



A Kingdom Established • David Spares Saul's Life • 1 Samuel 24:1-22 • 11/11/2018

Main Point

God expects us to choose the right thing, even if the wrong thing is more comfortable.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

At what times in life do you feel the most confident in who you are or what you're doing?

When do you feel the least confident? Why?

What is the key difference between confidence in God and other kinds of confidence we may feel?

Saul was never fully confident in God's plans for his life. He was wrought with feelings of insecurity and inadequacy in his position as king, stemming from a lack of trust in God. David, on the other hand, knew who he was and could live freely out of God's promises because he didn't have to prove himself to anyone. His confidence was in God and the call upon his life. When we are confident in God and His purposes in our lives, we can choose the right thing even if the wrong thing is more comfortable.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 24:1-7.

Verse 2 tells us Saul took 3,000 men with him to hunt down David. What does this tell you about Saul and his personality?

What was the source of the pressure on David to take matters into his own hands and kill Saul? What are some ways that type of pressure looks like in our lives today?

What do we learn about David's character from these verses?

David's men recognized the vulnerability of the king. They urged David to take advantage of the situation. David crawled to Saul's location and cut off the corner of Saul's robe. This act was more than benign aggression. It signified the transfer of power from Saul to David. By removing the corner of the robe, David also put Saul in violation of the law (see Num. 15:38-39). In essence, David symbolically declared Saul's claim to kingship was null and void.

David chose the uncomfortable hard thing, and it ended up being the right, God-honoring decision. What most often tempts you to choose the comfortable over the uncomfortable?

| Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 24:8-15.

What do you take away as David's main point in this exchange? What is the implication of David's words to Saul for us today?

Are you as content as David seems to be to simply let God effect His will, His way, in His time? Or are you likely to "help God out" in some way? Give a recent example.

David's addressing Saul as "my father" indicates his sincere respect for Saul as both his king and his father-in-law. He offered the scrap cut from Saul's robe as evidence of his innocence. That he did not kill Saul when a golden opportunity to do so was available proved he had no desire to assassinate the king. David protested his innocence to Saul and declared he would let God judge between them. David trusted God to exact vengeance if such was needed. So he promised he would never attempt to kill Saul.

| Have another volunteer read 1 Samuel 24:16-19.

What did Saul affirm about David's character and calling in this passage?

Think about how David acted in the face of opposition. How does this compare with how Jesus behaved when He faced His accusers?

Saul recognized the role of providence in what had occurred. He concluded the Lord handed him over to David. In reaching this conclusion, Saul acknowledged God's sovereignty over the monarchy of Israel and specifically over him.

Saul pointed out in verse 19 that David modeled doing good to those who mistreated him, a point the New Testament also emphasizes. Read Matthew 5:43-45 and Romans 12:14-21. Discuss these verses.

What qualities from the Matthew, Romans, and 1 Samuel 24 passages illustrate godly character? Of the traits on this list, which do you most need to work on in your life?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

David eventually does become king, just the way the Lord wanted him to. David had to endure a miserable life for many years and likely questioned God's plan on many occasions, but don't you think he looked back on that moment in the cave and was glad he chose the uncomfortable right over the comfortable wrong?

What is your biggest takeaway from this excerpt from Saul's and David's stories?

Right now in life, do you identify more with Saul or David? Why?

In either case, how can you remind yourself this week of who God has called you to be and what He has called you to do?

Pray

Close in prayer, asking God for the strength and confidence to choose the uncomfortable right in whatever situations your group members are facing. Pray for the help to obey Him and for the clarity to realize right and wrong, to trust God, and to follow Him in those moments when we want to do the wrong thing.

Commentary

| 1 Samuel 24:1-22

24:1-7. After Saul had responded militarily to the latest outbreak of Philistine aggression, he returned to Gibeah to focus on David. When his intelligence network informed him of David's whereabouts, he immediately assembled an elite fighting force "from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men" (v. 2). Having made a journey of more than thirty miles, the royal troops centered their efforts in the vicinity of the "Crag of the Wild Goats," an otherwise unidentified rock outcropping near the Dead Sea. As the troops made their way down a path cut by shepherds driving their flocks, they came to a series of sheep pens along the way (v. 3)—suggesting a favorable campsite for Saul's men—and a nearby cave. Providentially, the cave that Saul chose to use was the same one in which David and his men were hiding. Saul's vulnerability during this private moment was extreme, and David's soldiers knew it. In fact, the situation was so extraordinary that David's men concluded God made it happen to fulfill the prophetic words, I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish (v. 4). This prophecy is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture and probably represents an example of false prophecy; alternatively, it may have been a genuine prophecy relating to non-Israelite enemies misapplied to Saul.

David moved stealthily to Saul's location and used his weapon aggressively against the king. However, the aggression was symbolic in nature; he cut off a corner of Saul's robe. This act was far from meaningless because David's confiscation of a portion of the royal robe signified the transfer of power from the house of Saul to the house of David. Furthermore, by removing the corner of the robe, David made Saul's robe to be in a state of noncompliance with Torah requirements (see Num. 15:38-39; Deut. 22:12); thus, Saul's most obvious symbol of kingship was made unwearable. In essence, David had symbolically invalidated Saul's claim to kingship.

David immediately recognized the powerful implications of his act and was conscience-stricken (v. 5). By voiding Saul's claim to kingship, he was at some level lifting his hand against "the anointed of the Lord" (v. 6). This was more than an act against the king; it was rebellion against the Lord, who had commanded Israelites not to curse their rulers (see Ex. 22:28) and had previously punished Israelites who had expressed a rebellious attitude against authority (see Num. 12:2-15; 16:1-35). Having repented of his actions, David then worked to prevent his men from sinning in a similar manner (v. 7). Meanwhile, Saul, who somehow remained oblivious to all of this, returned to his men.

24:8-15. A most remarkable confrontation occurred in this moment of vulnerability for Saul and David. The section of text stretching over vv. 8-21 contains the longest recorded quotes by both David and Saul found in 1 Samuel. The amount of space the author devoted to these two quotations suggests that he considered them to be thematically central. Close inspection of these quotations does not disappoint us, for they are seen to contain at least two major items: David's most passionate affirmation of loyalty to the king and Saul's confession that David would be Israel's next king. While Saul was still within earshot of the cave, David emerged from its dark recesses and "called out to Saul" (v. 8). This action was perilous, since it betrayed the location of David and his men. However, the risks were not extreme, since Saul was away from his camp and therefore his army: if need be, David and his men could capture Saul before the king could rejoin his troops and muster them for battle.

David prefaced his major quotation with a short but significant call, as well as an action directed to Saul. Rather than cursing his ruler, David honored him by calling him both my lord and the king. Rather than falling upon Saul in a murderous attack, David fell upon the ground "and prostrated himself with his face to the ground." Following these verbal and physical signals of loyalty to the king, David uttered what is perhaps the most passionate and eloquent plea for reconciliation between people recorded in all ancient literature. In his appeal David tactfully avoided accusing Saul of being the one who initiated hurtful actions against him. It was not Saul but unnamed "men" (v. 9) who concocted the idea that "David is bent on harming" the king. Having affirmed his support for Saul and disavowed a belief that Saul was ultimately responsible for the present problem, David then brought forward evidence to suggest that his purported betrayal was entirely false. With the skill of an expert lawyer, David carefully laid out evidence to make his case, and then used it to lead Saul to an unavoidable conclusion. First, he discussed the eyewitness evidence. David carefully walked Saul through the immediate past events, supplying details to emphasize the extreme danger from

which the king was delivered: “the Lord delivered you into my hands,” and some of David’s men even “urged” David to kill the king. As part of this presentation David emphasized his saving actions on the king’s behalf: “I spared you.” More important, David also declared his motive for sparing the king: it was because he respectfully recognized that Saul “is the Lord’s anointed.” David treated the king properly, not because of anything the king had done or might do, but because of what the Lord had done. David’s respect for human authority was based on his respect for divine authority.

Second, David presented material evidence to support the interpretation of events just given: a “piece of your robe in my hand” (v. 11). If there was any doubt in Saul’s mind about how close his brush with death really was, this evidence would remove it. Saul’s own royal garment would remind him that David “cut off the corner of” the robe, “but did not kill” him. Finally, David led Saul to the desired verdict: he was “not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion.” David skillfully concluded his case for exoneration by quoting an ancient proverb (v. 13; see Matt. 7:16,20). Since David did not carry out an evil deed against the king, it followed that David was not an evildoer. Thus he was no threat to Saul, and the king should stop treating David as if he were. Though Saul had been hunting David down, David would not seek to avenge the king for “the wrongs” done against him; his “hand will not touch” Saul. But in attempting to kill an innocent man, Saul was violating the Torah and was in danger of bringing divine wrath upon himself (see Ex. 23:7). The Lord, who is a judge with greater authority than any earthly king, would “judge between” David and Saul and “avenge the wrongs” (v. 12). Thus David was actually pleading for Saul to save himself, not just to spare David.

Concluding his presentation to Saul, David used the language of poetry. Using a series of two parallel couplets linked through the keyword “after,” he attempted to put the king’s recent efforts in perspective. With these words David tacitly accused the king of acting like a fool and squandering precious national resources. Yet the employment of rhetorical questions and unflattering comparisons of himself to a dead dog and a flea—all expressed in a poetic framework—helped to make David’s criticisms more palatable and poignant. David brought his address to a thundering conclusion by employing five consecutive clauses that have the Lord as their subject. In these words David moved his focus away from Saul to an authority high above the king. He appealed to the Lord to (1) “be our judge, (2) “decide” the dispute, (3) “consider” his cause, (4) “uphold” it, and finally (5) “vindicate” him (v. 15).

24:16-17. Saul, who was apparently far enough away from the cave that he could not see the face of the one addressing him, attempted to confirm David as the source of the words just spoken. That David’s words had a great impact on the king is apparent. Formerly he had refused even to mention the name of his enemy; now he called him “David” (v. 16). Formerly David was Saul’s son-in-law (see 18:21); now he is “my son.” Saul was now emotionally broken and “wept aloud.” Then the king launched into the longest unbroken quote credited to him in Scripture. He began by exonerating David, noting that the young man was “more righteous than” himself (v. 17); whereas David treated Saul “well,” that is, in an ethically commendable manner; Saul had treated David “badly,” that is, wickedly (see Gen. 44:4; 1 Sam. 25:21; Ps. 35:12).

24:18-22. David's actions toward Saul defied military logic: "the Lord delivered" the king into David's hands, yet he "did not kill" him (v. 18). Furthermore, his actions defied common sense: conventional wisdom advises killing one's enemy when found, but David let Saul "get away unharmed" (v. 19). In gratitude for this, Saul pronounced a blessing on his son-in-law, asking the Lord to "reward" him richly. Then, as if he just recalled that the Lord had already promised David a reward, he affirmed God's royal intentions for the younger man: "you will surely be king" (v. 20). In making this confession, Saul confirmed the words of his son Jonathan (see 23:17). Rekindling for a moment his prophetic powers (see 10:10; 18:10; 19:24), Saul also predicted that Israel would flourish under David. Saul was emotionally crushed by the circumstances and in this state set aside all pretense of superiority to David. Begging him to grant two requests, he first asked that his successor "not cut off my seed" (v. 21)—that is, that David not follow the ancient custom of exterminating all descendants of his dynastic predecessor. Second, he requested that David not "wipe out my name from my father's family," a request closely related to the first but emphasizing the preservation of a link between Saul and his forebears.

Without hesitation "David gave his oath to Saul" (v. 22). In so doing he was confirming the oath he had made previously with Jonathan (see 20:14-17,42). David would later fulfill this commitment by giving sanctuary—indeed a position of honor and a generous inheritance—to Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:1-13; 19:29; 21:7). As this encounter between the present and future kings of Israel ended, "Saul returned home" to Gibeah. However, David chose not to return to his wife and home, probably fearing that the fire of Saul's insane enmity toward him would be rekindled. Instead, he "and his men went up to the stronghold."

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

1 Samuel 28:4-19; 1 Chronicles 10:1-6, 13-14; 1 Chronicles 11:1-3