

Introduction

I went to the grocery store the other day to buy some ice cream. It is quite astounding how many different flavors and brands are available. Decision making is difficult because of such a great assortment of options. But we have grown used to having many options in other areas as well. Think of the panoply of colors that can be mixed to suit your taste when it comes to paint. Now think in terms of creation. God's works are full of variety. Psalm 104:24 says, "O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." And how various are all his creatures. God is a God of a vast assortment of kinds and looks and colors and even behaviors. We need to stop from time to time to recognize the variety of God's works. And like the psalmist we need to bless the Lord, for he is very great! This morning I want you to see that variety characterizes more than merely what God makes. Variety also characterizes how God works in providence. God works in different ways at different times to accomplish his purpose and to display his glory. That is what stands out thematically as we continue our study of the life of David and consider 1 Samuel 23.

[Read text and Pray]

I like the old hymn about the providence of God. It says, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." And in light of this morning's text, we could also say that God moves in various ways his wonders to perform. God never changes. He is always the same—yesterday, today, and forever. But that does not mean that God always works in a predictable way. He is the same, but as with an artist his works are full of variety.

In our text this morning we encounter four different situations in which God works to bring liberation to his people. They face danger from the enemy, and God delivers them. But he redeems uniquely in each situation. Overall we learn the principle that God's approach to rescuing his people from trouble varies from situation to situation. Yet he remains dependable and faithful. The text teaches us to look for God to keep his promises and deliver his people but to realize that he will not do it the same way every time. His approach displays artistry in his providential working. Let us marvel at his ways but also continue trusting him no matter what our circumstances are like. So, then, let's look at this collection of four instances of deliverance. And let us behold the unique way in which God brings each one about.

I. The Deliverance by David of the City of Keilah. (1-5)

Word came to David that the Philistines were attacking the Judean city of Keilah and robbing the harvest from its citizens. Now David is not yet the king of Israel, but he shows the heart of the king. A king's heart should be for his people—for their protection and for their well-being. So when David hears the news, he immediately is gripped with a sense of responsibility to do something. So, he inquires of the Lord. The writer is not concerned to tell us HOW David received the word of the Lord. The main issue is that David sought the Lord and the Lord answered. The Lord spoke according to the concern in David's heart.

But David's men were not so sure. They were already fearful just hanging out and seeking to elude Saul. The thought of going to fight against the Philistine army was even more terrorizing to them. So David asked the Lord again. The Lord ordered David to go and assured him: I will give the Philistines into your hand. With this assurance David and his rag-tag collection of societal rejects

went to battle and they were successful. God gave the Philistines into David's hand. They attacked the Philistines, took their livestock, and set the city of Keilah free.

So God delivers the city in an unlikely way. By all rights Saul, the king, should be leading the armies of Israel to Keilah to deliver the citizens. But God commissions David and his small group of unqualified and fearful discards and gives the enemy into their hands. Their weakness was His strength.

It is often the case that God works in this way. Part of His objective is to shame those who are confident in their own wisdom and power. So he chooses the things that are weak and foolish in the eyes of the world to demonstrate the power of God. It is certainly true of God's plan for redemption from sin and its guilt. God sent His Son not in the form of a mighty warrior or powerful leader in the worldly sense. He sent his Son to a man and woman who lived in the backwoods. He came not in the form one would identify as a king. He came rather in the form of a servant. And he did not accomplish redemption by some great and compelling act of bravado that would excite the marvel of the worldly. Rather he accomplished redemption by surrender to the evil intents of prideful men and to their ghastly sentence to hang him on a cross as one cursed and despised. Yet in the plan of God, it is by his stripes that those who take refuge in him are healed, that we are delivered, that we are liberated from wrath and set free from bondage.

And beyond the cross, God continues to work through unlikely vessels to populate his kingdom. The disciples Jesus chose to be his apostles were unexciting to the masses just like you and me. But God works this way. Do not despair of your weaknesses. Do not think yourself incapable of being used by the Lord. If you will humble yourself before him and obey what he tells you to do, your weaknesses are just what he wants. It is through human weakness that God displays divine strength.

We turn from God's deliverance of Keilah through David to God's deliverance of David from the very city he had just delivered.

II. The Deliverance of David from the City of Keilah.

Word spread of David's success at Keilah. That word came to Saul. And though he would not go to defend the city, he would now go and besiege the city in order to capture David. It becomes clear that one thing and only one thing matters to Saul at this point. He was now obsessed with eliminating David. He even begins to imagine that the hand of God is with him. Notice verse 7. Saul said, "God has given him into my hand." It is amazing what we will tell ourselves when we are determined to live and act in opposition to what God actually has said.

How many times have people rationalized disobedience to the clear teaching of God with the claim that "God is telling me to do it." God does not tell you to DO what his word has already told you NOT to do. God does not tell you NOT to do what his word has already told you TO do. You should not be expecting direct revelation anyway. The Lord has given his instructions to us in his word. But for sure, if you ever think you hear God telling you to do something his word forbids or not to do something his word commands, know this: IT IS NOT GOD that you are hearing. By the same token, if you ever think you hear God saying something is okay that his word says is not okay, IT IS NOT GOD that you are hearing. You must keep your life and your thinking bolted and hitched to the word of God. For the moment you unhitch from it you are headed for grave darkness in your thinking and grave danger in your living.

I do not know if I have been more bitterly disheartened with a supposed evangelical teacher than I have been with Andy Stanley. He builds his church on the premise of doing what it takes to get the world in the church. In video clips I have seen recently, he appears to have moved in the direction of affirming homosexuality. But it all traces back to his approach to the word of God. In 2018 he began to assert that Christians must unhitch themselves from the Old Testament. He has claimed that you should not build your faith on the inerrancy of the scripture because you thereby lose credibility with the world. Stanley is a sad example of the catastrophe for which you are headed when you reject the authority and reality of what God has actually said. He was preceded by a king who also disregarded God's word, was rejected by God to be replaced by another, and nevertheless he thought God was with him.

Back to the deliverance, we observe that David is aware that Saul is plotting harm against him. So he again seeks guidance from the Lord as to what he should do. Two issues are pivotal in David's determination of what to do. Will Saul actually come? And if he does will the men of the city hand David over to Saul? God knows all things. There is nothing that can be known that God does not know. He even knows what might happen if circumstances were to change in a particular way. God knew and God knows what would happen if David remained in Keilah even if he did not actually remain there. So the Lord reveals his knowledge to David. If David were to remain in the city, yes, Saul would come against the city, and yes, the city would hand David over to Saul. So David and his men departed from Keilah and went into the wilderness. Saul sought him every day, BUT GOD did not give him into his hand.

David sought God in the appointed way. God imparted to David the knowledge necessary to be able to make a wise decision. Acting upon that wisdom, David was delivered. Saul sought David continually, but God protected him. He did so in this instance by imparting sufficient knowledge to make a wise decision.

This is the way the bulk of God's protective deliverance works in our lives. We should not be anticipating that God will speak directly to us whether audibly or inaudibly. Of course God has spoken in this way at times in history; they were times when folks did not possess the full revelation of God as we do today. We affirm the sufficiency of the scripture, and by the knowledge of his word, we know what God's will is for our lives. We are delivered from foolishness and foolish decisions by meditating upon and living in accordance with the wisdom of God expressed in his word. We are directed how to live and how to walk in the power of God.

And if any one lacks wisdom, let him, like David, ask of God, and it will be given. We may not have a priest with an ephod at our side, but we actually have it better. We have a priest greater than Abiathar. Our priest is Jesus, the Son of God. We have one who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and who has been tempted as we have and yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. But do not expect that you can ignore the scriptures and be wise. God guides us practically to daily deliverance by giving us his knowledge. In the light of the knowledge of God and his word, we can use the brains we have received from him to make wise and godly decisions which correspond to deliverance.

This instance of deliverance is striking because those who were delivered by David cannot be trusted to protect him. They would welcome the deliverance David brought them, but they would turn on David for the fear of Saul.

It is going to be this way for us sometimes. Sometimes the people we help won't help us. They will receive from us but not return favor. They may even betray us. Unlike David, Jesus was not protected from betrayal. One who had received instruction and protection from Jesus delivered him up to the Sadducees who delivered him over to be crucified. Jesus was not delivered from the wrath of God so that we might be. Oh, what a gracious Savior he is! Do you ever turn on him who has so gloriously delivered your soul?

III. The Deliverance of David from the Grip of Discouragement. (15-18)

Saul had one purpose in life now. So he goes out relentlessly seeking that he might end David's life. When you are on the run from such an enemy and hanging out in a place called Horesh (it was not a prime vacation spot), you can grow weary and tired and despair of the future. You are a candidate for discouragement. Such was the case with David. He needed deliverance from the threat of discouragement.

Alistair Begg is helpful at imagining how things might have been. He writes, at this point "if we had heard [David] as he just got up in the morning and rubbed his eyes and looked out on the day—we might have heard him saying, 'How did I get myself into this? It seemed at first, when Samuel came and anointed me, that life was filled with such promise. But this is just one disaster after another.'"

You might find yourself feeling that way sometimes. "When I was saved my heart was filled with great hope about how I might be used and the kinds of accomplishments I might make, but wow, I have experienced hardship after hardship and I am just not where I thought I would be spiritually." You may be wearied by disappointments, unfulfilled hopes, and anticipations, and the lot. Maybe you have experienced wave after wave of trial; it seems that the old slithering serpent just won't let up coming after you. You know the need for encouragement yourself.

Well, God provided for David in the form of a personal visit from a godly friend—Jonathan. Saul could not find David, but the Lord assured that Jonathan could proceed directly to him. "Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh and strengthened his hand in God."

Look how this encouragement came. First, it came in person. Jonathan rose and went to David. He went where he was. This wasn't a zoom meeting. It was person-to-person, eyeball-to-eyeball, heart-to-heart. We need encouragement in this way. Write notes. Send text and emails. Make calls. But sometimes you just have to be right there. And by the way that is what church is meant to be—right there in person, the gathering of the body in one place, within reach, within touch. Christians who can make it out of their homes should be making their way out of their homes on the Lord's day to gather with the Lord's people in person. It is a crucial factor in being delivered from discouragement and persevering in joy.

So the encouragement was in person. It was also grounded in the word of God. This was not merely a manipulative pep-talk. It was the application of the word of God to the circumstances in which David found himself. Fear is a major opponent that pursues us all. The fact is that God's people have no reason to fear, but we need to remind ourselves and we need reminding by others. This is what Jonathan does for David. He sets his attention off of his circumstances and back on the assurances of the word and works of God.

Look at what Jonathan says. First, he says, the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. That is, his evil intent to kill you will certainly not be realized. You know, every Christian has the same assurance in regard to Satan. We are warned of a roaring lion who relentlessly seeks someone to

devour. But we are also assured by God's word that "greater is He who is in us than he that is in the world." We need to remind each other of this.

Second, Jonathan says to David, "You shall be king over Israel." He is simply reminding David that it is the Lord who rejected Saul and it is the Lord who anointed David as king. And the Lord did not anoint David as king for nothing. His purposes will come to pass. God has promised and he will do it. As Paul says in Ephesians, he works all things according to the counsel of his will. The same kind of principle holds true for all believers in Christ. Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those who he justified, he also glorified. So Paul can say to the Philippians, "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus." That is an encouraging truth!

Third, Jonathan says to David, "I shall be next to you." I really just treasure this line. Here is an expression of personal loyalty. I am with you, David. Jonathan may be the son of Saul, but he was not like Saul. His heart was for the glory of God, the promise of God, and the word of God. So his loyalty would be with the son of Jesse, the king anointed by God. When brothers stick close, it is an encouragement not to fear. It is a help against discouragement.

IV. The Deliverance of David from the Grasp of Saul. (19-29)

Well, here come the Ziphites. They want to score political points with Saul so they offer to lead Saul to David. Saul wants to be really sure so he tells the Ziphites to double down on their ability to point him to David. He follows them and pursues David. Here in these verses you have a drama that intensifies with each descriptive word. This time Saul knows where David is. He has local guides to lead him to David. And he comes oh so close. Saul is on one side of the mountain and David and his men on the other. David was hurrying. Saul was closing in. He was on the verge of capturing David. What was it that Jonathan had just said? "The hand of Saul shall not find you"? But it looks like Jonathan's solid assurances are about to be proven wrong. However, just when Saul was about to grasp hold of David—at the last possible moment—a messenger came to Saul to warn of a serious incursion of the Philistines against the land. The situation was dire and Saul could not afford to wait another minute. He must leave Horesh immediately and go against the Philistines. Just when Saul could not have been any closer to capturing David, just in the nick of time, the providence of God assured that David was again delivered.

It is striking to note that at the first of this chapter David was delivering Israelites from the aggression of the Philistines and here the Philistines serve to deliver David from the aggression of Saul. Truly, God moves in assorted ways to deliver his people. He is never late but sometimes it is just barely the case. The lesson for God's people is to never give up hope. Our circumstances are never so serious that God cannot step in. His promises will never be thwarted. Every promise is true and he is faithful to keep every single one of them. The hour may look ever so bleak. The enemy may be on the threshold. Sometimes the Lord may wait until the very last moment. I am sure each of us could tell a story or two of how God worked in our defense in just the nick of time. The lesson for all of us is to keep holding on. Keep trusting. Keep resting. God may be slower than we think he should be, but he is never late.

Just think. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was dying, he purposefully waited to arrive until his friend was in the grave four days. He was greeted by both Mary and Martha who said, "Lord, if you had been here sooner, my brother would not have died." But it was the purpose of Jesus to do even better than keeping their brother from dying. He was determined to raise Lazarus from death. The Lord may seem slow but he is never too late to accomplish his intended purpose.

Conclusion

God works in a single way to bring redemption to sinners. No man comes to the Father but by Jesus Christ the Son. There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. There is but one way to receive this salvation, and that is by grace through faith. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

But when it comes to being saved out of our assorted troubles, temptations, and trials in life, God moves in an assortment of ways his wonders to perform. It is a work of divine power, beauty, and artistry at which to marvel and in which to rest. David wrote Psalm 54 when he learned that the Ziphites had gone to Saul to tell him where he was. The confidence and rest he expresses belongs to every believer. Listen.

1 O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might.

2 O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth.

3 For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life;
they do not set God before themselves. Selah

4 Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.

5 He will return the evil to my enemies;
in your faithfulness put an end to them.

6 With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you;
I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

7 For he has delivered me from every trouble,
and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.