

Prayer

Glorious Lord, You who have revealed Yourself to countless people throughout the world, show Yourself to me today. Give me eyes to see where You are, ears to listen to Your Word, a mouth to speak to You, and a heart to accept the challenge of Your abiding presence and will. Change and transform my life daily through the power of Your divine love; I praise You, glorious Lord: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Environment

As the Olympics begin in Beijing embroiled in controversy about the levels of air pollution in the city, pray that the issue of pollution might raise genuine interest and concern.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the joy of music and song
- Pray for national leaders gathered in Beijing for the Olympics
- Pray for those who are victims of injustice in the legal system

Meditation

Where is Your power and strength, O Lord?
Give me faith in Your unfailing provision.
Come to the aid of our embattled souls
when we need You most of all;
Come to the aid of Your glorious Church
when it is called to preach revival;
Come to the aid of the poor and weak
when they need a genuine Saviour;
Come to the aid of sick and worried
when they need authentic healing;
Come to the aid of those who are unsaved
When they need to find hope in You;
Come to the aid of people trapped by evil
who need Your powerful deliverance;
Where is Your power and strength, O Lord?
Give me faith in Your unfailing provision.

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 26:12-18

¹² So David took the spear that was at Saul's head and the water jar, and they went away. No one saw it, or knew it, nor did anyone awake; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them. ¹³ Then David went over to the other side, and stood on top of a hill far away, with a great distance between them.

¹⁴ David called to the army and to Abner son of Ner, saying, 'Abner! Will you not answer?' Then Abner replied, 'Who are you that calls to the king?' ¹⁵ David said to Abner, 'Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. ¹⁶ This thing that you have done is not good. As the

LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD's anointed. See now, where is the king's spear, or the water jar that was at his head?'

¹⁷ Saul recognized David's voice, and said, 'Is this your voice, my son David?' David said, 'It is my voice, my lord, O king.' ¹⁸And he added, 'Why does my lord pursue his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hands?'

Review

This is the story of the second time that David was pursued by King Saul, and although David had been given a clear opportunity to kill Saul, he resisted the temptation. The story is a little complex, but can be summarised like this. Saul was tracking David in the wilderness of Ziph (26:1f.) accompanied by Abner, the commander of the King's army and his best soldiers. This was by far the best quality army Saul had so far used against David, because Abner was usually occupied doing the King's business of securing the borders of Israel and establishing the security of the land. On this occasion, it is clear that Saul was throwing all his resources at finding his enemy.

As Saul and Abner pursued David, spies from David tracked their every move, and reported to David when the Israelite army set up camp for the night, stationed all around their King, who for the sake of safety, slept amongst his troops with Abner by his side (26:5). Calling for a volunteer, Abishai joined David and crept into the Israelite camp, to where Saul and Abner lay. Next to Saul, stuck in the ground, was Saul's spear, probably the same spear that Saul had twice thrown at David when threatening his life (18:11, 19:9). Little wonder that Abishai was keen to take the spear and thrust it through the dysfunctional king (26:8). David responded with the same caution that had come upon him when he last faced Saul in the cave (24:1f.), believing that it was wrong before God to kill a man anointed by Samuel, even though he was now living outside the will of the Lord who had given him authority. Using tactics similar to those he had used before, David took the spear from near Saul's head and a nearby (royal) water jar, and crept out of the camp. Scripture records 'no-one saw it, or knew it, nor did anyone awake; for they all were asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them' (26:12).

In the previous incident at the cave (ch 24), David followed Saul out of the cave and faced him directly, and although Saul had promised that he would thereafter respect David, he clearly did not, and was not to be trusted, for had he come after David again, as we (and David) anticipated. For this reason, and due to the presence of a large army of picked soldiers, David and Abishai took refuge well away from Saul, on the top of a hill, from where he could escape in a number of directions, if necessary.

Interestingly, David shouted out first of all to Abner, accusing him of not doing his duty to protect the King. David's challenge undermined Abner not just in the hearing of the King, but in the hearing of the army as well. This was an astute move, placing uncertainty in the minds of the Israelite army under Abner's command, an uncertainty which bought David time in a potentially dangerous situation. David's words were also very clever, because Abner would have known that the penalty for failure of duty was death, and David's provable accusation against Abner clearly gave him the advantage. When David did eventually accede to the throne, He would have to deal with this army and its commander and ensure its loyalty; so what he did neatly demonstrated his personal authority to all present.

When Saul heard David's voice, he spoke out; and a conversation ensued, shouted across the hillside. Saul did not break down and cry as he had done in the incident at the cave (24:16), he professed forgiveness to David for everything, and promised David his blessing (26:25). However, the story ends in the same way as that of chapter 24, with David

returning home, and Saul going back to court, so David remained as suspicious of Saul as ever. He was not going to trust the words of a man who changed his mind according to his moods and the seasons; and yet again scripture tells us a story of David's bravery and godliness in the midst of considerable stress.

It never ceases to amaze me that some Christians view their faith as something of a hobby; something that they can give attention to after they have managed to sort out everything else in their lives. Stories such as this from the Old Testament are there to remind us that it is within the real and sometimes critical circumstances of our lives that faith is most relevant, it is not an afterthought! Faith is not a luxury to turn to when we have found peace, but a guide to our behaviour and practice when we are at our most exposed, and when we have to go through the hardest trials that life affords. David had given the Lord permission to control his actions and emotions even in the midst of battle with his enemies, and Saul had lost touch with faith in God when he had fallen out with the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 15). That was the difference between them; Saul was searching to find his faith again, and David was exercising it. Because of this, David would always win any minor skirmish with Saul, even if his ultimate victory lay in a future, as yet unseen.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you think that David was indeed brave to walk into the camp of the enemy, even though the Lord had put them all to sleep? How does David show faith in this story?
2. Can you work out any significance for David taking the water jar from near Saul's head?
3. If you were a member of the Israelite army, what would you think of your commander and King after an event such as this?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

One thing sticks in my own mind about this story, and it is patience. David seems to have been blessed with an ability to be patient which is far beyond my own, and I feel I have something to learn from him. David was someone who has much to teach all of us.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *If you are a working person, you may well know what it is like to have to live with antagonisms and personality clashes at work. Everyone has to find their own way through such difficulties, by the grace of God.*
- *It could be that you observe a battle between two people who are attempting to lead your church, and it can be difficult because one personal will fight with another and clashes can become severe. Pray and ask the Lord what the story of David and Saul can teach in this situation.*

Final Prayer

Your will, Lord God, contains the secrets of the Universe; its origins, its workings and its future. Show me how I am placed within your plan for the world and give me inner peace. May I demonstrate confidence in You as my Maker and my Redeemer, to the praise and glory of Your Name. AMEN