warning coming to fulfilment.

The problem arose through one of his sons named Absalom, the thief who stole the people's hearts. Absalom's agenda was motivated by vanity and pride. There was nothing spiritual about his behaviour. If he was aware that Solomon would inherit the throne he was probably consumed with jealousy and anger, but all this was deep inside his heart where no one but God could see. On the outside Absalom was popular – he was everybody's 'yes' man; he was the smooth man of his day.

We notice in the verses 1-12 that it is all about Absalom – his life revolved around himself, he built himself up.

After this it happened that Absalom provided himself with chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. Now Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way to the gate. So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him and say, "What city are you from?" And he would say, "Your servant is from such and such

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a tribe of Israel.” Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you.” Moreover Absalom would say, “Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice.” And so it was, whenever anyone came near to bow down to him, that he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him. In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Now it came to pass after forty years that Absalom said to the king, “Please, let me go to Hebron and pay the vow which I made to the Lord. For your servant took a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, ‘If the Lord indeed brings me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord.’” And the king said to him, “Go in peace.” So he arose and went to Hebron. Then Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, ‘Absalom reigns in Hebron!’” And with Absalom went two hundred men invited from Jerusalem, and they went along innocently and did not know anything. Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counsellor, from his city—from Giloh—while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number’ 2 Samuel 15.1-12.

Absalom

- He provided for himself. The terminology should alert us here to the danger of being selfish in our behaviour.
- He promoted himself. Fifty men to run before him – Absalom wanted to be noticed, to be important.
- He presented himself. Before anyone could see the king, they had to see Absalom. He was always positive with the petitioner, rather

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like a member of a political opposition party who can make promises without having to fulfil them. He can point out the problems without having to provide the solutions. This was the way in which Absalom sowed his seeds of discontent.

- He ingratiated himself. He told everyone, ‘Your case is right and just’ without hearing the case. ‘If only I was a judge! I would deal with everyone’s case and give him justice.’ All you had to do was to bow the knee to Absalom. He would take you in his arms and kiss you. He acted as a prince who cared for you from the heart! So the people would go back home and say, ‘The prince has shown me favour.’

From this we need to learn about the danger of an ‘Absalom’ in the church. Many churches have been ruined by men who promise everyone everything and point out all that is wrong. The members listen, become dissatisfied and discontent, and reject their pastor for an Absalom.

But we might say, ‘Surely Absalom was only fulfilling what God had warned David about – problems within his family.’ Yes; God’s warnings had come to pass, but that does not take away the sin of Absalom and his deceit.

God’s sovereign overruling is a mystery unsolvable to the human mind – but faith believes. Consider Calvary: wicked hands did God’s will.

‘Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death’ Acts 2.23.

How did God view the actions of Absalom, and how does God describe such a person? As an actor and a thief.

Absalom was not in a hurry. He waited to make his move to become king and usurp the throne, denoting patience. This mention of forty

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years does not refer to the amount of years Absalom rebelled. It is rather considered to be that the time from when Israel first desired a king to the present; Israel had had forty years of kingdom rule.

In any event, Absalom did chose his time carefully and patiently, yet all the while motivated by pride and vanity. He could afford to act slowly – he was the prince; he already had power, wealth and a good lifestyle. Absalom was a man who thought he was in control, and he would make his move in accordance with his own timing. Over these forty years he made himself the most popular man in the kingdom – the ‘go to’ man.

From this we realise we need to be aware as a church of those who appear to be smooth and say the right things to you, who make you feel good about yourself and scratch where it itches in your life, and yet have war in their hearts. Satan is often subtle in the way he works. He provides wolves in sheep's clothing – such was Absalom. He simply just kept ‘on message’ and eventually made his move with devastating consequences. We need to be aware of the wiles of the devil; he is not always a roaring lion, but sometimes like an angel of light.

- He deceived himself. Absalom deceived David under the premise of serving the Lord in Hebron, but actually Absalom, by his lifestyle, had come to deceive himself totally. He thought he was in control, that he could do what he wanted when he wanted. Now he felt ready to be king – *‘Absalom reigns in Hebron!’* There was no fulfilling his vow to the Lord at Hebron. There was, however, much about fulfilling his vow to himself. There was much to feed Absalom's pride. He increased, yet Absalom was increasingly deceiving himself.

How may we discern such an ‘Absalom’ in our own experience? They are those who provide for themselves, promote themselves, present themselves and ingratiate themselves. Their popularity and support does not come as a result of a movement of the Spirit in the church.

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Rather it comes as a concerted effort over time to bring attention to themselves, and to gain support for themselves. The Word of God describes such people as acting, and as stealing the hearts of the people.

David

The following verses provide valuable teaching for us as to how faith operates in times of rejection and grief.

‘So David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, “Arise, and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword”’ 2 Samuel 15.14.

- Faith not only considers ourselves but the implications of our actions and decisions upon others.

‘Then the king went out with all his household after him. But the king left ten women, concubines, to keep the house’ 2 Samuel 15.16.

- Faith will allow the Lord to work in the hearts of His people if they are going to support His work.

‘Then all his servants passed before him; and all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had followed him from Gath, passed before the king. Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why are you also going with us? Return and remain with the king. For you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. In fact, you came only yesterday. Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you.” But Ittai answered the king and said, “As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even

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there also your servant will be.” So David said to Ittai, “Go, and cross over.” Then Ittai the Gittite and all his men and all the little ones who were with him crossed over’ 2 Samuel 15.18-22.

- Faith desires the Lord’s blessing on all who stand for what is right.

‘Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why are you also going with us? Return and remain with the king. For you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place”’ 2 Samuel 15.19.

- Faith accepts God’s provision of support and comfort whoever the Lord sends – in this case Ittai, a foreigner.

‘And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over. The king himself also crossed over the Brook Kidron, and all the people crossed over toward the way of the wilderness’ 2 Samuel 15.23.

- Faith is obedient to the permissive will of the Lord, however painful and difficult it is to understand.

‘There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city’ 2 Samuel 15.24.

- Faith depends only upon the Lord not in a symbol of His presence. See also 1 Samuel 4.3:

‘And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies.”’

and John 12.26:

‘If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour.’

David – Faith Exercised in Rejection and in Grief

- Faith submits to the will of the Lord whatever the Lord ordains for us in our spiritual experience.

‘There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. Then the king said to Zadok, “Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. But if He says thus: ‘I have no delight in you,’ here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him.” The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait in the plains of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.” Therefore Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem. And they remained there’ 2 Samuel 15.24-29.

- Faith expresses itself not only in times of triumph but also in times of grief, following the Lord.

‘So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up’ 2 Samuel 15.30.

See also Luke 19.37, 41-44:

‘Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen...Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close

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you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

- Faith prays to the Lord to work in the hearts of people against us over whom we have no control.
- Faith worships the Lord wherever and whatever bad news we receive.

‘Then someone told David, saying, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” And David said, “O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!”’ 2 Samuel 15.31.

- Faith discerns the Lord’s provision and uses it wisely, even if the Lord’s way surprises us.

‘Now it happened when David had come to the top of the mountain, where he worshipped God—there was Hushai the Archite coming to meet him with his robe torn and dust on his head...So Hushai, David’s friend, went into the city. And Absalom came into Jerusalem’ 2 Samuel 15.32, 37.

Conclusion

*The just by faith shall live,
Nor fear the powers of hell;
All blessings that a God can give,
In Christ most richly dwell.

When sense and reason fail,
And all things dark appear,
By faith the just shall say, ’Tis well,
Jehovah will appear.

If providence should frown,
And crosses still increase;
By faith, the just shall live and own
God their salvation is.*

21. DAVID – DIFFERENT ATTITUDES IN TIMES OF OPPRESSION AND STRESS

2 Samuel 16-21

Here we note the attitude of David in the process of restoration to Jerusalem from oppression. We will be considering various texts over seven chapters in an overview.

Reaction

a. Ziba

‘When David was a little past the top of the mountain, there was Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, who met him with a couple of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred summer fruits, and a skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, “What do you mean to do with these?” So Ziba said, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who are faint in the wilderness to drink.” Then the king said, “And where is your master’s son?” And Ziba said to the king, “Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, ‘Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me.’” So the king said to Ziba, “Here, all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours.” And Ziba said, “I humbly bow before you, that I may find favour in your sight, my lord, O king!”’ 2 Samuel 16.1-4.

Before David was Mephibosheth’s servant Ziba, an opportunist taking advantage of his disabled master. It would appear that David’s reaction to the slander of Ziba is hasty, lacking in discernment of the whole picture. David was a man in a hurry at this point and had not

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time to think either clearly or carefully. More considered thought could have raised legitimate questions in his mind regarding the slander. For example, the issue was obviously not the restoration of Saul's kingdom; he was dead, as was Jonathan. The issue at the time was the raising up of Absalom's kingdom.

From this reaction of David we learn important lessons regarding the attitude of a believer to slander:

1. Do not be hasty in spirit in taking sides in a matter;
2. Do not make a judgment against another party without at least hearing their own case;
3. Beware of those who flatter to deceive.

'He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips' Proverbs 20.19.

b. Mephibosheth

'Now Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. And he had not cared for his feet, nor trimmed his mustache, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he returned in peace. So it was, when he had come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" And he answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me. For your servant said, 'I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go to the king,' because your servant is lame. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king, but my lord the king is like the angel of God. Therefore do what is good in your eyes. For all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king. Yet you set your servant among those who eat at your own table. Therefore what right have I still to cry out anymore to the king?" So the king said to him, "Why do you speak anymore of your matters? I have said, 'You and Ziba divide the land.'" Then Mephibosheth said to the king, "Rather,

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let him take it all, inasmuch as my lord the king has come back in peace to his own house” 2 Samuel 19.24-30.

Mephibosheth explained the facts to David and placed himself under the mercy of David, having no personal rights. David’s reaction was one of understandable expediency, while at the same time unjust. Ziba was a deceiver and thief, and had obtained his assets under false pretences. Nevertheless, he had supported David and was a significant person politically among David’s entourage. David accepted Mephibosheth’s explanation of the facts, but did not totally reverse his previous hasty decision. He decided to take the middle-of-the-road option and told Mephibosheth to divide the assets between them. Whereas Ziba’s reaction, when David handed over the assets, was to seek more favour from David, Mephibosheth’s reaction was one of total loyalty to David whatever the cost – *‘Rather, let him take it all, inasmuch as my lord the king has come back in peace to his own house.’*

Mephibosheth could not do much in Jerusalem in David’s absence but he had done what he could. His appearance in Jerusalem was one of sadness and mourning at David’s absence. There was no doubt for anyone in contact with him where his loyalty lay. He was lame, limited but loyal. This example teaches us that, while we may feel weak and limited, we can do what we can for the Lord. Every little step we take in service and loyalty for the Lord helps us. It is evident that David respected his fellowship with Mephibosheth as later he commanded his life be preserved (see *2 Samuel 21.5-9*).

Restraint

There is, in our fallen human nature, a propensity to revenge as a mistaken form of justice. By nature we like to get our own back or have the last word on a matter. This policy of life, even humanly speaking, rarely succeeds. For the Christian there is a better way as we follow the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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'Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"' Luke 23.34.

'For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously' 1 Peter 2.21-23.

c. Shimei

'Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!" Then Abishai the son of Zeruah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day." And as David and his men went

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along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust. Now the king and all the people who were with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there' 2 Samuel 16.5-14 (note especially v11).

Shimei was of the house of Saul and hated David with a bitterness beyond reason. A spirit of bitterness will undoubtedly affect our language. Here we see it in cursing and shouting at David. For a believer a spirit of bitterness may have a more polite manifestation, but its root problem is the same. We tend to constantly point out the faults of the person we are embittered against. Basically, as with Shimei, however polite we may be by contrast we still just want the person out of our lives.

Here Shimei's heart revealed itself not only in speech but in action – throwing stones and speaking contemptuously. Bitterness causes us to become an accuser; so here David is accused of being a man of bloodshed. In the *Authorised Version* Shimei called David a son of Belial, meaning a child of the devil, the personification of wickedness. Bitterness made Shimei a declarer of the judgment of God: *'The Lord has brought upon you'* (verse 8). We can do this out of bitterness when the person we hate falls into trouble. We should beware if we are too ready to pronounce those in trouble as being under the judgment of God.

Here David was undoubtedly under the permissive will of the Lord, and he was undoubtedly being chastened. Nevertheless let us never forget –

'For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives' Hebrews 12.6.

God views the trials He allows in the believer's life as an indication of His love and care – we see them as judgment. Bitterness feeds a spirit of jealousy and rage within our hearts, as with Shimei.

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Here we come to some very significant points in David's understanding of his trial.

- He restrains the mighty men from chopping off Shimei's head;
- He acknowledges the permissive will of the Lord in allowing Shimei to attack him;
- He reasons, 'If my own son wrecks my life, why are you surprised a member of Saul's family does so also?' Here faith motivating restraint saves the life of Shimei and moves David into the arms of the Lord;
- Faith in the Lord whatever and wherever causes a spirit of restraint, not retaliation. The Lord in His mercy may return good for evil – only God can use this trial for my spiritual good.

Please note here the similarity in the experience of David to that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Men cursed Him and accused Him of being from Beelzebub of the devil. They demonstrated their bitter hatred but the Lord Jesus did not retaliate. Instead He showed holy and pure restraint, submitting to His Father's permissive will.

Twice David showed restraint with Shimei as he submitted to the permissive will of the Lord in His life. The second occasion was on his return to Jerusalem after Absalom's defeat.

'Now Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king when he had crossed the Jordan. Then he said to the king, "Do not let my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember what wrong your servant did on the day that my lord the king left Jerusalem, that the king should take it to heart. For I, your servant, know that I have sinned. Therefore here I am, the first to come today of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king"' 2 Samuel 19.18-20.

Here we are taught that a spiritually mature reaction to those in opposition teaches restraint. David showed great restraint and did not take the opportunity to take revenge or to have the last word.

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d. Absalom

Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.” And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom’ 2 Samuel 18.5.

David pleaded in fatherly love for the men of war to deal gently with his son, despite all his rebellion. Again we see the restraint of David, longing to see repentance and restoration in relations. However, Absalom came to a tragic end, hanging from a terebinth tree and slain by Joab. He was buried in a pit with a very large heap of stones over him. Joab restrained the men of Judah from pursuing Israel and all Israel fled to their tents. Absalom the ‘yes man,’ the seemingly loving man, the ‘all-things-to-all-people’ man, was now dead and buried. He had been executed, and treated in a manner against King David’s orders by Joab. All around was still trouble.

When our actions, motives and words are not governed by truth, in the end it is all confusion for us. Truth does not change. What does change is the way we react and respond to truth.

Please note the significance of 2 Samuel 18.18 in connection with Absalom’s testimony:

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up a pillar for himself, which is in the King’s Valley. For he said, “I have no son to keep my name in remembrance.” He called the pillar after his own name. And to this day it is called Absalom’s Monument.’

Absalom set up for himself a monument. He had been the man of the moment. However he took no care of his soul. He was not buried at the place of his monument but in a pit with a heap of stones.

e. The two messengers

Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, “Let me run now and take the news to the king, how the Lord has avenged him of his

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enemies." And Joab said to him, "You shall not take the news this day, for you shall take the news another day. But today you shall take no news, because the king's son is dead." Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." So the Cushite bowed himself to Joab and ran. And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "But whatever happens, please let me also run after the Cushite." So Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, since you have no news ready?" "But whatever happens," he said, "let me run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain, and outran the Cushite.

'Now David was sitting between the two gates. And the watchman went up to the roof over the gate, to the wall, lifted his eyes and looked, and there was a man, running alone. Then the watchman cried out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he came rapidly and drew near. Then the watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, "There is another man, running alone!" And the king said, "He also brings news." So the watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man, and comes with good news." So Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, "All is well!" Then he bowed down with his face to the earth before the king, and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king!" The king said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant and me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what it was about." And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still. Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "There is good news, my lord the king! For the Lord has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you." And the king said to the Cushite, "Is the young

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man Absalom safe?” So the Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm, be like that young man!” 2 Samuel 18.19-32.

David now received the news that Absalom had been killed. Two men came with the news, one sent and another unsent. The unsent man Ahimaz arrived first, but only had part of the account to convey. When David had seen him from a distance he had hope, for he was a good man probably with good news. Ahimaaz, sad to say, is rather typical of unsent, liberal preachers. They do know what the truth really is; they dabble in part of it, but leave out the essentials, as Ahimaaz did. They do not want to convey all the truth! The difficult parts are left out to focus on those elements that will make us feel better. ‘All is well!’ is their cry. When the crucial question came from David, Ahimaaz avoided giving the answer. ‘I saw a great tumult but did not know what it was about.’ The vital question remained unanswered by Ahimaaz.

We can also see here the danger of wanting to be the bearer of news without knowing all the truth. This can happen when we want to convey news without authority to do so from the source. The news then becomes unreliable. As Christians we should, as far as possible, be conveyers of accuracy. Here pride motivated Ahimaaz. He wanted to be in the picture and put himself forward to do so. He told part of the truth but not all the truth; he could not bring himself to convey the difficult part. He was unsent.

However the second man, the Cushite, was sent by Joab. He was to convey what he had seen. It was the Cushite who conveyed all the truth to David accurately, however difficult. Without over-spiritualising, I do think there is an important lesson here in terms of ministry. The Cushite was sent for he had seen, he was prepared, he knew the truth and he was prepared to speak it. A minister is a person who is sent by God, being set aside for the purpose of preaching – he is a sent man.

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After hearing of Absalom's death, David appeared to lose his self-restraint in mourning over Absalom.

'Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: "O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!"' 2 Samuel 18.33.

David's mourning for Absalom became so consuming that he lost the greater picture of the kingdom need. There had been a great slaughter in the woods owing to the rebellion of Absalom – twenty thousand were killed. Thousands of parents were now bereft of their sons through a war brought about by the vanity of Absalom. So Joab rebuked David, but he did so very harshly and passionately.

'And Joab was told, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. For the people heard it said that day, "The king is grieved for his son." And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well. Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the Lord, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now." Then the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people,

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saying, “There is the king, sitting in the gate.” So all the people came before the king. For everyone of Israel had fled to his tent’
2 Samuel 19.1-8.

Joab was mighty warrior but a man of the world. He did not understand the deeper reason for David’s grief. David knew that the sword in the family was allowed by God as punishment for David’s infidelity and murder. So the depth of his grief, however all-consuming, was motivated by personal sorrow for his own backsliding. However, David recognised the wisdom in what Joab was saying, however harshly, and responded graciously.

This teaches us that the believer, even in grief, needs to be aware of the importance of their testimony. The world looks on, and especially those in leadership require great grace to remember the bigger picture. The Lord had permitted this event in the life of David and therefore grief must be measured by faith.

Restoration

f. Barzillai

‘And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim and went across the Jordan with the king, to escort him across the Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. And he had provided the king with supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very rich man. And the king said to Barzillai, “Come across with me, and I will provide for you while you are with me in Jerusalem.” But Barzillai said to the king, “How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king? Your servant will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. And why should the king repay me with such a reward? Please

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let your servant turn back again, that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what seems good to you.” And the king answered, “Chimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him what seems good to you. Now whatever you request of me, I will do for you.” Then all the people went over the Jordan. And when the king had crossed over, the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own place’ 2 Samuel 19.31-39.

At David's restoration to Jerusalem he was met by an elderly man by the name of Barzillai. This man had provided for David generously and in the right spirit. As they parted we read David blessed him – he prayed for him.

Generous people using their wealth for the work of the Lord are blessed by the prayers of thankful people. For example, George Muller prayed for a donor's son for twenty five years, and he was eventually converted.

David reasoned with and assured the men of Judah in Jerusalem of his peaceful intentions. However his homecoming was under the cloud of a dispute between Israel and Judah.

‘Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, “Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David's men with him across the Jordan?” So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, “Because the king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?” And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, “We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you. Why then do you despise us—were we not the first to advise bringing

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back our king?” Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel’ 2 Samuel 19.41-43.

g. Sheba

Sheba led an Israelite rebellion but ended up besieged in Beth Maachah. It took a wise lady to deal with the situation and avoid great bloodshed and close down the rebellion. She described herself as among the peaceable and faithful in Israel.

“Then a wise woman cried out from the city, “Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, ‘Come nearby, that I may speak with you.’” When he had come near to her, the woman said, “Are you Joab?” He answered, “I am.” Then she said to him, “Hear the words of your maidservant.” And he answered, “I am listening.” So she spoke, saying, “They used to talk in former times, saying, ‘They shall surely seek guidance at Abel,’ and so they would end disputes. I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?” And Joab answered and said, “Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.” So the woman said to Joab, “Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall.” Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem’ 2 Samuel 20.16-22.

David settled back in Jerusalem in his God-ordained office as king on the throne at Jerusalem. But the nation suffered three years of famine and David enquired of the Lord the reason. Further justice must be done on the house of Saul for their terror against the Gibeonites.

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David remembered his covenant with Mephibosheth and preserved his life for the sake of the covenant. He buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan in the tomb of their father Kish. After David had fulfilled God's means of justice and kept the covenant, God restored the land from famine. (See *2 Samuel 21.1-14*).

22. DAVID'S PRAISE, THANKSGIVING AND ADORATION

2 Samuel 22 & Psalm 18

Following this restoration and peace again in the land, David rendered unto the Lord the praise due to His name. It is this song of thanksgiving, repeated in the words of *Psalm 18*, to which we could also refer, that will now take up our consideration.

David's song of praise and thanksgiving is rich with descriptions of the character and work of the Lord. It is this theme that we will follow while learning from the context in which the praises are set.

David testified of how God blessed him spiritually, delivered him providentially, sanctified him and kept him. In all these experiences which are described for us in this song of praise and thanksgiving David constantly refers to the character and dealings of God.

The psalm in chapter 22 can be divided into three parts:

1. Verses 2-20 – Praise: motivated by Who God is, by what God does, and by his experience of God's wisdom and power;
2. Verses 21-31 – Thanksgiving: his God-given respect for righteousness, his God-given direction in life, his God-given wholeheartedness, and God's delivering mercies to him;
3. Verses 32-52 – Adoration: God's sovereignty in growing His Kingdom – Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory.

Praise: verses 2-20

- *'The Lord is my rock'* v 2: Two Hebrew words are used for rock in verses 2-3. Their combined meaning is revealed in the words translated 'fortress', 'strength', 'stronghold' and 'refuge'. The Lord is my rock is teaching us about strength, stability and security.

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- ‘...and my fortress’ v 2: My defence, my castle for the soul is provided by God.
- ‘...and my deliverer’ v 2: The Lord carries me away in safety. He is the cause of deliverance.
- ‘the God of my strength’ v 3: Lessons learned by the Lord’s people in the Way. See David’s testimony and song:

‘Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage’ Psalm 84.5.

‘Both the singers and the players on instruments say, “All my springs are in you”’ Psalm 87.7.

- ‘...my shield’ v 3: My protector, as a scaly hide of a crocodile is hard and yet sensitive to touch, giving protection while remaining sensitive to danger. With God’s protection we can be hardened in resistance but soft of heart.
- ‘...the horn of my salvation’ v 3: The word here has the meaning of a height and light, symbolising power. In the *Authorised Version* it is translated ‘high tower’, providing visual sight afar off.
- ‘...my stronghold’ v 3: In the New Testament Pauls teaches the need to pull down strongholds, meaning a mindset that is anti-God, resistant to truth and a barrier to righteousness. Here David testifies in his new nature of God’s mindset being his truth – security known by the truth of God, the Word of God and the way of God.
- ‘...my refuge’ v 3: The way of escape in trial and affliction.

‘But I will sing of Your power; yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; for You have been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble’ Psalm 59.16.

‘Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul’ Psalm 142.4.

David's Praise, Thanksgiving and Adoration

- '...my Saviour' v 3: Here the word 'Saviour' refers to our spiritual salvation in the Messiah. Note the word as used in *Isaiah: 43.3, 11*.

'For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place...I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no saviour' Isaiah 43.3, 11.

'And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the Lord because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Saviour and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them' Isaiah 19.20.

- My prayer-hearing God v 7: Note the similarity to Jonah's experience in this teaching –

'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple' Jonah 2.7.

David continues in his praise, motivated by the dealings of the Lord in his life – things known and felt in his life. He focuses on the awesome power of God and praises God for His wonderful power to deliver in verses 17-20.

Thanksgiving

- 'My lamp' v 29: How do we know the benefit of God's lamp in our lives?

'Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' Psalm 119.105.

Practically, the picture is of a person walking along an unlit pathway. There is danger of tripping up, walking in refuse or falling into a hole. A lamp light is essential on this journey to avoid hurt, to make progress on the journey, to provide the reality about the path before you and to alert you to dangers. It is essential to let others know you are on the pathway, and it provides the walker the light in which he

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can proceed in confidence. The Word of the Lord provides light along the Christian pathway, firstly as the light of truth and knowledge; secondly, as the light of direction; thirdly, as the light of counsel; fourthly, as the light of comfort and assurance; and fifthly, as the light which enables progress in the way.

- *'His way is perfect'* v 31: As for God – David has proved man's way is not perfect or reliable. But as for God – there is a profound, eternal difference.
- *'The word of the Lord is proven'* v 31: It is tested in the fire and proven to be pure, reliable and sure.

Adoration

- *'For who is God, except the Lord?'* v 32: Unashamed acknowledgement of the one true God. David knew about the Dagon event when it was broken before the Ark (*1 Samuel 5.1-8*, and see chapter 15). The Ark of the Covenant was banished from Philistia! God will not share His glory with another.
- *'...and who is a rock, except our God?'* v 32: This reminds us of the parable the Lord Jesus told of building the house of life on the rock or on the sand (*Matthew 7.24-27*).
- *'God is my strength'* v 33: David and Paul represent true faith in God.
'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'
Philippians 4.13.
- *'God is my strength and power'* v 33: Strengthened with might by His power in the inner man (see *Ephesians 3.16*).
- *'...He makes my way perfect'* v 33: His way is perfect so as I follow Him my way will be upright and mature.
- *'He makes my feet like the feet of deer'* v 34: Able to walk in difficult terrain, giving stability.

'Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

David's Praise, Thanksgiving and Adoration

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace' Ephesians 6.13-15.

- *'...and sets me on my high places' v 34:* Height is seen here in terms of protection and assurance.
- *'You have also given me the shield of Your salvation' v 36:* Here David teaches us about grace – it is given to us!
- *'...Your gentleness has made me great' v 36:* God's patient condescension with David sanctified his life. It matured his leadership ability.
- *'You enlarged my path under me' v 37:* He opened up opportunities to serve in God's way.
- *'You have armed me with strength for the battle' v 40:* We are reminded of David and Goliath.
- *'You have subdued under me those who rose against me' v 40:* meaning 'caused to stoop down' or fall.
- *'You have also delivered me from the strivings of my people' v 44:* meaning contentions, complaints and debates.
- *'You have kept me as the head of the nations' v 44:*

'Righteousness exalts a nation' Proverbs 14.34.

- *'The Lord lives!' v 47:* as opposed to the idols of the nations, made with hands.
- *'Blessed be my Rock!' v 47:* David writes here in terms of his communion with God. He has nothing but praise for his Rock.
- *'Let God be exalted, the Rock of my salvation' v 47:* Here the God of the salvation of my soul is meant.
- *'You have delivered me from the violent man' v 49:* See the words of Goliath as an example of what David has experienced.

'So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield went before him. And when the

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Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking. So the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!" Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel"
1 Samuel 17.41-46.

- *'He is the tower of salvation to His king'* v 51: Here the God of my providential deliverance is meant.
- *'...and shows mercy to His anointed'* v 51: David has learned to value the mercy of God.

Conclusion

David has learned that his successes and times of prosperity have been tempered with failures and wanderings, but the Lord his Rock has remained faithful and just, right and true.

In the next chapter David will utter these immortal words, *'Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure'* (2 Samuel 23.5). Here is his hope – everything about God is worthy of all our trust and praise for time and eternity.

23. DAVID'S LAST WORDS

2 Samuel 23.1-7

'Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.' Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase?"' 2 Samuel 23.1-5.

David was now entering the final stages of his life here on earth and his final words are of vital significance. The last words of a dying believer often carry tremendous weight and impact. Of course, we can do no better than remind ourselves of the final words of the Lord Jesus – *'It is finished!'* (John 19.30). We could also be reminded of the last words of Stephen being stoned to death –

'But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down

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and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep' Acts 7.55-60.

As we consider the last words of David the king, the first point I bring your attention to is humility. David, the son of Jesse, in his authority as king, does not forget his humble upbringing. His wording brings our attention to the power of God to take insignificant people and raise them up to serve; and not only to raise them up but to anoint them in leadership to bring spiritual blessing on others.

People make the mistake of judging a person according to their background and not according to God's grace. God does not need man's approval to raise up humble people to serve Him. He does so to magnify His name.

'Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you' 1 Peter 5.5-7.

The second point I make by way of introduction is to bring attention to the Trinitarian nature of David's writing. In verses 2 and 3 he refers to the Spirit of the Lord – the Holy Spirit; the God of Israel – the Father; and the Rock of Israel – the Son.

The third point that comes out of David's introduction is the absolute significance of the inspiration of Scripture. Again in verses 2 and 3 he says, *'The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue'*; and *'The Rock of Israel spoke to me.'* All Scripture is described as being God-breathed (2 Timothy 3.16). It has been said, 'The Scriptures do not breathe out God; God breathes out the Scriptures.' This is a profound and fundamental principle in understanding the inspired origin of Scripture.

David's Last Words

The word 'inspiration' is a translation of the Greek word 'theopneustos', which literally means God-breathed. The Latin word 'inspiro' is then used to translate this Greek word to bring us to our English word 'inspired'. So a Christian believes by faith that Scripture is God's inspired Word breathed out of Himself for us. The Scriptures are God's truth, wisdom, commandments, justice, grace, mercy, and assurance in Christ and His Holy Spirit.

Tyndale said: 'The Scriptures sprang out of God.' Therefore, coming from God, His Word originally given was both inspired and infallible, being without error. So when we talk about inspiration, we are speaking of the Bible's divine authority; the Bible is God-breathed and therefore God's Word.

The Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper said:

'Inspiration is the name of that all-comprehensive operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He has bestowed on the Church a complete and infallible Scripture.'

God by His Holy Spirit worked directly upon the mind of all those writing it.

- The Apostle Paul said, *'I have received from the Lord that which I also delivered unto you' (1 Corinthians 11.23);*
- On more than 2,600 occasions the Old Testament prophets said: 'The word of the Lord came to me', or 'Hear what the Lord says';
- *Exodus 33.11* records, *'So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend';*
- God spoke to Samuel with an audible voice, for example, in *1 Samuel 3*.

God also revealed His truth to be written through visions, as with Obadiah and with Ezekiel. Calvin said:

'We have to do with the Word which came forth from God's mouth and was given to us. God's will is to speak to us by the

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mouths of the Apostles and Prophets. Their mouths are to us as the mouth of the only True God.'

The fourth point that arises out of David's introduction is the question of what is meant here by 'Israel'. Twice David refers to Israel in relation to God, the first referring to the sovereign '*God of Israel*' working out His purposes to Israel; the second referring to the God of salvation working out His purposes in Christ, '*the Rock of Israel*'.

In the Old Testament 'Israel' is obviously used many times to refer to a nation in a time sense. However, it is also used to refer in a far wider sense to the Church of the living God in a spiritual sense. The Apostle Paul explains this to us.

'But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel...For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy...and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles...Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved"' Romans 9.6, 15-16, 23-24, 27.

'And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God' Galatians 6.16

Having this wider view of Israel, as having a spiritual application, will positively affect our reading of the Old Testament. It is not only of historic value with its accompanying lessons; it speaks of Christ and His Church – Israel.

"Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He

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expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24.26-32.

The fifth point is that David is writing here of a Covenant and a Kingdom. Because it is God's Kingdom and God's Covenant in Christ, David has total assurance and confidence in them. From this we learn to never assess God's Kingdom and God's promises based on circumstances. The certainties of God's Kingdom and His promises arise from God's revelation of them in His Word. In our Christian life we do not gain comfort or certainty from God's promises of His Kingdom based on circumstances, but through God's Word.

The sixth point we can make from these verses is the attraction of the King. Here David writes of the King Christ Jesus, the Messiah. The Kingdom is attractive to believers because the King is attractive to believers as Saviour and Lord. Here in this song David is writing in a Messianic sense of his salvation according to grace. His house is not so with God, his life has not been perfect, yet God has made an everlasting covenant with him. This is referring to the everlasting Covenant of Grace in Christ Jesus the Lord. Saul's kingdom and reign had been a failure, and David's had been affected by failure. Solomon's kingdom would also be. Yet there is a King whose Kingdom will remain eternally, and it is to this King and Kingdom David looks by faith; David writes of this King, the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Lord,

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inspired by the Holy Spirit. His personal testimony clearly leads us to Christ in salvation. Messiah brings –

a. Justice (v3)

He is true and wise.

'Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice. A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, and a cover from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land' Isaiah 32.1-2.

One of the greatest encouragements to faith is to be absolutely assured that the One in Whom we are trusting is honourable in all His dealings. He is a King Who reigns in righteousness and with authority because of Who He is and how He reigns – a Ruler in Whom we can have total and absolute confidence. He is described by those who trust in Him as *'The Lord our Righteousness'* (Jeremiah 23.6). God the Father Himself described the reign of His Son Jesus Christ in this way:

'But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions"' Hebrews 1.8-9.

In this verse we are directed to One Who is righteous in all His ways! As the perfect Man He walked in the fear of the Lord, His heavenly Father.

b. Light (v4)

He brings light as the true Light of the world.

'But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings' Malachi 4.2.

He is described in *Luke 1.78* by Zacharias as the Dayspring from on high Who has visited us.

c. Hope (v4)

A cloudless sky brings hope of a sunny day, the joy of the morning, fullness of joy.

'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full' John 15.11.

d. Life (v4)

As rain brings a vibrancy to the grass, so Christ brings life and strength to believers. It is, however, a tender vibrancy speaking of the nature of Christ here on earth.

'For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him' Isaiah 53.2.

David often wrote of the tender mercies of the Lord, a truth that amazed him. Here reference is also made to the shining of creation in the sun after the rain. There is a freshness, clarity, a shining of the leaves, brightness and new vigour. So Christ brings light, life and clarity in the Gospel.

The Messiah is the central figure to the Everlasting Covenant, which is:

a. Gracious (v5)

It is called the Covenant of Grace because it is ordained of God. It is applied freely to sinners ordained by God unto eternal life in Christ Jesus. It is a provision of the God of all grace, and its terms of reference are eternally unchanged.

b. Secure (v5)

It is ordered by God, and its security is underwritten by God. God is the reason and nature of the Covenant. It is what it is because it is God's promise.

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c. All-sufficient (v5)

In this Covenant is all my salvation; all my desire is wrapped up in it. Why is this Covenant different from any other covenant? It is God's promise and provision, and for His glory! This is David's desire. The Covenant is eternal, all-sufficient and unchangeable, planned and provided by God alone. It is a Covenant entered into by the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a Covenant sealed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Conclusion

David looked to this Covenant of Grace as his only hope of salvation and eternal security. He did so in the knowledge that his life and his own house were not so with God. So for us, we, like David, have to say – 'My house is not so with God', meaning it is not what it should be or could have been. Failure and backsliding have hindered my witness. Nevertheless, there is hope and certainty not because of me but because of God's grace in Christ Jesus. There is a Covenant ordered in all things and secure. God will forgive, save, receive and adopt us in Christ. His purposes towards us in Christ cannot and will not fail.

It was this amazing truth that sustained David as he neared the end of his pilgrimage here on earth. Here are the words of a dying man whose hope is founded upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. David was a man after God's own heart who had vast experience of life in poverty and in wealth. He experienced danger, persecution, betrayal, victories, failures, bereavement, strength and blessing. His failures were not used as an excuse to give up but rather for confession and greater endeavour. In the midst of his struggle with the flesh he grew and matured in his life of faith and obedience to God's way.

Now, when David assessed his life, he came to this point of openness and dependence upon God: If my hope of Heaven depended upon me, I am done for, I am lost, for my house is not so with God. Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant!

David's Last Words

The Scriptures are constantly faithful. As much as there is wonderful assurance to believers, there is a solemn warning to unbelievers. In a compromised world and Church, God's Word remains the same – it makes a divide, it makes a demarcation. In our world of so-called tolerance, where man seeks to be wiser than God in understanding the nature of love, God's love still remains true to His Word. It never contradicts His Law, and it never treats sin lightly. We only need to go to Calvary to see this! So David ends with the warning:

'But the sons of rebellion shall all be as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands. But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place' 2 Samuel 23.6-7.

And likewise the Word of God:

'But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death...But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life' Revelation 21.8, 27.

'But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practises a lie' Revelation 22.15.