

## **Introduction**

We have a lengthy text this morning and I want to read it in its entirety, so let's jump right in.

[Read text and Pray]

At the end of 1 Samuel 24, we might have hoped that the days of Saul's seeking David to kill him were over. Saul said he knew that David surely would be king and the kingdom would be established in his hand. David swore an oath not to eliminate Saul's entire household, and they went their separate ways. Samuel died and David had the encounter with Nabal. Now in 1 Samuel 26, Saul is back at it. The Ziphites, true to their past form, inform Saul that David has returned to their woods. And Saul amasses 3,000 troops once again to seek David. As in chapter 24, David has a perfect opportunity to take the life of Saul and seize the throne for himself. And now for the second time he resists the temptation to do so. Instead, David takes hold of the symbol of Saul's authority and power and demonstrates to him once again that he is NOT seeking Saul's life. David declares that he will continue to trust in the plan and protection of the Lord. So the overall message of the text is when temptation is repeated, and you have resisted before, resist again. Do not think that previous resistance to temptation earns you a pass for the future.

The overall lesson, however, is just the tip of the iceberg. A careful examination of this text uncovers more truths than we can effectively consider in our time together this morning. We will have to be selective. But what I want to do is point out some of the lessons within the main lesson. I want to do so by considering the main characters in the chapter.

Let's start with . . .

### **I. Abishai.**

It is difficult for a company of 3,000 soldiers to be discreet. And when it appeared that Saul had arrived at the wilderness, David sent spies to be sure. He then determined to make a raid upon the camp by night. He approached Abishai and Ahimelech with an invitation: "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" Apparently Ahimelech's answer was a silent decline, but not so the answer of Abishai. He said, "I will go down with you."

The situation makes me think of the question the Lord put to Isaiah in the wake of seeing him in his majesty: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" Isaiah replied, "Here I am! Send me." I also think of Jesus when he would take a select few a little further than the other disciples. They had the opportunity to know him better and see more of his glory. They went with him to the mount where he was transfigured. They went with him into the midst of the garden to pray. Because they went with him, they learned from him and they experienced him in greater depth. And because of what they saw they were able to extol his glory. John states, "that ... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked on and touched with our hands ..." This is what we proclaim to you.

Ahimelech the Hittite missed out and we never hear of him again in the scripture. But Abishai we will meet again. Abishai beheld the glory of David that he made a choice for righteousness and not expediency. He saw a man of faith and conviction. And it left an indelible impact upon his life.

I grew up singing the hymn, "Wherever He leads I'll go." It goes like this:

"Take up thy cross and follow Me," I heard my Master say;  
"I gave My life to ransom thee, Surrender your all today."  
Wherever He leads I'll go, Wherever He leads I'll go,  
I'll follow my Christ who loves me so, Wherever He leads I'll go.

He drew me closer to His side, I sought His will to know,  
And in that will I now abide, Wherever He leads I'll go.

Abishai was willing to follow the Lord's anointed where he led. Are you willing to follow the Lord Jesus who is THE Anointed One wherever HE leads?

He will lead you to faith, to trust and obey him. This is the lesson from the example of Abishai.

Let's turn our attention next to ...

## **II. Abner.**

After David confiscated Saul's spear, he went a safe distance away and began calling out to the army and its commander Abner. It was their charge to follow the king's orders but also to protect the king. They had failed in that they succumbed to a deep sleep, and David and Abishai had entered the camp and gone to its very center and could have taken the life of Saul had they been so inclined.

Rightly does David say to Abner, "Why have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD's anointed." The reason David would not lift his hand against Saul is the same reason Abner and his men should not have gone to sleep on the job.

The lesson here for you and me is that if the anointed of the Lord has charged us to watch, to remain alert, then that is exactly what we should do. I am mindful of the dark hours before the cross when Jesus went into the garden to pray. Indicating he was about to pray, he took Peter, James, and John with him and instructed them to watch and pray, while he went a little further. Three times he went and prayed, "not my will but yours be done." Three times he came back to the disciples and each time they were asleep.

The intent of Jesus was that his disciples remain alert and prayerful so that they would not be overtaken with temptation. When we give in to temptation, we fail our Lord who is the king. We need to see Abner and the groggy soldiers as examples of what we are not to be.

1 Corinthians 16:13 tells us to be watchful, to stand firm in the truth.

Colossians 4:2 instructs that we continue in prayer being watchful in it.

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour."

The stakes are too great; we cannot afford not to be watchful. Our king has told us to watch and to pray. This is the lesson from Abner.

Next, I want us to consider lessons we learn here from

## **III. Saul.**

First off, we see the stubbornness of people in sin. Here Saul gathered three thousand men and traveled down to the wilderness of Ziph. Yet again, he is pursuing David because of pride and jealousy. Back in chapter 24, Saul wept, saying to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you

have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. ... May the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me." Saul went home, but now he is back. He would not control the "me monster" inside.

In the New Testament, James 3:16 tells us that "where bitter jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice." They have certainly gobbled up Saul. As David says, he is nothing more than a flea or a partridge in the mountains, and yet Saul cannot stop wanting him to be eliminated. The desire to do him evil has overcome every recognition in his soul that David does not deserve this. Saul's example warns us against the desires within that want to be more highly recognized than others, that want power for ourselves, a name for ourselves, that want influence for ourselves.

Second, Saul shows us the sad, sad results of sin in our lives. After being confronted by David, Saul replies: "I have sinned. Return my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." Sin is always foolish. It is always a great mistake. It is wrongheaded and evil. Sinning against the living God is irrational and deranged. It is to think that happiness and fulfillment can better be had by disobeying the commands of our Creator than to obey them. It is to believe that the God who gives us life commands for us to live, act, and think in a way that is less than the best for us. And it is to somehow think we can maneuver around accountability to God for daring to act in opposition to his righteous law.

To sin is foolish and mistaken. It has always been this way. And we have seen evidence after evidence prove that it is so, yet we still do it any way. Saul had already recognized the misery of sin, specifically the sin of pursuing David to kill him. And yet here he is again, the second time around. He didn't learn anything the first time. Here he is now adding sin upon sin, still believing the lie that you can pursue happiness and satisfaction through disobeying God.

But Saul is not alone is he? Why do we sin? Some of the evil that is done in the world is almost completely inexplicable. Think of the shooting this past week at Michigan State University. There is no discernable reason why the man would open fire on students at that university. But we know that the heart of every human being by nature is desperately sick. Who can know it? But what we all know about committing sin is that we think we will be better off if we do it.

We need to call to mind the real and destructive nature of sin to be reminded in the hour of temptation that the threat of punishment is real. We need to call to mind the insanity of sin. It seems that sin never delivers what it promises but tries it out one more time, just in case. When you and I sin, we will never be glad we did. But when we obey the Lord, we will never be sad we did.

But we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. By nature we are children of wrath like all the rest. We are all under the just and righteous condemnation of Holy God. Hopeless as that sounds, it is not completely hopeless. It is not hopeless because the One against whom we have sinned and who stands over us as judge, is also a saving and merciful God. In his mercy, he has sent his own holy Son, who has never sinned. He came as a spotless lamb to be sacrificed and condemned in the place of sinners. And if you have not already, if you will turn to him and trust in Jesus's perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, your sins will be forgiven and you will be right with God.

You know, Saul thought he was in a safe place. He was in the middle of the camp surrounded by his army and accompanied by the army's commander. But when the Lord comes for you all the defenses you could possibly set up will fail to keep him at bay. We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. Any claim that you might have about yourself will fail to satisfy him. The only claim before the holy judge is the righteous work of Jesus.

Now, let's turn to ...

#### **IV. David.**

I have already mentioned the main message of this text. Do not let victory over previous temptations convince you it is okay to sin the next time. It is a point not to be overlooked. Let's say you have determined to cut back on desserts. For whatever reason, you know it is something you need to do. Now, you are at a dinner and the hostess asks you if you would like dessert. You quickly reply that, no, you are avoiding sweets at the time. So she says okay. But then she brings out the dessert, and your mouth begins to water. And she says "Are you SURE you do not want dessert?" What do you say then? I know what I usually say.

Temptations to sin are not all that different. They are relentless. What you refuse today may return tomorrow and say, "Are you sure?" You could find your mind saying, "just look. Yesterday you said, 'no.' But today it is just harder. You deserve a break."

But actually a second shot at it, a second time around actually gives you the opportunity to demonstrate that doing the right thing, doing the godly thing, obeying the Lord, is an act not merely of temporary convenience but of conviction. Abishai urged David as all the men in the cave had done previously. But David spoke with conviction to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? ...The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed."

A second lesson we learn from David is of the importance of learning from our experience. Every day we walk with the Lord, we have the blessed privilege of growing in the Lord. In chapter 24, David resisted the temptation to take matters into his own hands. In chapter 25, he just about did it anyway when the offender was not the Lord's anointed but a lousy rascal named Nabal. But David listened to the petition of Abigail and left vengeance with the Lord. In short order the Lord took vengeance. When Nabal got wind that Abigail had interceded with David, he became as a stone and a week later the text says that "the LORD struck Nabal, and he died." Now look at verse 10 here in chapter 26. Of Saul David explains to Abishai, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down in battle and perish." David knows the LORD can work with Saul as he did with Nabal or he certainly can work in another way of his own choosing, but David leaves it with the Lord to do as it pleases the Lord.

He has learned experientially that the main thing that is the human responsibility is to trust God. We trust him by obeying him and leaving the providential details to him. We may not know how God will solve various problems we face, but we must know that we cannot resort to sin to try and deal with them ourselves. Dale Davis writes, "Any believer will face predicaments in which he does not know how God will bring relief but does know what is or is not God's will for him. ...God's ways will frequently baffle us but God's will is sufficiently clear to lead us in the meantime. God's ways may not be clear, but our way is—at least enough of it to know what obedience requires" (272).

There is one more lesson from the example of David in this text that needs our attention. I want you to notice what is the main concern of David when it comes to his having to run for his life in

attempting to escape from Saul. Down in verses 19-20, David is musing to Saul about why he is seeking his life. He states, if it is the Lord who has stirred up Saul, then an offering to the Lord should suffice for reconciliation. But if it is men who are stirring him up, then they should be cursed. What they are doing is truly evil, because they are in effect driving David away from God. They are putting distance between David and the tabernacle. They are putting distance between David and public worship. In pushing David to go away from Israel for safety, David's heart is broken over the distance between him and the presence of the Lord. It is not that God is not omnipresent. David knows that he is. But David longs for the courts of the Lord. David wants to be where the action of worship is observable and experiential.

David evidences that his flight is not bothersome simply because he is away from home and finds himself in circumstances of inconvenience. What really gnaws at him is that he could die away from the presence of the Lord. David values public worship. He longs for the courts of the Lord. The "face" of the Lord is seen in the sanctuary (Psalm 63:2).

What about you? Do you long for public worship with the people of God? If not, ask yourself why not? Do you see public worship as a duty or as a delight? Perhaps you are missing the fact that public worship is truly not about the entertainment of ourselves but the honor of God and the indulgence in fellowship with him. Perhaps you are not near him to begin with. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. And public worship will be your delight.

There is one more character in the narrative ...

#### **V. The LORD.**

Everything is truly always about God. He is always at the center, even when the characters are allowed to overshadow. The presence and involvement of the Lord in this chapter may be subtle, but it is key. You find the LORD explicitly mentioned in verse 12. All that David and Abishai did and said was for this reason. They entered the camp of 3,000, but "no man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them."

What made Saul vulnerable? A deep sleep from the LORD. What made David protected as he entered the camp? A deep sleep from the LORD. This event was taking place under his sovereign hand.

With regard to Saul, the Lord was using this event to show him yet again the outcome that he faces. He has been rejected by the Lord. His sin is foolish and it is a mistake. This is an opportunity to repent by the mercy of God.

With regard to David, the Lord is growing David day by day to trust him more and more. The Lord is giving David an opportunity to again choose honoring Him over expediency. The Lord is protecting David and encouraging him in his faith. See how God kept this army of 3,000 asleep? The Lord is saying, "David, you are man after my own heart." And we are realizing that this statement is not so much about God's place in David's heart as it is about David's place in the heart of God."

And that is the place of every one of God's elect. Chosen before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us." (Ephesians 1)

## **Conclusion**

Saul thought he was safe in the midst of an encampment of 3,000 soldiers. But David waltzed right in. David was able to observe too that if the Lord is not your protector, you are unsafe. But remember what he wrote in Psalm 34:7? "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear [the Lord], and delivers them."