

Deliverance

David & Saul Pt.12
1 Samuel 19:1-24

Summary: God protected David through people (Saul's kids), providence, supernatural power, and prayer. Enjoy God's deliverance no matter how quiet the providence or how indirect the means and don't presume upon God – seek wholeheartedly after deliverance and look to heaven until it comes, and then rejoice in anticipated grace.

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1 Samuel 19:1 Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David ² and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. ³ I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

⁴ Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. ⁵ He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"

⁶ Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death." ⁷ So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

⁸ Once more war broke out, and David went out and fought the Philistines. He struck them with such force that they fled before him. ⁹ But an evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp, ¹⁰ Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape.

¹¹ Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." ¹² So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. ¹³ Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head. ¹⁴ When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill." ¹⁵ Then Saul sent the men back to see David and

told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him." ¹⁶ But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats' hair. ¹⁷ Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" Michal told him, "He said to me, 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'"

¹⁸ When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. ¹⁹ Word came to Saul: "David is in Naioth at Ramah"; ²⁰ so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied. ²¹ Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. ²² Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" "Over in Naioth at Ramah," they said. ²³ So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. ²⁴ He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Review: The favor of God = the key to success

1 Sam. 18:5 Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army.

The word translated "successfully" is an important word from the Law. It points us to the great promise of Dt.29:9. There that same word is translated "prosper."

Dt.29:9 Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do.

The writer of Samuel is making the point that David was enjoying the benefits of that promise because he met the condition of keeping the terms of the covenant, and the terms of the covenant are essentially the same now as then – love God. When you love God, the general rule will be that everything you put your hand to will prosper.

There are exceptions to that rule (we read about that in Ps.43, and in Job), but unless there is some other factor at work, the normal response from heaven to a faithful man or woman is success in the things they put their hand to, because the things they put their hands to are things that honor God and show Him to be glorious.

In chapter 18 you have two candidates for the throne – Saul and David. Saul struggles with all his might to be king. David puts forth no effort to become king yet over and over and over David comes out on top and Saul on the bottom – every time. And the reason for that is the bottom line of most of the book of 1 Samuel – the Lord was with David and not with Saul. If you want to succeed in anything in the Kingdom of God – especially in spiritual leadership, the bottom line will be if the Lord favors you or not.

We saw in chapter 17 that the power of God works through, not instead of human effort so we still work hard. But that work only brings success if it is energized by the Lord's favor. If Saul's life teaches us anything it is that human effort exerted against the plan of God is a dart gun against a bulldozer, and God's disfavor is like quicksand – the more you struggle against it the faster you sink.

You will be doing yourself a huge favor if you can find a way to burn the picture of this chapter into your brain stem so that this principle is a part of all your subconscious thinking. This picture of the most powerful man in the nation using all his resources, all his strength, all

his ability to accomplish something, and has nothing but total, abject failure because God's favor is not with him. And alongside that is the picture of another man who has abundant success in everything because he had God's favor. If you can burn that picture into your brain, all your efforts in life will turn into efforts to draw near to God and enjoy His favor, because you will intuitively know that He is the source of all success, and without His favor there is no success.

Now, when I say, "success," do not think I mean anything like, "lack of suffering." Sometimes the success God grants comes with a whole lot of suffering. Success just means reaching your goals but when you are seeking after God your main goals are no longer the avoidance of suffering. While you do enjoy much more success, you also tend to face significant suffering. That is what David faces in chapter 19., so this morning we going to fix our attention on how to handle suffering, especially the kind of suffering that you can see coming before it arrives. How do you deal with impending, approaching danger?

Introduction

In this chapter David finds himself in a house under surveillance by government officials who have orders to kill him in the morning. Imagine being in a house surrounded by armed men determined to kill you. There is no 911. They have full authority from the government, so no one can stop them. I spent a lot of time trying to think of ways to describe to you the terror that would go along with a predicament like that because if you are like me you read 1 Sam.19 and the last thing on your mind is terror. When I first read it David's predicament in the house is no more terrifying to me than thinking about Jack way up high in the beanstalk (one slip and he is dead). We know how the story ends, and so it just does not seem like a big deal. But it was a big deal. If you want to know how terrifying this was, think of this - David, the invincible warrior, probably one of the bravest men who ever lived, was terrified. You can tell that by the way he prayed that night.

Deliver me ... O God; protect me ... Deliver me ... save me ... Fierce men conspire against me ... they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight!

Maybe some of you can relate to having your life seriously threatened like this, but I can't. It is just too far from anything I have ever experienced. Probably the best we can do is apply what we hear this morning to the most frightening thing we have ever faced. In once sense that is too bad, because the joy of experiencing God as your stronghold and refuge is directly related to the degree of danger and fear you are facing. If you got turned around while driving in Denver and someone came to your rescue by showing you how to get back on I-25, that would make you a little bit happy. But if you were kidnapped and were just about to be tortured and at the last second someone busted in the door and rescued you that would make your really happy. Your enjoyment of God as protector depends on how much trouble you are in. It is really a wonderful gift if the Lord ever allows you to go through something extremely terrifying, because only then can you really enjoy the attribute of God as a fortress.

Chapter 19 begins with a section about how Jonathan managed to bring about reconciliation between Saul and David, so Saul swears he won't hurt David, and David comes back into Saul's palace and then war breaks out again.

⁸ Once more war broke out, and David went out and fought the Philistines. He struck them with such force that they fled before him.

Literally it says David struck them with such a blow that they fled from before his face. The imagery is of a single blow – one punch. The whole battle could be summarized as being like this – they tried to attack and David smacked them hard, and they ran away. We don't get a big long description of the battle – just one verse – because the point here is not to talk about the battle, but to let us know the occasion for Saul turning against David again.

Protection through Providence

⁹ But an evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp, ¹⁰ Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall.

What David did was a wonderful victory for the nation of Israel but Saul doesn't care about that. He cares about his political career and about the defeat of anyone who is a threat to his career, and the welfare of the nation takes a back seat to that.

When Saul made his oath he made the most solemn possible vow, swearing by the very life of God that he would not kill David, and he keeps the vow – for all of two verses. Apart from special grace from the Spirit of God, human resolve to be better is never successful. If you are trying to change something in your life just by resolving to change, forget it. If you have not changed up to this point your only hope for change in the future is if you find a way to receive more grace than you have received in the past. And if you do not have a plan for how to do that, do not expect long-term success. So once again Saul tries to kill David and David escapes.

10 ...That night David made good his escape.

And from here until Saul dies David lives his life as a refugee. Just look at how much refugee language there is just in this chapter:

v.2 go into hiding

v.10 eluded

v.10 made good his escape

v.11 run for your life

v.12 fled and escaped

v.17 escaped

v.17 get away

v.18 fled and made his escape

So now his life is always in danger, and God is always delivering him, and God delivered him in a lot of different ways. With Saul's spear throwing, the second-greatest warrior in the nation is now 0 for 3 at close range. If that were normal for Saul he never would have lived this long. We do not know if God did something to make him a bad shot, or David a great dodger, or if Saul just happened to sneeze right when he was throwing, but one way or another God delivered David from three shots at point blank range.

That is protection through providence. God orchestrates natural circumstances in such a way as to protect you from some threat. The burglar gets lost on the way to your house. The drunk driver runs out of gas before he makes it to where you are. The person telling lies about you happens to catch your co-workers on a day when they aren't really paying attention. You set your hand down on a counter just one centimeter away from where there are some flu germs. The scam artist who would have taken you misdials and calls someone else. That is protection through providence.

When God uses providence – especially quiet providence, it seems like luck or chance are the authors of our deliverance rather than God. (Do you know what I mean by quiet providence? When God takes care of you through some wonderful coincidence - not a miracle, but a big enough coincidence that we say, “Wow, that was providential,” I call that loud providence. Like when you have a bill for \$462.28 and you don’t know how you’re going to pay it, and that day you get an unexpected insurance refund in the mail for that exact amount. That is loud, obvious providence. But when God takes care of you through normal, everyday, mundane, invisible providence, for example when you need \$462 and so you go to work and put in some overtime and payday comes and you get your paycheck - I call that quiet providence. It is quiet because it is not as obvious that it is God who is providing for you. Quiet providence is just as wonderful and just as much a demonstration of God’s power as loud providence or miracles.)

Providence is an amazing thing. God moves heaven and earth in natural ways to fulfill His great and precious promises to us. God forgive us for attributing that to luck or nature or to ourselves or anything else. Forgive us for living and thinking like atheists during times of quiet providence. Whether the deliverance comes through providence, people or supernatural power – it is all God’s protective love.

Starting in v.11 Saul takes a different approach and God provides a different kind of deliverance but before we get to that let’s skip ahead to v.18.

Protection through Power

¹⁸ When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. ¹⁹ Word came to Saul: "David is in Naioth at Ramah"; ²⁰ so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men and they also prophesied. ²¹ Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. ²² Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" "Over in Naioth at Ramah," they said. ²³ So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. ²⁴ He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

There were true prophets and false prophets. True prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit to give verbatim messages from God without any error. False prophets were controlled by evil spirits, and many times went into uncontrolled altered states of consciousness. Prior to this time Saul had experienced both. Just after he was anointed he prophesied by the Holy Spirit and then later under the influence of the demon. When you see the word “prophesy” in Samuel the only way to tell which kind it is is from the context. I believe the school of prophets under the leadership of Samuel were true prophets, and what happened to Saul and his men was most likely demonic.

So God protects David by overpowering Saul and his men with a sheer act of supernatural power. So sometimes God protects through providence, other times through supernatural power and starting in v.16 we see a third way.

Protection through People

¹¹ Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed."

I do not know how Michal found out, but somehow or another she knows, and she lets David know.

First Saul's son warned David and now Saul's daughter. Sometimes God's protection comes through people. Saul gave Michal to be David's wife in the hopes that she would be a snare to him but as it turned out she was more loyal to David than to her father. Some people hated David and others loved him, but in this case God saw to it that the right person loved him enough to be more loyal to him than to her own father.¹ One of the ways God protects you from danger is by giving you favor in the eyes of certain key people who will be in a position to protect you from some future threat.

So David looks out the window and sure enough, there they all are – armed, and ready to grab him as soon as morning comes.

¹² So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped.

Evidently their bedroom was at least two stories up, and somehow Michal lowers him down.

¹³ Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head.

It is disturbing that Michal had an idol. On the one hand it is good, because she does not seem to have a whole lot of reverence for the thing. She uses it as a dummy. But it is still disturbing that she even has it, and that David allowed it in his house. This is the first sign of bad news regarding the heart of Michal. Later on we will get more insight into that, but for now the point is she sides with David against Saul.

In fact, she even deceived Saul to do it. Just as Samuel deceived Saul back in chapter 16, now Michal deceives him, first by sending David out through the window, then the whole idol-in-the-bed trick, then with her response when Saul confronted her:

¹⁷ Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" Michal told him, "He said to me, 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'"

She makes up a story about David threatening her so now both Saul's son and his daughter have sided with his most hated enemy. When God removes His favor from you, you are outnumbered in a huge way, because God is sovereign even over the affections of your own family members. [And I'm not going to step in this whole ethics of lying issue again – except to remind you of this – that nowhere in Scripture is the practice of deceiving a murderer (a murderous person or nation) to protect their victims condemned as lying.]

So God protects us in various different ways; sometimes quietly through providence, sometimes indirectly through people, and sometimes obviously through sheer supernatural power. God's tools for protecting and saving us are just as wide and varied as are our trials. For every new struggle we face God has ten new creative ways of saving us and most of those ways are not obvious. When He works through people it seems to us like it is those people who are

¹ **1 Sam.18:20 Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David.** This is extremely unusual. Outside of the Song of Songs this is the only place in the whole Bible where a woman is said to have loved a man (Expositors Commentary). No doubt a lot of women did love men, but it is significant that the writers of Scripture never found it significant to mention any other place but here. God's favor very often comes in the form of favor in the eyes of men and women – just the men and women whose love God knows it would be best for us to have.

the *authors* of our protection, rather than the mere tools God is using. People are never the source of your deliverance – only tools. How did Michal’s (lame) effort end up working? I want us to slow down for a minute and think about how God protected David through Michal’s efforts.

¹⁴ When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill." ¹⁵ Then Saul sent the men back to see David...

What happened between vv.14 and 15? Evidently, when Michal said David was ill, they left and went back to Saul! I guess they thought, “We can’t kill him now – he’s sick.” Can you imagine the conversation with Saul when they came back? “Where’s David?” “Well, we were going to kill him, but it didn’t work out.” “What do you mean it didn’t work out?” “Well, we got there, and we guarded the house through the night like you said, but then in the morning when we went to get him it turned out he was sick in bed, and so we figured we probably shouldn’t bother him. Poor guy - maybe once he’s feeling a little better then we can kill him.”

Why on earth would they hesitate to kill someone because he’s sick? Was it like in the movies where, of all the bad guys there is only one of them who is smart and all the rest are a bunch of morons? Or was there maybe some kind of etiquette about killing a guy in his bed? I suppose that’s possible. In the old West even the bad guys evidently had scruples about shooting someone in the back, because it’s not fair.

To me it seems equally unfair to shoot a guy in the front if you are ten times quicker on the draw than he is, but that never seems to bother them. Killing a man is fine, just don’t ever break the “no shooting in the back” rule. It is funny how even the worst of people will tend to have some rules they follow, so maybe it was considered especially bad to kill a guy in his bed.

Or, maybe they just did not want Michal to see it. That is the way it sounds to me. That is why they didn’t just bust into their house during the night. They stand guard until morning. The plan seems to be to wait until he comes out, bring him to the palace, and then do it there. And that fits with what happens when Saul hears David is sick. He does not tell them to go kill him in bed; he tells them to bring him in his bed to the palace.

But really none of those are the primary reason. The primary reason why Michal’s plan worked has been stated repeatedly in the last few chapters - God was with David and not with Saul. Did Michal come up with the most brilliant escape plan ever conceived? No. But God made it work. How is it that David’s enemies are so easily fooled? We just got done laughing at them – they are a mockery. What is the explanation for that?

Protection through Prayer

The explanation is due to something that is not even in this text. It is something that happened that night while David was in his house with the murderers outside. What happened was this: David prayed.

And guess what he prayed for – that his enemies would be a mockery, that God Himself would laugh at them, and that their efforts would be thwarted. All the things that happened that resulted in David’s escape were answers to David’s prayer.

Psalm 59:1 For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam. When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him.

David took the time to write a psalm that night.

Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. 2 Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men. 3 See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men

conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD. 4 I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight!

We don't have time to go verse by verse through this whole psalm, but there are a few things I think we need to see because they give us insight into how to handle fear when we see a looming threat.

Watching for God

David looked out his window and saw these guys keeping watch. Their job was to keep watch all night to make sure that when David left the house they could take him to be executed, so David's response was, If they are going to keep watch, so am I.

⁹ O my Strength, I watch for you; because you, O God, are my fortress, ¹⁰ my loving God will meet me.

David figured if his enemies are spending the night watching for him, he had better spend the night watching for God. So what does it mean to spend the night watching for God? What does the heart of faith do in those moments in life when disaster has not yet struck, but you can see it right outside your window? It has not hit quite yet, but you can see it coming, and from a human standpoint it is just a matter of time? How does the heart of faith deal with moments when you feel the icy cold sting of anticipated pain or loss or harm?

Most of my life I've believed that the best response in a time like that is to just relax in the promises of God. Don't get worked up – just trust God, because He will automatically take care of everything. I always thought having a reaction like that is faith – I'm trusting God that everything will work out OK. But a lot of times I think that reaction is more presumption than faith. God does promise protection and deliverance, but He does not give them automatically. He gives them in response to earnest, heartfelt, fervent prayer.

Peace and comfort and deliverance are promised, but they do not come automatically. Be careful not to read the Psalms too fast. When one verse talks about being in terrible straits, and two verses later he is singing for joy because God delivered him, don't assume there was not a long time in between of seeking God – a time of desperation when he cried out to God and nothing happened. He keeps crying out, and cries out some more, and still nothing happens. So he turns up the volume and intensity of his seeking after God and really cries out, and all that keeps going on for a long, extended, seemingly endless period of time before God finally comes and delivers him. That is why the psalmists say things like, "How long will You hide your face from me? Will you forget me forever?" You just don't say things like that if it seems like God has been unresponsive to your prayers for a day or two.

Godly men and women start asking questions like that after the trial seems to be going way longer than what is bearable.

So don't read vv.1-8 too fast. When you face impending disaster, don't think that faith means having an attitude that says, "Oh well – whatever happens happens. It will all work out for the best." David didn't just lay down in bed and say, "Well, if they kill me they kill me. 'nite Michal" and then click off the light. He poured out his soul to God in prayer beseeching Him for deliverance.

When disaster is looming on the horizon of your life, and you first become aware of the fact that it is approaching, at that moment you need some things. You are afraid so you need courage. Your heart is in turmoil so you need peace. You may be confused trying to figure out what to do so you need guidance. When you see the approaching storm you know you will need

either deliverance (so the storm takes a turn at the last minute and doesn't hit your life), or, if it does hit, you will need either refuge or strength. Sometimes God provides refuge in the midst of the storm, so you are sheltered from it; other times He wants you to stand out in it so you need strength. When we need things like courage, peace, guidance, deliverance, refuge, or strength; God wants us to earnestly and persistently seek those things from Him and not to stop until God grants them or the storm is over.

I believe that's what it means to watch for God. When you pray for courage or strength or peace or guidance, do not just fire off the prayer like a telegram and then forget about it.

Ps.5:3 In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Pray and then look to heaven in eager expectation and if nothing comes, pray harder and longer and more fervently. Then watch. Look in your heart and see if God is giving you peace or courage or security or strengthening and keep that process up until God has given enough to satisfy your soul.

We need to be like our dog Tessa when I'm in the kitchen with a plate of food. She watches me without so much as blinking no matter how long it takes until one of two things happens – either I drop something for her to eat, or I finish the whole plate and put it away in the dishwasher. Then and only then does she leave the kitchen. One reason why she does that is she doesn't have anything else worthwhile to do. What else is she going to do? She's a dog. There is no other thing she could be doing that would be better than standing there in the kitchen hoping for the chance of receiving some grace. When you need deliverance or strength or courage or peace or joy, it is the height of foolishness to ask God for it in some passionless, half-hearted way for a while and then give up. It might make sense to give up if there were some other option – some other source of those things. Tessa might give up on me if there is someone else in the kitchen who also has a plate. But for us there is no one else with a plate. We have nowhere else to go.

But how often do we decide the wait is too long, and we try to resort to some human solution?

We say, "I can't wait any longer for Your grace, so I am just going to numb the pain with a little sin"?

"God, You are taking too long to provide a godly husband who is a spiritual leader so I am just going to marry a nice, attractive guy who is a nominal Christian and hope he comes around."

"You are taking too long to reveal Your glory in a way that satisfies the cravings of my soul so I am just going to take in a little pornography or indulge a fantasy or have a few drinks or watch a movie or go spend a bunch of money." That is like our dog saying, "He doesn't look like he's going to drop any food, I think I'll go out in the back yard and eat some grass." All that does is make her throw up. There is no one in the back yard with a plate of food and she knows that, so she keeps watch.

So David didn't take his eyes off God that night. What was God going to give him? Strength and courage to be able to handle being hauled off to be executed? Or maybe deliverance from even being captured? Peace? Joy? Guidance? What's going to drop down from God's plate? And when is it going to drop? He didn't know, so he kept praying and kept watching.

God in the foreground

A second observation I want to make comes from v.10. The NIV translates the beginning of v.10 “**you go out before me.**” The word normally means “to meet,” which is the way most of the translations render it. The reason the NIV and KJV both have the idea of God going out in front or preceding David is because the main idea of this word is “to be in front of.” It is not easy to discern whether here it should mean that God will come in front of David to meet him face to face, or go out in front of him to precede him in his confronting danger. Either way the point is that in David’s eyes it is God who occupies the foreground. Where most of us would look and see disaster, David saw God. Where we would see nothing but danger and hatred and unfairness and relentless suffering, David looked and at first he saw all that too, but then he looked again and saw God. Both were there, but one was in the foreground and the other was in the background. By the time David gets to vv.9,10, God is in the foreground and his trial was in the background.

What about for you? Is this big trial you are facing in the foreground with God and His promises in the background? Most of the time we are not so atheistic that we forget about God altogether. We know He is there – but He is in the background. We have 20 thoughts about our trial for every one thought about His promises. In our casual conversation we spend ten times as much time lamenting our trial than we spend rejoicing over the promises of God. You can tell which is in the foreground and which is in the background by which occupies most of your thoughts and words and emotions. When trials are in the foreground they seem really real and God’s promises seem distant and theoretical. They seem like thin, weak, Sunday school abstractions, compared to the cold, hard, brutal realness of the suffering.

Extended prayer

If that is how it is for you right now do what David did. If David could take the time to pray and write a psalm with ancient tools while his house was under siege by murderers, who among us is doing something so important that we can’t stop and seek hard after God – and keep seeking and keep seeking harder and harder until God is in the foreground. Take the time to write out a prayer. There is something very powerful in taking the time to craft a written prayer that really captures what is in your heart, and that leads your heart to God. Writing and rewriting, and editing and then reading and adding some more and reading some more and getting on your knees for a while, then adding another insight, then meditating deeply on how to tie the thoughts together and how to express them in a coherent, maybe even poetic way – there is something about that degree of effort put into a prayer that can result in a level of fellowship with God that goes beyond what you experience when you just kneel down and pray silently for a while. When David needed a whole lot of grace from God this is the kind of thing he did.

The Joy of Anticipated Grace

Skip down to the end of the psalm.

¹⁴ They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. ¹⁵ They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. ¹⁶ But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. ¹⁷ O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

The plan was to kill David in the morning, but when David looks ahead to morning what he sees is something wonderful. He sees the love of God coming to him in such abundant and

detectable measure that it makes him sing. Morning was the time when the storm was due to hit, but after his prayer David is fully convinced that come morning he is going to be singing for joy. David loved the feeling of God being a shelter and refuge for him in times of trouble.

This is the joy of anticipated grace. It is not a joy that comes from merely being aware that God is a refuge and fortress. The singing for joy came only after he had an experience of God as his refuge that was powerful enough to become bigger in his soul than the anxiety of the danger and suffering. The morning had not yet come. Deliverance and refuge were still David's only in promise form. But even in promise form they can be experienced. There is a profound change in the heart that takes place the moment the soul takes rest in a promise of God. Suddenly that promise goes from being a theological abstraction to a delightful experience. It goes from a theoretical concept to something that really seems real to the heart. Sometimes you know God's promises to be facts, and yet your heart responds to them as though they were fairy tales. But when you experience God's presence – experience God as deliverer or protector or refuge - suddenly it goes from seeming like a fairy tale to being more real even than your suffering.

Conclusion

Sometimes God protects you with providence, sometimes with people, sometimes with supernatural power and always through prayer.

Learn to love the experience of being protected by God. How many of you tend to be worriers? Worrying is a sin we all need to be diligent to overcome. However those of you who are more prone to that particular sin actually have an advantage over everyone else. There is a blessing that comes along with that particular weakness. The advantage of the worrier is he can at least see the hundred perils a day that God deliver him from. I tend not to worry, which is a good thing but the bad part is I also tend not to even have any awareness of all the dangers and threats out there that I am constantly being protected from. God has been so gracious in protecting me that instead of appreciating His protection I have tended to just assume there is no real danger out there. So if you tend to be a worrier, use that to your advantage. Take advantage of the fact that you can see how many terrible calamities God delivers you from every day, and even if you are not a worrier, all of us experience fear at some point. Never let fear go to waste. Times of fear and terror are painful to endure, but if it weren't for them we would never have any idea what it is like to experience God's protection and deliverance. Those attributes would mean almost nothing to us. Our ability to enjoy those attributes of God cannot be any bigger than our experience of fear and terror, so the more profound the fear and terror you experience in life the greater your capacity to enjoy refuge and fortress aspects of God's nature. Never waste any of your fears. Use them all to train your heart to delight in His protection and deliverance.

Benediction: Ro.15:5,6 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Devotionals

Deliverer

1 Samuel 19 Day 1

1 Samuel 19:1 Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David **2** and warned him...

¹⁰ Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape.

¹¹ Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him... **12** So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped.

²³ So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. **²⁴** He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night.

God delivered David in various different ways; sometimes quietly through providence, sometimes indirectly through people, and sometimes obviously through sheer supernatural power. God's tools for protecting and saving us are just as wide and varied as are our trials. For every new struggle we face God has ten new creative ways of saving us. And most of those ways are not obvious. When He works through people it seems to us like it is those people who are the authors, rather than the mere tools of our deliverance. When He uses quiet providence it seems like luck or chance are the authors of our deliverance – or that there was no deliverance because there was no actual threat.

Dear Father in heaven, You move heaven and earth in Your mighty providence to fulfill Your great and precious promises to Your servant. Forgive me, dear God, when I have attributed that to luck and not to You. Forgive me for acting as though You don't even exist when You do Your most marvelous (but quiet) providential acts. Teach me to love Your deliverance. The advantage of the worrier is he can at least see the hundred perils a day that You deliver him from. You have been so gracious in protecting me that instead of appreciating Your protection I have tended to just assume there is no real danger out there. Open my eyes to see what it is You are protecting me from. Thank You, dear God, for those times when You do let me see – times of fear and terror. They are painful to endure, but if it weren't for them I would never have any idea what Your protection and deliverance is like. Teach me not to ever waste any of my fears. Let me use them all to train my heart to delight in Your protection and deliverance.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Deliverer and protector

Promise to trust: He will protect me from all real harm

What will result if I experience this attribute today: peace, security, joy, trust

Watching for God

1 Samuel 19 Day 2

Psalm 59:1 Of David. A miktam. When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him.

David looked out his window and saw fierce, armed, bloodthirsty men keeping watch all night on the door to his house. Their job was to keep watch all night to make sure that when David left the house they could take him to go be executed. And so David's response was, *If they are going to keep watch for me, I'm going to keep watch too.*

⁹ O my Strength, I watch for you; because you, O God, are my fortress, ¹⁰ my loving God will meet me.

David figured if his enemies are spending the night watching for him, he had better spend the night watching for God. They were watching for a chance to capture and kill David. So what was David watching for? What does it mean to spend the night watching for God? What does the heart of faith do in those moments in life when disaster has not yet struck, but you can see it right outside your window? It hasn't hit quite yet, but you can see it coming, and from a human standpoint it is just a matter of time before it hits? How does the heart of faith deal with moments like that – moments when you feel the icy cold sting of anticipated pain or loss or harm? You know that unless something changes you are about to suffer something really hard, and your heart races with both fear and all the anxieties of thinking, "What should I do? What action should I take to prevent this, or at least prepare for it?"

Most of my life I have believed that the best response in a time like that is to just relax in the promises of God. Don't get worked up – just trust God, because He will automatically take care of everything. And I think the reason I thought that way is I didn't read the Psalms enough, and when I did read them I read them way too fast. So often in the Psalms the writer is distressed over some calamity, and then a couple verses later he is perfectly at rest in God. And if you aren't careful that can give the illusion that peace and comfort come automatically for the man or woman of faith. But if you read a little more carefully you start to see that the trial, very often, was a long, extended test that drove the psalmist, over a long period of time, to absolute desperation. And then during that time of desperation he cried out to God. And when he did so, nothing happened right away so he kept crying out, and crying out some more, and still nothing happened. So he turns up the volume and intensity of his seeking after God and really cries out. All this keeps going on for a long, extended, seemingly endless period of time before God finally comes and delivers him. That is why the psalmists say things like, "How long will You hide your face from me? Will you forget me forever?" You just don't say things like that if it seems like God has been unresponsive to your prayers for a day or two. Godly men and women start asking questions like that after the trial seems to be going way longer than what is bearable. When you read about a psalmist crying out to God day and night – you know he has come to the point of desperation and is remaining at that point at least for numerous days without getting a response from heaven. In other psalms we know the crisis lasted for weeks and months – maybe even years. For example Ps.108. In that psalm he asks for aid in battle in v.12, and in the very next verse it says **With God we will gain the victory and he will trample down our enemies.** That gives the illusion that help from God came immediately. But in v.11 he says that God no longer goes out with them in their battles. That has to refer to a long-term trend of battles (which would have to refer to at least to months if not years).

And so all that to say this – don't read vv.1-8 too fast. David doesn't skip to v.9 after ten seconds of prayer. When you face impending disaster, don't think that faith means having an attitude that says, "Oh well – whatever happens happens. It will all work out for the best." That attitude sounds like faith and trust in God, but it may be more laziness than faith. God wants us to have an accepting attitude toward

hard providence once it has happened, but if it hasn't happened yet God wants us to be energized and urgent in our seeking help from Him. David didn't just lay down in bed and say, "Well, if they kill me they kill me. 'nite Michal" and then click off the light. He poured out his soul to God in prayer beseeching Him for deliverance.

When disaster is looming on the horizon of your life, and you first become aware of the fact that it is approaching, at that moment you need some things. You're afraid so you need courage. You're heart is in turmoil so you need peace. You may be confused trying to figure out what to do so you need guidance. When you see the approaching storm you know you will need either deliverance (the storm takes a turn at the last minute and doesn't hit your life), or, if it does hit, you will need either refuge or strength. Sometimes God provides refuge in the midst of the storm and you are sheltered from it; other times He wants you to stand out in it so in those times what you need is strength from Him to be able to stand. When David saw trouble coming he didn't say, "Oh well, God will take care of me" and go on his merry way. He realized he needed some things from God – things like courage, peace, guidance, deliverance, refuge, and strength; and he sought those things from God with all his energy.

Keep me, dear Lord, from presuming on Your protection in a way that would cause half-hearted seeking after You. Show me the right balance between confidence that You will take care of me, and earnest seeking after You so that I might find protection in You.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who is the only source of the things I need when danger lurks

Promise to trust: He will give me strength, deliverance, refuge, courage, peace, and joy

What will result if I experience this attribute today: strength, deliverance, refuge, courage, peace, and joy, hope

Watching for God

1 Samuel 19 Day 3

Psalm 59:9 O my Strength, I watch for you; because you, O God, are my fortress, 10 my loving God will meet me.

David did not stop seeking courage, peace, guidance, deliverance, refuge, and strength from God until he had them, or until the storm was over. I believe that is what it means to watch for God. When you pray for courage or strength or peace or guidance, don't just fire off the prayer like a telegram and then forget about it.

Ps.5:3 In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

After David prayed he looked up to heaven and waited for an answer. He fixed his gaze on God and waited for Him to give the things he asked for – things God has promised to give if we seek them from Him with all our heart. “God, my heart is in turmoil, give me peace.” Then watch – like our dog when I'm in the kitchen with a plate of food. She watches me without so much as blinking no matter how long it takes until one of two things happens – either a drop something for her to eat, or I finish the whole plate and put it in the dishwasher so she can see there is absolutely no chance of getting what she wants. Then and only then does she leave the kitchen. Until then she stares up at me without blinking. When you need peace or courage or strength from God beseech Him for it, and then don't take your eyes off Him until you get your answer. He may drop something different from what you wanted. Or He may decide it's best for you to wait a little longer. But don't give up until He puts that plate away altogether.

One reason why our dog does that is she doesn't have anything else worthwhile to do. What else is she going to do? She's a dog. There is no other thing she could be doing that would be better than standing there in the kitchen hoping for the chance of receiving some grace. When you need deliverance our strength or courage or peace or joy, it is the height of foolishness to ask God for it in some passionless, half-hearted way for a while and then give up. It might make sense to give up if there were some other option – some other source of those things. Our dog might give up on me if there is someone else in the kitchen who also has a plate. But for us there is no one else with a plate. We have nowhere else to go. No matter how long God takes in responding to your prayer it's worth it to wait, because there is no other place to go.

But how often do we decide the wait is too long, and we try to resort to some human solution? We say, “I can't wait any longer for Your grace, so I'm just going to numb the pain with a little sin”? “God, You're taking too long to provide a godly husband who is a spiritual leader so I'm just going to marry a nice, attractive guy who is a nominal Christian and hope he comes around.” “You're taking too long to reveal Your glory in a way that satisfies the cravings of my soul so I'm just going to take in a little pornography or indulge a fantasy or have a few drinks or watch a movie or go spend a bunch of money.” That's like our dog saying, “He doesn't look like he's going to drop any food, I think I'll go out in the back yard and eat some grass.” All that does is make her throw up. There's no one in the back hard with a plate of food. No one in the living room or anywhere else – her options are to stay in the kitchen and see what she gets from me or get nothing. And she knows that, so she keeps watch.

David knew that, so all night he kept watch. He didn't take his eyes off God. What was God going to give him? Strength and courage to be able to handle being hauled off to be executed? Or maybe deliverance from even being captured? Peace? Joy? Guidance? What's going to drop down from God's plate? And when is it going to drop? He didn't know, so he kept praying and kept watching.

Oh Lord, give Your servant the faith to keep watching You, and never to give up and take the shortcuts of sin.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God who is the only source of the things I need when danger lurks

Promise to trust: He will give me strength, deliverance, refuge, courage, peace, and joy

What will result if I experience this attribute today: strength, deliverance, refuge, courage, peace, and joy, hope

Deliverer

1 Samuel 19 Day 4

Psalm 59:1 For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam. When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him. Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. 2 Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men. 3 See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD. 4 I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight! 5 O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors. Selah 6 They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. 7 See what they spew from their mouths-- they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, "Who can hear us?" 8 But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations. 9 O my Strength, I watch for you; because you, O God, are my fortress, ¹⁰ my loving God will meet me. God will let me gloat over those who slander me. 11 But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In your might make them wander about, and bring them down. 12 For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, 13 consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob. Selah 14 They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. 15 They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. 16 But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. 17 O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

The NIV translates the beginning of v.10 "you go out before me." The word normally means "to meet" or "to confront," which is the way most of the translations render it. The reason the NIV and KJV both have the idea of God going out in front or preceding David is because the main idea of this word is "to be in front of." It's not easy to discern whether here it should mean that God will come in front of David to meet him face to face, or go out in front of him to precede him in his confronting danger. But either way the point is that what is in the foreground in David's eyes is God.

Where most of us would look and see disaster, David saw God. Where we would see nothing but danger and hatred and unfairness and relentless suffering, David looked and at first he saw all that too, but then he looked again and saw God. Both were there. There was evil and danger and all that, but there was also God and His promises. Both were there, but one was in the foreground and the other was in the background. For David, at least by the time he gets to vv.9,10, God is in the foreground and his trial was in the background.

What about for you? Is this big trial you're facing in the foreground with God and His promises in the background? Most of the time we aren't so atheistic that we forget about God altogether. We know He is there – but He's in the background. We have 20 thoughts about our trial for every one thought about His promises. The trial seems really real and God's promises seem distant and theoretical.

If that's how it is for you right now do what David did. If David could take the time to pray and write a psalm with ancient tools while his house was under siege by murderers, who among us is doing something so important that we can't stop and seek hard after God – and keep seeking and keep seeking harder and harder until God is in the foreground and the trial fades to the back?

You might be thinking, "I've tried that and it doesn't work. How did David do that?" The answer is in v.9. He knew God was his fortress, and so he watched for Him. He strained the eyes of his heart until he could see God as his fortress. I don't know how much time he spent, but I know it was at least enough for him to write a psalm.

Take the time to write out a prayer. There are all different kinds of prayer – ranging from the little one-liners all through the day to the kind where you have to do what Jesus did and get away from everyone, travel to an isolated place where you won't be interrupted, and spend a long, extended time seeking God. There is something very powerful in taking the time to craft a written prayer that really captures what is in your heart, and that leads your heart to God. Writing and re-writing, and editing and then reading and adding some more and reading some more and getting on your knees for a while, then adding another insight, then meditating deeply on how to tie the thoughts together and how to express them in a coherent, maybe even poetic way – there is something about that level of effort put into a prayer that can result in a level of fellowship with God that goes beyond what you experience when you just kneel down and pray silently for a while. And when David needed a whole lot of grace from God this is the kind of thing he did. He didn't stop seeking after God until God was in the foreground and his trial was in the background.

Oh Lord God, You are my fortress. You go before me as I plunge into today's version of my ongoing trials. You will come to me and meet me. You will be there in front of me at 10:00 this morning, and at noon and at 3:30 and in the evening and as I get ready for bed. You will be there, but will I see You? You will stand in the foreground, between me and the bully of this trial, but will I see You there? Or will my heart choose instead to run around to the other side so the trial is in the foreground and You in the background? Give me the grace, dear God to seek refuge in You, and to fill up my whole field of vision with Your great and precious promises.

Even when the trial is my own sin, if I repent, even then You are willing to stand between me and that wretched monster. Even then, when my eyes can see nothing but the black darkness of guilt and failure You are willing to step between me and my sin so that Your goodness and glory and holiness is in the foreground and my guilt and wickedness fade to the back. Oh dear God, what grace! Thank You dear Father! Thank You, dear Lord Jesus, for standing between me and the wrath of God!

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: A fortress and safe haven who will stand between me and trouble

Promise to trust: He will protect me and go out before me and meet me face to face.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Hope, joy, desire to seek Him as refuge, security, peace, rest, courage

The Joy of Anticipated Grace

1 Samuel 19 Day 5

¹⁴ They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. ¹⁵ They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. ¹⁶ But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. ¹⁷ O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

David speaks of the morning in future tense in v.14. They came in the evening to watch all night and take him in the morning. But when David looks ahead to morning what he sees is something wonderful.

He sees the love of God coming to him in such abundant and detectable measure that it makes him sing. David loved the feeling of God being a shelter and refuge for him in times of trouble.

This is the joy of anticipated grace. It is not a joy that comes from merely being aware that God is a refuge and fortress. David had that information in times when he lacked joy. The singing for joy came only after he had an experience of God as his refuge that was powerful enough to become bigger in his soul than the anxiety of the danger and suffering.

That experience, however, was not actual deliverance. The morning had not yet come. Deliverance and refuge were still David's only in promise form. But even in promise form they can be experienced. There is a profound change in the heart that takes place the moment the soul takes rest in a promise of God. Suddenly that promise goes from being a theological abstraction to a delightful experience. It goes from a theoretical concept to something that really seems real to the heart. Not long ago my parents went on a cruise for the first time in their lives. My father gets motion sickness easily, so he didn't know if he would enjoy the cruise or not. He had been told cruises were enjoyable, and he knew in theory that it probably would be (which is why he spent the money to go), but the prospect of going did not generate the kind of excitement and joy that it would now that he knows from experience that he thoroughly enjoys cruising. If he were to be on his way to leave on a cruise right now there would be much more delight of anticipated joy than before, because the joy of the cruise is more real to him now.

Oh Lord, this kind of joy should dominate the life of one who benefits from all Your promises, but so often it is not real in my heart. It remains theoretical. I know the facts: the protection and strengthening and grace You have in store are wonderful and should thrill my soul. But even though I know those to be facts, my heart responds to them as though they were a fairy tale. Dear Lord God, please awaken my heart to the reality of Your promises, that I might really believe.

I know that will happen if I keep seeking hard after You and do not give up. Give me the faith to do that. Help me believe with such certainty that the joy is there for the having if I just don't give up seeking that I persist no matter how long it takes and no matter how unfruitful it seems.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose promises are *real*

Promise to trust: He will be faithful to fulfill what He has promised

What will result if I experience this attribute today: hope, joy, earnestness in seeking