

My Life Was Precious in Your Eyes  
1 Samuel 23-24, 26  
June 4, 2023  
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CenterPoint Church

## Introduction

My daughter hates the Shakespeare play, *Macbeth*, as I'm sure many high school English students through the years have. She dismisses it with: "Everyone dies at the end, it's pointless." Fair enough, but it is regarded as one of the greatest plays ever written and has some wonderful moral questions that continue to resonate with humanity four centuries later. I'm sure you know the plot: Macbeth is a Scottish general who is hosting the king, Duncan, in his castle. He has been given a prophecy by a group of witches that he will eventually become the king. Strongly encouraged by his wife, he decides to take matters into his own hands, and make his destiny happen sooner rather than later. So he kills the king as he sleeps, which brings a struggle with guilt – "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No." When the king's sons flee the country, Macbeth is crowned king, but he must continue to kill others to keep his hold on the crown.

Our Scripture passage this morning presents us with a man who had also been told in a prophecy that he would be the future king of his country, this time ancient Israel not Scotland. He would have multiple chances to kill the reigning king, who was not innocently staying at his house but was ruthlessly trying to kill him. He had much stronger reasons than Macbeth did to end this king's life, but he passed up every chance. Why did David choose mercy and not vengeance? Why did he choose to stay in the wilderness rather than force his way to the throne? We'll see a man who walked by faith not by sight, a believer who entrusted himself to the hand of the Lord despite his circumstances tempting him not to. Maybe we can see ourselves in similar predicaments and find the strength of our faith and convictions to stand strong in the face of temptations and shortcuts to an easier life.

Heading into today's passage, remember that David has fled Saul's palace as it was made clear to him that the king wanted to kill him. In the last chapter, Saul had reiterated that desire by putting to death an entire city, Nob, the city of the priests, merely for helping David; even though they did not even know that David was Saul's enemy. Our chapters today continue Saul's hunt for the young upstart. We'll see betrayal, nighttime raids, confrontation, remorse, and a king relieved in more ways than one. We have three long narrative chapters today, but I am not going to read all of the verses, I will summarize some of them. Our first chapter proves the old saying that

### **I. No Good Deed Goes Unpunished (Chapter 23)**

Let me summarize the first 15 verses: The Philistines attacked an Israelite town named Keilah so David asked the Lord if he should go defend them. The Lord said, yes, go save Keilah. David's men didn't think that was such a good idea, so David prayed again and was told that the Lord would deliver the Philistines into his hand. So he went and beat them and saved the town. Saul got word that David was in Keilah and knew that the city had walls around it, so he saw an opportunity to trap David and his men, so he headed there with an army. David heard he was coming and asked the Lord whether the men of Keilah would surrender him over to the king. The Lord said yes, that's exactly what they'll do, so David took his men and left town for the hill country. Starting at v. 16:

*<sup>16</sup> And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this." <sup>18</sup> And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. <sup>19</sup> Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill*

*of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? 20 Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand." 21 And Saul said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, for you have had compassion on me. 22 Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is very cunning. 23 See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah." 24 And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. 25 And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 26 Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, 27 a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land." 28 So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. That place was called the Rock of Escape. 29 And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.*

David was hiding out for his life, on the run from the king of Israel who wanted him dead, and he took the time to defend one of the cities of Israel from their perpetual enemy, the Philistines. Saul the king was supposed to defend his territory, but he was too busy trying to kill the man that he saw as his rival that he didn't have time to protect his own people. After David saved the town, he found out that Saul was coming to get him again and he wondered if that city would close ranks and protect him. You know, since he just saved them against the wishes of his own men. But that was not the case, they were ready to give him up. How incredibly ungrateful is that - ready to betray the man who just saved them? Of course, word probably reached them that Saul was killing entire cities for helping David, so maybe we can't blame them for being willing to hand over David.

Then in verse 19 another group, the Ziphites, sought out Saul to give him David's location. Saul caught up with David and his men in the wilderness of Maon and was closing in to kill him when he was called away to deal with the Philistines. What a coincidence, right? But, of course, we see the hand of God there in His continued protection of David. That's two instances of a group of Israelites ready to sell David out and get him captured. Even though he escaped every time, David must have been so discouraged by all of this. I think that's why we have this little scene with Jonathan in verses 16-18. David's best friend came out to the wilderness to encourage him, and though neither of them knew it, this is the last time they would ever see one another.

One of my life verses is Galatians 6:9: "*And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*" It's easy to get discouraged, especially when people are ungrateful and even turn on you after you've done something nice for them. Parents, you can probably come up with examples of when you felt your kids took for granted how much you do for them and sometimes it feels like all you hear is complaining and whining. Spouses, do you keep a mental record of the times that your husband or wife didn't reciprocate your love and sacrifice? At work, you go above and beyond the call of duty, but no one seems to recognize or reward you; instead, they only seem to point out your failings. I remember a group of people from my last church took basically an entire Saturday to help a new couple that had started attending the church move their stuff into a storage unit and then to their new house an hour and a half away. And then the couple left the church a few months later complaining to the pastor that no one had reached out to them! These things aren't really the same as an ungrateful town of Israelites turning on David after he had just saved them, but the principle is the same: don't let people's ingratitude and unwillingness to reciprocate your good deeds discourage you and turn your heart from pleasing God. Press on in serving the Lord and

helping people no matter how they treat you. After all, the Lord continues to work for our good despite the hundreds of times we take him for granted and fail to give Him thanks and honor for His work in our lives. We love because He first love us, we serve because He first served us, we forgive because we are so greatly forgiven in Christ.

Our next chapter is an episode from David's life where, unlike the last chapter,

## **II. A Good Deed Is Rewarded (Chapter 24)**

Summary of the first 7 verses: Saul was back hunting David in the wilderness of Engedi. At one point, he left his army and went into a cave alone to "answer the call of nature," not realizing that David and his men were hiding deep in the cave. David's men saw this as clearly God giving Saul into their hands to kill. But David would not allow anyone to attack the Lord's anointed; he just crept forward and cut off a corner of Saul's robe, which he immediately felt guilty about. Picking up in verse 8:

*<sup>8</sup>Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. <sup>9</sup>And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm?' <sup>10</sup>Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' <sup>11</sup>See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. <sup>12</sup>May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. <sup>13</sup>As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. <sup>14</sup>After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! <sup>15</sup>May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand." <sup>16</sup>As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. <sup>17</sup>He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. <sup>18</sup>And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. <sup>19</sup>For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. <sup>20</sup>And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. <sup>21</sup>Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." <sup>22</sup>And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.*

Saul was back chasing David, this time with 3,000 men to David's 600. What a crazy story that Saul picked the very cave that David and his men were hiding in to use as his personal port-a-potty! David's men assumed that God had given Saul into David's hands to end his life, but David did not agree. Think of how tempting that must have been for David: not only could he take out his frustrations on this man who had threatened and hunted him for no reason, but he could stop this life of running and hiding. He could be on his way to the palace to sit on the throne. All his problems would seemingly be over. Except that he would have a problem with God. David knew what attacking Saul would mean in the eyes of the Lord, that he would have the blood of the king of Israel on his hands. So he chose mercy against Saul, only cutting a piece off his robe, and even that troubled his conscience. What we just see as a harmless act of cutting a little cloth was actually more of a declaration of revolt. Think of a veteran tearing up an American flag or a husband throwing his wedding ring down – the symbolism is worse than the actual act.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Nicoletti's sermon "Responding to our Adversaries" from 10/20/19, found at [faithtacoma.org](http://faithtacoma.org).

I love how David treated Saul because he didn't act out of vengeance, but he also didn't allow himself to be a doormat. He balanced grace and truth; he granted mercy without allowing his persecutor to hurt him more. He was wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove. He had learned that Saul could not be trusted, but that didn't keep him from doing the right thing. Then he spoke straight, hard truth to Saul: "Despite being urged to kill you, I did not because you are the king that the Lord has anointed. Though you hunt me, I will not lift my hand against you. The Lord is going to judge you for this. He will deliver and vindicate me." David's words had a profound effect on Saul, who began to weep. He recognized that his life had been spared and proclaimed both David's superior righteousness and his status as the future king. This is what Samuel had told Saul back in chapter 15:28: "*The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.*" In light of that future kingship, Saul even begged David to show mercy to his descendants. David swore that he would, and Saul left.

Of course, Saul would change his mind and get back to hunting David two chapters later! But even though the king had gone back on his word, David would not go back on his, and we'll see again that **III. Kindness Leads to Repentance (Chapter 26)**<sup>2</sup>

My summary of the first 7 verses: The Ziphites from chapter 23 found out where David was hiding in the hills and again they snitched to Saul, who immediately took 3,000 men down there and set up camp. David asked for a volunteer among his men to sneak into the camp with him, and his nephew, Abishai, volunteers. They snuck right up to Saul who was asleep next to Abner, the commander of his army. Saul's spear was stuck in the ground next to his head. Let's pick up the narrative in verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> Then Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." <sup>9</sup> But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" <sup>10</sup> And David said, "As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. <sup>11</sup> The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go." <sup>12</sup> So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them. <sup>13</sup> Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. <sup>14</sup> And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered, "Who are you who calls to the king?" <sup>15</sup> And 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 the king your lord. <sup>16</sup> 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. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head." <sup>17</sup> Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." <sup>18</sup> And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? <sup>19</sup> Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' <sup>20</sup> Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains." <sup>21</sup> Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake." <sup>22</sup> And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. <sup>23</sup> The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you

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<sup>2</sup> Title taken from Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (England: Christian Focus, 2000), p. 215.

*into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed.* <sup>24</sup> *Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.* <sup>25</sup> *Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them."* So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Verse 12 tells us that a "deep sleep from the Lord" had fallen upon all of Saul's men, that's how David and Abishai could sneak into the camp without being spotted and have a conversation. Once again, David was encouraged to end Saul's life when he had the chance, and for the second time, it was framed as an opportunity handed to him by the Lord. And again, David asserted that it would be a sin against the Lord for him to kill Saul. There's a bit of prophecy in David's explanation to Abishai why he could kill Saul – *"the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish."* There's a sense where all three of these will combine soon to end Saul's reign and life.

So he settled on just taking Saul's spear and water jar; remember that this was the spear that Saul had tried to kill David with twice! And as he had done with the strip of Saul's robe, David held it up to show as proof that he had come close enough to kill the king. David first rebuked Abner for being incompetent: *"As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the Lord's anointed."* And that "you" is plural – he was calling out everyone around Saul. David was the only one who saved Saul's life that night. And then, similar to chapter 24, David was straight up with Saul about how he did not deserve Saul's hate and violence.

Romans 2:4 asks, *"do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"* Paul is teaching that we should not take God's grace and patience for granted, but should understand His kindness as a warning to repent of our sins. Here in 1 Samuel, David's kindness led to his enemy's repentance. It cut deep in Saul's heart and we actually hear him admit that he had sinned, that he was foolish and made a great mistake. He pledged that he would not try to harm David anymore. We've heard that before, but this is actually the last attack he would make. This would be the last time that Saul and David saw each other as well. And their time ended with the current king pronouncing a blessing on the future king – *"Bless you, my son... You will do many things and will succeed in them."*

## **Conclusion**

It's interesting that in all three of these stories, these historical accounts, that David's men tempted him to do the opposite of what he ended up doing. They tried to discourage him from attacking the Philistines and in both stories where Saul was vulnerable to David's attack, they urged him to end the king's life. And all three times David resisted his men's advice. They were not bad men, they were looking out for what they thought was best for David. But David knew what the Lord wanted from him. This is an easy application for a preacher: will you be a man-pleaser or a God-pleaser? 1 Thessalonians 2:4b – *"we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts."* When even the well-meant advice of those around you clashes with what you know God wants from you, what will you choose? David chose to honor God over his own comfort, safety, and prosperity.

David's restraint also reminds us that no matter what other people have done to us, we do not have the right to act in an ungodly manner towards them. No matter how much your spouse hurts you, you are not then justified in being harsh and vicious in how you speak to them. No matter who attacks you on social media, you should not reply in the same ugly manner that they have attacked. We can explain and defend ourselves in a godly way, just as David defended himself. But ultimately, we leave these things to the Lord, trusting in His vindication and that He will make all things right in the end. We are called to resolve conflict and be peacemakers.

Romans 12:18-21 reminds us that, *“<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

Do you think that what David did to Saul felt like heaping burning coals on the king's head? I think it did. Saul wept and felt remorse and admitted that David was more righteous than he was and deserved to become king. That had to be tough to admit, but Saul's evil was overcome by David's good. Your pursuing peace instead of continued animosity may win over your enemy. Your forgiveness might even take his anger away. Sometimes, you may have to do it all over again, just like David did, but Jesus taught us that there are no limits on our forgiveness. And any grace we extend to others pales in comparison to the grace that God has shown us.

Ultimately, God is shaping us through the attacks and setbacks and trials of this life. Christians see adversity through a different lens than the rest of the world: Romans 5:3-4 - *“We **rejoice** in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”* Character doesn't just appear out of nowhere; it is the result of God's refining our lives through tribulation and suffering. We can thank God for our pain because it will ultimately benefit us. God's hand was on David, He would eventually raise him to the throne and make him the greatest king in the history of Israel. But first, God would shape his character and prepare him by teaching him lessons in the wilderness that he couldn't get in the palace.<sup>3</sup>

We see that David could have skipped over a lot of pain and made his way to the throne much quicker if he had taken Saul's life. And in the same way, the greater David could have avoided the pain and agony that He faced and taken a shortcut to glory. Early in His ministry, Jesus was tempted to avoid the path of suffering and grab hold of His throne early - Matthew 4:8-10: *“the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these I will give you, if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.’”* Jesus knew He would need to suffer and take the long road to the throne that awaited Him. And even when He could have called down ten thousand angels to keep from being crucified, He knew that the Father's plan was that He would die a painful death for our sake.

→ Transition to Communion

Benediction

2 Corinthians 13:11 - *“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”*

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Dallas: Word, 1997), p. 52.