

Prayer

Glorious Lord, show Your power and love to all of us who meet to worship You this day, across every continent and in every small corner of this globe. Turn us to repentance, forgive us our sins and lead us into paths of righteousness. Then, may we give you the glory for Your great salvation, and live our lives to the praise of Your name: through Jesus Christ our Lord: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Thanks for Life

Praise the Lord for the gifts of life and love. All of us have been made by God, and we live in different ways, yet He loves us all equally. Give thanks for all that God has given you.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the politics which lie behind energy production*
- *Give thanks for your home*
- *Pray for journalists working in dangerous places of the world*

Meditation

What is Sunday without the worship of the Lord?
What is Monday without honouring Him at work?
What is Tuesday without giving time back to the Saviour?
What is Wednesday without discovering Him in others?
What is Thursday without enjoying ourselves in Christ?
What is Friday without sharing the Gospel with a friend?
What is Saturday without enjoying our rest in Him?
What is any day without the presence of our Lord?
And what does life all mean without His creative touch?
So why not let each glorious day be one of worship?
And why not let Him guide you each and every day?

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 24:1-11

¹ When Saul came back from following the Philistines, he was told that David was in the wilderness of En-gedi. ² So Saul took three thousand chosen men of Israel, and went to look for David and his men in the region of the 'Rocks of the Wild Goats'. ³ He came to the sheepfolds at the side of the road, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself; but David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave!

⁴ David's men said to him, 'This is the day the LORD has told you about when He said, "I will give your enemy into your hand, and you will do to him as it seems good to you."' Then David went and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's cloak; ⁵ but afterwards, David was conscience stricken because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak, ⁶ and he said to his men, 'The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to raise my hand against him; for he is the LORD's anointed.' ⁷ So David scolded his men severely and did not permit them to attack Saul. Then Saul got up and left the cave, and went on his way.

⁸ After this, David also got up and went out of the cave to call after Saul, 'My Lord, the King!' When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down with his face to the ground and did obeisance. ⁹ David said to Saul, 'Why do you listen to the words of those who say to you, "David seeks to harm you"? ¹⁰ This very day your own eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into my hand whilst in the cave, and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you! I said, "I will not raise up my hand against my Lord, because he is the Lord's anointed." ¹¹ See, my father, look at the corner of your cloak in my hand; for the fact that I cut off the corner of your cloak and did not kill you, you may know for certain that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you are hunting me to take away my life!'

Review

David and Saul had been playing a deadly game of cat and mouse in the mountainous regions of Judah, as Saul attempted to track down and kill his sworn enemy, David. Meanwhile, David had cemented together the band of followers he had gathered by going on raids that helped gain both David and his men the reputation of defenders of the land of Judah (23:1-5). Saul was still king of all Israel and David was the outlaw, but it was becoming clear that David could outwit Saul whenever he so wished. But because David had always accepted that whilst he lived, Saul was 'the Lord's anointed', he was reluctant to do anything that would contribute to his death. Saul was still the man who was the first king of all Israel; even though he stood in the way of his just claim to the throne of Israel and Judah. The situation therefore was one of stalemate.

On the surface, the details today's story are comical. With the eyes of faith, we can see that David's deference to Saul was an expression of his respect for God, despite the difficulties of his own circumstances, and this is important for our story. It must have been a terrible and greatly taxing thing for David to be confident of the Lord's anointing and his own right to the throne of Israel, and yet see Saul acting in a manner completely contrary to the best interests of the people. Out of respect, he had to accept the situation, but David had to learn one of the most important lessons of true godly leadership, which is that one who has received the Lord's anointing is not at liberty to do what he wants. The Lord's ways are mysterious and yet they must be followed with studious care because it is God's path that is being walked, not the leader. These stories are in scripture for a purpose.

Saul came after David with three thousand picked men. This was no match, one would have thought, for the group of four hundred loyal to David, despite David's charisma and increasing authority over them and the region of the country in which they lived. The scene in our story is set with comical precision. David lies hidden deep inside a cave, and the unknowing Saul uses the same cave to 'relieve himself'. One would have thought that Saul's troops would have checked the cave out, but they did not, and the comedy begins; but as with most comedies, it is one with a serious point to make.

David was tempted to kill Saul by his men, who quoted to him what they believe to be God's word, that He would 'give your enemy into your hand' (24:4). They expected David to Saul in the back. David, however, craftily cut a piece of cloth from Saul's cloak (which would have been placed to one side). For David, this was not a chance to vindicate himself by killing Saul, but for proving to Saul that He was loyal to him as the anointed King of Israel. Yet David appears to have been uncertain (see 24:5) feeling awkward at having 'played' with Saul in this way. He chided himself for his foolishness, and then chided those who were with him. They must have been bewildered by David's actions, as from their point of view, a battle could not be won without taking advantage of an enemy's weakness!

The element of comedy strikes again when we hear Saul get up to leave the cave after all that had happened, only to find himself confronted by David (24:9f.) claiming loyalty, giving

him due honour and virtually asking for Saul's forgiveness for having been so foolish! David clearly asked for Saul to understand that he was not attempting to kill him, but it is hardly possible to imagine the confusion in Saul's mind at this moment, as someone who was already of unstable mind!

From a spiritual point of view, this whole story illustrates the importance of trusting God for the circumstances of life and the timing of things that happen. It was quite natural for the men to suggest that David act to kill Saul in the cave, but David was sensitive to the Lord's ways and would not do this. It is so easy to follow the natural ways of the world, but the question we face is what would the Lord have us do? He may well have a different plan for us which may appear on the surface to be completely wrong, or as in this case, comical.

It is often the case that the Lord's way of dealing with things is not the most logical from a worldly perspective. Indeed, the right worldly thing to do should be ruled out, leaving the way clear for us to offer the situation to the Lord in prayer and Him to tell us what to do. Sometime a situation only seems difficult because we have not perceived the Lord's will; and in offering it to the Lord in prayer we see it in a totally different light. This is easy to say, and hard to do, particularly when, as with David and Saul, a difficult situation persists over many years. However, God's purposes very often take many years to come to fruition, but they will not do so unless we follow Him closely each step of the way.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have you found yourself in the situation of disagreement with someone who is in spiritual authority over you? How have you handled it?
2. It appears that in our story, the Lord spoke to David through his conscience, in what other way might he make his will known in such circumstances?
3. Do you think that Saul deserved to continue to live, whilst underperforming as King and displaying increasing neurosis?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I wonder how many of us would have had the greatness to do what David did in this situation, knowing that the whole event would be a matter of great humour to everyone who heard about it! One of David's spiritual strengths was to be unafraid of what people would think of him, and this is something from which we should learn.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Reflect upon circumstances where you have had the opportunity to do severe damage to the cause of an enemy of yours, perhaps at work, or at church. What did you do, and how does this story compare with what actually happened?
- Pray for the political leaders of your own country and ask the Lord to help them to put aside personal interest for the greater good.

Final Prayer

Bring me to the end of this day, Lord Jesus, in peace and contentment. In peace because I have dealt with my sin before Your glorious throne and accepted Your forgiveness; and in contentment because I have heard Your word and responded to it. So may my worship be complete this Sunday; the day of Your Resurrection: AMEN