

Our helper

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[0 : 00] The scene that we have here at the end of chapter 21 and the beginning of chapter 22 in 1 Samuel. And then the beginning of chapter 22 we find David in a cave and he's now surrounded by a group of debtors, discontented and distressed people along with members of his family.

But how do we know that these portions of scripture are particularly significant? All scripture we know is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for all good purposes.

So it's always the whole Bible is accurate. The whole Bible is there for our benefit. But as I mentioned before, David in the cave is the source of two of his Psalms, Psalm 57 and Psalm 142. And the madness of David at the end of chapter 21 is the scene from which Psalm 34 is written. So we have a significant scene or two scenes in David's life.

And I'd like to begin, first of all, by making just a few observations, a few practical observations. Observation number one is it's not good to be alone in the Christian life.

[1 : 42] Now you might say, well, where does that come from? Well, the contrast between chapter 21 and chapter 22 is quite significant. In chapter 21, at the beginning of the chapter, we read, David went to Nob, to Ahimelech, the priest.

Ahimelech trembled when he met him and asked, why are you alone? Why is no one with you? David is particularly isolated. David is particularly vulnerable.

He's on the run from Saul and he soon finds himself in the hands of one of the great enemies of the people of God.

So being alone in the Christian life is never a good idea. We are meant for community. We are meant for fellowship. We are meant to be together.

And we need to be together. We need one another. The contrast with chapter 22 is quite remarkable. Because we're told that David went to the cave. He went to the cave of Adullam.

[2 : 42] Members of the family came. The distressed, the discontented, the debtors came. So by the end of this scene, instead of David being on his own, David is with 400 people.

He's still vulnerable. He's still at risk. But he's not alone. Throughout the Bible, and particularly we see in the New Testament, we have these commands that can only be fulfilled when we are working, living, serving, worshiping together.

You know, they're characterized by one another. Over 100 times in the New Testament, these commands are given for our benefit, our mutual benefit, our edification.

The Apostle Paul, I think, is at least 59 of those commands, belongs to the Apostle Paul. 14 of them with Jesus.

14 of the commands have to do with love. So even just looking at the letter to the Romans, we see Romans chapter 12, be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

[3 : 50] Later in chapter 12, honor one another above yourselves. Chapter 12, verse 16, live in harmony with one another. 13, 8, Romans, love one another.

Romans 14, 13, stop passing judgment on one another. Romans 15, 7, accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you. And 15, 14, instruct one another.

Sometimes we are inevitably isolated. Sometimes we are beyond our control on our own. But it's never a good idea.

If we can avoid being isolated or on our own, that's why worshiping God together, that's why fellowship, whether it's small groups or whatever it is, we need each other.

We need God, of course, but we need each other. So that's observation number one. Observation number two, and if you read the whole of chapter 22, you would see that this works in two different ways.

[4 : 51] Observation one, it's not good to be alone in the Christian life. Observation number two, birds of a feather flock together. If you're interested, you can read of the kind of company that Saul kept at the end of the chapter.

You'll read of the kind of people that were attracted to his reign. And as it is the case, the Scottish equivalent of birds of a feather, which I learned here, is if you fly with the crows, you get shot with the crows.

So Saul had a certain personality type, and he tended to attract similar people. But more importantly, we see that David is an attractive character.

As I said, he was on his own at the beginning of the chapter. And then who comes to join him? His brothers, his father's household, so the family came.

And then this unusual collection of people, the distressed, the debtors, and the discontented, all gathered around him. About 400 men were with him.

[6 : 00] So these people saw some affiliation with David. They saw some connection with David. They wanted to be in his company. So there are two constituent groups here in the cave with David.

There's family, and there's misfits. Which I think is a great description of the Christian church. We are a family, and we are misfits. That's true of each one of us in one way or another.

And we are gathered together, magnetically attracted to a leader. In this case, the leader was David. But as we know, the leader, the author and the perfecter of our faith, the one who is genuinely magnetic, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He draws people to himself. So it's said of a leader that a leader is only a leader in so far as people follow them.

David is clearly a leader. He's a general. He's a king. He has a personality that is suited for leadership, not perfect. But David attracts people.

[7 : 10] But notice that while we facetiously, I described the people of God as misfits and as family. When he comes to write one of his psalms, Psalm 142, he describes it in slightly different terms.

At the end of Psalm 142, he puts it this way. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

So not only do we need each other in fellowship and in friendship, mutual support, mutual encouragement. But there is something magnetic about Jesus. There's something magnetic about the gospel that not only misfits and family members, but that the righteous are drawn together.

And that's a sharp distinction we see in this chapter between those who surround David and those who surround Paul. The righteous, those who fear God, and those who fear Saul.

Now, Saul is quite a frightful character, and you could read more about what Saul was up to at the end of the chapter. But there's something magnetic about the righteous.

[8 : 24] I guess I would put it this way. Magnetism works two ways. Magnetism can attract, and magnetism can repel. The Lord Jesus does two things.

He does both. When Jesus is lifted up, we're told in chapter 12 of John, now is the time for judgment on the world. Now the prince of this world will be driven out.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

So Jesus draws people together. All different kinds of people. But we're also told that the gospel is an offense. That the gospel repels people.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we're told that to the Greek, the gospel was foolishness. It was ridiculous. To the Jew, the gospel was a stumbling block.

[9 : 22] So then and now, Jesus both attracts and repels. The gospel both attracts and repels. The righteous are attracted and the unrighteous are repelled.

So we are drawn to Jesus. We need him. We want him. We desire him. We hear his gospel. We respond to his gospel. We want to be in his company.

And we want to be in the company of his people. Even though we are quite an unusual group of people. The gospel, as we see in the New Testament, as in the Old, tends to attract the odd and the eccentric.

In chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, as I mentioned, brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards.

Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

[10:24] God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things. The things that are not to nullify the things that are. So that no one may boast before God. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.

Who has become for us wisdom from God. That is our righteousness. That same word. Holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

So not many wise. Not many noble. Not many significant. He chooses weak and insignificant people. To demonstrate his powerful and wise plan.

Those who were in distress or in debt or discontented. They had nowhere else to go. They had nowhere else to turn. And isn't that the case? So often we find that there's nowhere else to go. Jesus said, will you leave me as well? To whom else can we go? Who else has the word of life? There's nowhere else to go but Jesus. We may have tried everything and anything.

[11:33] But we come to that point where we need him. And where we gather together in our weakness. Not in our strength. We gather together as those who have made foolish decisions. Not wise.

We gather together not because we are significant. But because he is significant. I said there were three observations. The third observation, very simply. Is when God says do something.

It's always a good idea to do it. At the end of the passage that Stephen read. But the prophet Gad said to David. God's spokesman. Do not stay in the stronghold.

Go into the land of Judah. So David left and went to the forest of Hereth. As a general rule. That never fails. When God calls you to do something.

You are never wrong for doing it. When God tells you to avoid something. You are never at a loss for avoiding it. So as followers of Jesus. We express our love for Jesus.

[12:32] As we keep his commands. He says yes. We say yes. He says no. We say no. God spoke to David through Gad the prophet. And he said it's time to go David.

And David left. Whenever we find ourselves in the will of God. We are safe and we are secure. Whenever we find ourselves saying God says what I think.

God says what I want. God says go but I'd like to stay. God says stay but I'd like to go. That is never an equation. That will bring happiness or satisfaction.

So those are just a few. Simple observations from those. Those few verses. But can we turn for a moment to the psalm. That I read earlier. Psalm 57.

Because a lot of times when we are reading the narrative. Or the story of the Bible. We wonder. What is David thinking?

[13:26] What is going through the head of Joseph here? What is going on in Solomon's mind? What are the characters that we are reading. Thinking or feeling.

But with this scene in the cave. We don't need to scratch our heads. We don't need to wonder. David tells us exactly what is going on. And while we have practical lessons.

We have two key spiritual lessons here. Captured for us in Psalm 57. The first lesson is. I need help.

I need help. You need help. We need help. David is in a cave. He goes from being on his own. He's now in the company of 400. His family is with him.

But how does he begin Psalm 57? Have mercy on me my God. Have mercy on me. For in you I take refuge.

[14:23] I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings. Until the disaster has passed. David has found refuge. Yes. In a cave.

But David recognizes that his only security. His only safety. Is not a structure. But is God himself. We need help. We need help. This world is difficult.

This world is scary. This world is uncertain. We need help. I'm reminded by Louise McMillan. She was telling me that there were 366 occasions in the Bible.

Where we are told do not fear. Or do not be afraid. Well that says we live in a pretty frightening world. Once a day. For 365 days.

And maybe twice on a particularly frightening day. We can go to a different verse in the Bible. And be reminded that we are not to fear. We are not to fear because we have God with us.

[15:19] We have God for us. God is on our side. I wonder whether we have that scene. Where Jesus is saying that he would long to gather people.

As a bird would gather chicks under his wings. This idea of a bird who is protecting their young. That's exactly what God does.

He gathers people like a parent to protect. We are vulnerable. We are weak. We are exposed. We are in jeopardy. But he is gathering us so close.

That we are in his shadow. This image of shadow means closeness. So in Psalm 23 when we speak about. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

It means that death is so close it casts its shadow on us. And when we speak of God's shadow. It means that he is so close that he casts his shadow on us.

[16:19] And when we are going through life. The trials. The tribulations. The uncertainties. The challenges. The difficulties. It's never a good idea to be far from God.

It's always a good idea to be close to God. And David is not taking his security based on a cave. David is finding his security based on his relationship with God.

I need help. You need help. We need help. And God is that present help. In our time of trouble. And notice that there's a dialogue here.

I cry out. To God most high. To God who vindicates me. He sends from heaven and saves me. Rebuking those who hotly pursue me.

God sends forth his love. And his faithfulness. So there's a dialogue here. David is crying out. And God is answering. David is asking.

[17:18] And God is providing. David is vulnerable and at risk. Why? Because King Saul is after him. He's vulnerable. He's at risk. Why? Because the king of Gath.

He found himself in the presence of the king of Gath. So he's up against it. But he says no. I'm going straight to the top. I'm going to God most high.

The God who is most high cannot. There's nothing or no one higher. He is the strongest. He is the wisest. He has the most power. He has the most authority. So in the Christian life.

Never settle for anything other than the top. I'm reminded of a scene many years ago. So my dad was a Buick driver.

When he bought a car. He would always buy a Buick. Which he felt was a reliable car. Nice. Comfortable. But one year he bought a Buick.

[18:15] And it was just awful. It never worked properly. The engine wasn't right. It made lots of sounds. And he went back to the dealer. He went back to the dealer.

And he said. I want my money back. This car is not what I want. It's not doing what you've told me it'll do. The dealer said. I'm sorry. I can't give your money back. I remember.

We had a computer then. I remember dad was sitting. Typing a letter. I said. Who are you writing?

He said. I'm writing the chief executive officer of General Motors. General Motors at the time.

Was the largest corporation in the world. Dad wrote the CEO. The dealership's not helping. Goes straight to the top. Writes to the CEO. Gets a check.

Gets a refund. You're not happy with the car. We'll give you a refund. Go right to the top. Don't settle for a middle man. Go straight to the God most high. That's the access that we have through Jesus.

[19:12] We go right to the top. You see. Saul's not the top of the pyramid. King of Gath is not the top of the pyramid. You add anyone you wish today. Vladimir Putin.

Donald Trump. Keir Starmer. They're not the top of the pyramid. God most high is the top. Never settle for anything other than the top.

So David reminds us that I need help and that we need help. And we take refuge in God. But secondly. The second message here.

And this you might think is not directly stated. But I think it is. Is that we not only need help. But we need a helper. We don't just need help.

That means we cry out. And we get an answer. Somebody's listening. Somebody cares. We have a place of security. But notice the language at verse 3 that I read. God sends forth his love.

[20:11] And his faithfulness. This is echoed again in verse 9. I will praise you among the nations. I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love reaching to the heavens.

Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Love and faithfulness. These two key Old Testament words are often put together.

Faith. Faithfulness. Fidelity. God who keeps his word. God who never lets us down. Love. Love. Sometimes described as grace. Or covenantal love.

The kind of love that never lets you go. These two words are echoed in John chapter 1. In John 1 we're told. That in the beginning was the word.

And the word was with God. And the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Chapter 1 verse 14. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory.

[21 : 13] The glory of the one and only. Who came from the father. Full of grace and truth. So God becomes human. And God is now characterized in these same two terms.

Grace and truth. Love and faithfulness. John continues. Out of the fullness. Out of his fullness. We have all received grace. In place of grace already given.

For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. The law is good. The law shows to us the right path.

The law shows to us the places of danger. The law shows to us the places of security. So the law was given through Moses for our good and for our benefit. But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

So David as he's crying out to God. And recognizing that God is a God of love. And faithfulness. David is pointing us beyond himself.

[22 : 11] David is pointing us to Jesus Christ. And is saying not only do we need help. But we need a helper. And in Jesus Christ. God has come down.

To help us. Not only is he in heaven to hear our cries. But he's come down to earth. He's come down to earth to live. He's lived this life. He knows exactly what we are going through.

He knows the trials. He knows the tribulations. He knows the disappointments. So we need help. And we need a helper. Just as David is a model of what leadership looks like.

A righteous leader attracts righteous people. But David is an imperfect leader. And as you read the David story. We are reminded that like ourselves. He gets it wrong.

He knows what's right. He does what's wrong. He knows what's wrong. And he does it. He knows what's right. And he avoids that sometimes. So we have in David an imperfect leader.

[23 : 11] But I believe in Psalm 57. He is pointing us to one who is perfect. That the God who is most high. Now comes down. The God who hears and answers.

The God who is the refuge for his people. Has now come down to dwell among his people. That he has come to experience life. To live a perfect life in our place.

To die a sacrificial death on our behalf. So we need help. And we need a helper. David is reflecting on his situation.

But he's seeing his life in the light of God. Is that how we see our life? And I think David is being honest. And I think we need to be honest.

Do we frame our life in our knowledge of God? Our awareness of God? His power? His presence? His love? His faithfulness? Because David is seeing everything through that lens.

[24 : 14] You see, when you look at this world apart from God. It simply doesn't make sense. It doesn't add up. So often it seems like the good never seemed to prosper.

So often it seems like the evil always seemed to get ahead. It doesn't seem to make sense. But when we begin to see the world through the lens of the Bible.

Through the lens of God. Things begin to make sense. And David is trying to make sense of a situation that is not adding up. David is trying to do the right thing.

And he's on the run. David is trying to avoid Saul's murderous threats. And finds himself in the hands of another enemy. David finds himself alone in the cave.

And then has a group of 400 family members and misfits to join him. Whatever he might have expected when Saul, Samuel chose him to be the next king. I don't think this was part of his plan.

[25 : 15] You see, that's interesting. The Christian life is not what we think our plan is. But the Christian life is the plan that God has for our life.

And as we go through this life. To us it seems like there are many twists and turns. But God has a way of making a straight way. What does the Proverbs say in Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5 and 6?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. But in all your ways acknowledge him. And he will make your path straight.

David saw his life through the lens of God. The refuge that God gave. The help that God provided. And David gave us a foretaste of the helper who was to come.

We need help. We need a helper. This life is tough. This life is unexpected. This life will take turns and put you in places that you never expected to be in.

[26 : 13] As we cry out to the Most High God. He hears. He answers. He comes down. And he overcomes all of our obstacles.

He delivers us. So that the end of the day. In verses 9 to 11 of the psalm. I will praise you Lord among the nations. I will sing of you among the peoples.

He gives us a song to sing. And an audience with which to sing it too. For great is your love reaching to the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the sky. Be exalted oh God above the heavens.

Let your glory be over all the earth. At the end of the day. God is exalted. The people of God will be exalted. And all the enemies of God will be humbled.

That's why David needed help. That's why he needed a helper. And that's why we read these words today. Through the lens of scripture. And through the lens of the incarnation of Jesus.

[27 : 13] He is our help. He is our hope. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory. The glory of the only begotten son of the father.

Full of grace and truth. Let's pray. Father we thank you for this scene. Those many years ago. Three thousand years ago.

Thank you.