

Survivor

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[0 : 00] Well, please keep open the Bibles at that section in 1 Samuel and let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, you've caused all of Holy Scripture to be written to make us wise for salvation in Jesus.

So tonight, as we look at this part of 1 Samuel at David and Saul, we pray that it will turn us to Jesus, that we may place our trust in him and be saved.

Amen. He's on the run, a fugitive on the run. We saw last week that he went from Gibeah, Saul's capital, to Nob, not far away, then to Gath, then to the cave of Adullam, then across to the other side, to the eastern side of the nation, out of the nation's borders to Moab, to some stronghold then in Moab, and then back into Israel to the forest of Heret.

And now tonight in this chapter 23 onwards, David continues being on the run. He moves to a town called Kailah, back towards the Philistines, perhaps on the border on the western side of the nation.

So he's crisscrossing the nation on the run. And then to various wilderness places near Kailah. We're told in chapter 23, verse 13, that David and his men, there are about 600 of them, set out.

[1 : 28] They left Kailah and they wandered wherever they could go. Always on the run. Later in this chapter 23, to the wilderness of Ziph, south and a bit to the west probably of the nation of Israel.

And near there to the wilderness of Maon he goes, later in chapter 23. And then at the beginning of chapter 24, we find that he's in the wilderness of En Gedi, back across to the east, right by the Dead Sea.

And then back more centrally and further south to the wilderness of Paran, at the beginning of chapter 25, from where it seems for a brief time, he goes all the way up north to Mount Carmel, and then comes back down to the wilderness of Ziph again in chapter 26.

David is always on the run, the fugitive. The king is after him to kill him. Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but David has nowhere, it seems, to lay down his head.

And if that is true for David, how much truer for David's greater son. I read lots of books. And those who ever visit me know that, because there seem to be a couple of books around my house usually, from time to time.

[2 : 44] I often think when I read a novel in the first person, that perhaps a bit of the excitement is taken out. Let me explain. A novel in the first person is where the person telling the story is I.

I did this, or I did this, or this happened to me. And if their life is under threat, if there's some dilemma that seems to jeopardise them, you think, well, this is not going to work, because the person writing the story must survive.

They must be alive at the end of the story. So if in the story, I, the person telling the story, have, you know, 20 men all aimed with their machine guns at my head, I know that somehow I'm going to live.

And occasionally I think, oh, if this were third person, it would be a bit more gripping. I wouldn't know whether they're going to live or not. Well, one Samuel's written in the third person. It's about David and Saul and even Samuel.

It's not even by Samuel. Samuel, when Samuel is discussed, even though the book is called Samuel, does not say I. It's Samuel did this. However, even though it is written in the third person, we know the outcome.

[3 : 54] We know that David will survive. We know that because he was anointed by Samuel back in chapter 16 to be the next king, at God's command, no less.

And we know that what God says will happen, or plans to happen, does happen. So when we read Samuel, and we read this intrigue and gripping drama, one of the most exciting parts of scripture in one sense to read, we know that David will survive.

So it takes out one element of uncertainty in the story. Is Saul going to kill him? No, we know he's not. We know that David will survive. But whenever you read a novel in the first person, where the person telling the story is under threat, you know that they're going to live, otherwise they can't have told the story.

However, it raises another question of interest. How do they survive? How do they get out of this dilemma? How is it that David keeps avoiding or eluding Saul?

And that's actually a significant question. We're meant to know that David will survive. That's not part of the intrigue at one level. But the question is, how does it happen?

[5 : 18] How is it that Saul with 3,000 men, as many men as he sent out earlier against the Philistines and other enemies, how on earth does David survive that?

As Saul goes this way and that, how Saul's intelligence in every town and city, we saw a bit of that last week as well, with Doig the Edomite, in effect betraying the priests of Nob.

How does David survive? How is it that he is a survivor? As I said, David is anointed in chapter 16 as king, or at least the king to succeed Saul.

That tells us that he'll survive. And that theme echoes in the chapters tonight. Not least when Saul's own son, Jonathan, whom we saw at length two weeks ago in chapters 18 to 20, finds David in the wilderness.

Something indeed that the king can't do. And yet Jonathan can. And Jonathan comes to David, his best and truest friend. Jonathan, the one who stood to succeed from his father, to be the king of Israel, but who knows that God has chosen David, and readily and willingly submits to that, and acknowledges David to be the next king.

[6 : 36] So in chapter 23, verse 17, Jonathan said to David, Do not be afraid, for the hand of my father Saul shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be second to you.

Not I think that Jonathan means, I'll be the two I see, so much as I am under you. You are the one, not me, though I'm the prince. You are the one to be king.

Indeed, later on, at the very end of this book, as we may touch on next week, Jonathan is killed, when David becomes king. So here's another echo.

You will be king, and Saul will not get you. Jonathan actually says in that verse, at the end, My father Saul also knows, that this is so.

But knowing it, and accepting it, are different things. Saul knows that David will be king, but he can't accept it.

[7 : 37] And it's why he's pursuing him, with everything that he's got. We know that David will survive. The question is, how?

Well, even though he's a fugitive, at the beginning of chapter 23, David goes to this town, maybe a border town, called Kyla, at the beginning of chapter 23. He goes there, because the Philistines, are fighting them, and the Philistines, are the arch enemy.

After all, remember that it's the Philistines, whom David has already defeated, most notably, when he killed Goliath, the giant, when David was fairly unknown, and young at that time. Part of the cause, for David's claim to fame, and Saul's intense jealousy, of him.

But notice what David does. We're meant to notice what David does, because it is so strikingly different, from what Saul keeps on doing.

Saul gets intelligence, from human beings, and acts. Saul asks God, for direction. So in verse 2, David inquired of the Lord, shall I go, and attack these Philistines?

[8 : 50] And the Lord said to David, go, and attack the Philistines, and save Kila. David's men are a bit worried, about all this, and so David asks again, in a couple of verses later, and gets the same answer, even more emphatically, in effect, in verse 4.

The Lord answered, yes, go down to Kila, for I, God, Yahweh, emphatically, will give the Philistines, into your hand. And so David goes.

It's also a contrast to Saul, because in an earlier battle, Saul asks God for advice, and God is silent. Already, back in chapter 14, God is keeping his mouth shut, to Saul, withdrawing advice, as part of his judgment, on this errant king.

But in contrast, God gives direction, to David when he asks. Here is David, in relationship of trust, with God. In a contrast, to Saul the king.

We know that David, will survive, because God's anointed it. And all the way through, this close relationship, between God and David, continues. Not that David is perfect, but that David, keeps turning to, and relying, on Almighty God.

[10 : 04] This access to God, that David has, and Saul does not have, is actually emphasized, because if you remember last week, when all the priests, were killed at Nob, one survived, a viathar, a priest, and he flees to David, and joins his band, of merry men.

A viathar, the one priest left, takes with him an ephod, part of the, breastplate garment, of the priest. It symbolized, in effect, the access, that the priest brings, to God, for the benefit, of the people.

So in chapter 23, verse 6, when a viath, the son of Ahimelech, fled to David at Kila, he came down, with an ephod, in his hand. That is, it's underscoring, the fact that now, David, has the access, to God symbolized, by the priest's, ephod.

And therefore, for David, he finds grace, to help him, in times, of need, through a priest. How much, greater, a priest, have we, through whom, we find grace, to help us, in our times, of need, as well.

Well, even though David, defeats the Philistines, as God said, would happen, Saul, completely, disregards that. Saul, hears, that David, is at Kila.

[11 : 29] And so, Saul, comes to Kila, to destroy the city, with David. No sense of, thank you David, for defeating my enemy. No rejoicing, by Saul, that the pagans, have been killed.

But rather simply, I, want, David. See how perverted, his thinking is. See how, he doesn't really understand, the real enemy, anymore.

And so, he boasts, regally, in verse 7. God has given, David, into my hand, for he has shut himself, in by entering, a town that has, gates and bars.

A royal boast. But how hollow it is, as we'll see, in just a few verses time. David again, turns to the Lord, at Kila.

And he finds, from the Lord, that the people of Kila, will, betray him, back to Saul. They won't, honor David, for rescuing them, from the Philistines, their allegiances, to their king.

[12 : 36] They may not even know, perhaps, that David and Saul, are at loggerheads. David is inquired of God, God's given him the advice, and so therefore, from Kila, David flees.

And so, when Saul gets there, there's no David. In verse, 13, David and his men, who are about 600, they're gathering number, because it was 400, we saw last week.

Now up to 600, they set out, they left Kila, they wandered, wherever they could go. And when Saul was told, that David had escaped, from Kila, he gave up the expedition. And David remained, in the strongholds, in the wilderness, in the hill country, of the wilderness of Ziph.

Saul sought him, every day. But the Lord did not give him, into his hand. Back in verse 7, Saul had boasted, God has given him, into my hand. But God had not given him, into his hand.

The boast is empty. How does David survive? It is God's hand. He asks God for advice, and direction, and God gives it to him. And so directly, from God's word to David, David survives, the threat, of both the Philistines, but even more, seriously, the threat, of Saul.

[13 : 54] But of course, the threat doesn't ease. Saul picks up, the pursuit yet again. He pursues, to the wilderness of Ziph. And he certainly, has an intelligence network, around. He finds out, that David is there.

In verse 19, of chapter 23, some Ziphites, went up to Saul, at Gibeah, and said, David is hiding, among us, in the strongholds, of Horesh, on the hill, of Hakela, which is south, of Jeshimon.

Saul, it seems, wants to double check, on this. Perhaps he's getting sick, of pursuing David, and finding that David's, two paces ahead of him. And so he asks, these people, as if go and check, that that's where he is.

And he is, they tell him he is, and so Saul, comes down, to the wilderness of Ziph, to pursue him. Saul, is closing in.

And as we read, these verses, it looks as though, this really is, now seriously, the end. In particular, let me read, at the end of chapter 23, verse 25 onwards.

[14 : 57] Saul and his men, went to search for David. When David was told, he went down to the rock, and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard that, he pursued David, into the wilderness of Maon.

Saul went on one side, of the mountain, and David and his men, on the other side of the mountain. David was hurrying, to get away from Saul, while Saul and his men, were closing in, on David and his men, to capture them.

The idea of being, one side of the mountain, and the other side, some possible translation, suggests that maybe, Saul is trying, what I think is called, a pincer movement, to actually surround David, and capture him. And the sense here, the music is building up, it's getting faster and louder, if you're watching the film, we're getting tenser, as we're watching, Saul get closer, and closer to David.

How on earth, is David going to get out of this? All these men of Saul, we're not told how many are here, but probably, a significant number, knowing Saul's earlier pursuits, with 3,000 men. David surely, has got no escape now.

How will he get out of this? We know he must, but how? Well this is gripping drama, it's a nail biting thriller, surely there's no escape.

[16 : 17] The answer though, is a messenger, in verse 27, to Saul. Hurry and come, for the Philistines, have made a raid on the land. And so oddly, and abruptly, Saul stopped pursuing David.

And went against the Philistines. This relief, for David, is brimming with irony. The beginning of the chapter, the Philistines are the enemy.

Now they're David's saviour, unwittingly so of course. And now we cheer, for the Philistines. Hooray for them. They've been the agent, the evil pagan agent actually, of David's release.

What a sense of humour, God has, to use these Philistines, who keep on opposing God's people, to use them, to save, or rescue, or thwart the pursuit of, the anointed king, David.

From the wicked king, Saul. And what timing. That was just in the nick of time. Just as Saul's enemy, had come closer, and were about to get David. Phew.

[17 : 26] What a lucky stroke that is. What a coincidence, that the timing was so perfect. And that Saul calls off, his pursuit of David.

But no, it's not a coincidence of course. It's not luck of course. It's not just simply told that way, to get us excited either. It's God at work. It's clearly God at work.

It doesn't say, God is the one who sent the messenger, or this is the way that God did it. But it's true. That's how it happened. This is what David said, from the wilderness of Ziph.

Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me, by your might. You can't read it in 1 Samuel, but David wrote this little prayer, song, Psalm, 54 as we number it, when he was in the wilderness of Ziph, and the Ziphites were, colluding with Saul, to get David.

Save me, O God. That was David's prayer. As Saul pursued him in the wilderness of Ziph, as he closed in around him perhaps. Hear my prayer, O God. Give ear to the words of my mouth, for the insolent have risen against me.

[18 : 33] The ruthless seek my life. They do not set God before them. But surely, God is my helper. The Lord is the upholder of my life. He will repay my enemies for their evil.

In your faithfulness, put an end to them. With a free will offering, I will sacrifice to you. I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good. For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

Verse 14 earlier told us that God had not given David into Saul's hand, so he was able to flee from Kyla. But with that psalm, we can draw the same conclusion here.

God did not give David into Saul's hand. This time, not by giving David a word of warning in advance, but rather by a messenger who persuades Saul to turn away and fight the Philistines.

And Psalm 54 is David's statement of prayer and praise, that God's heard his prayer and upheld his life indeed. You see, verse 14 still holds, even though the solution is different.

[19 : 45] How does David survive? God. God giving a word early in the chapter. God diverting Saul away from the pursuit in the second part of the chapter.

Indeed, God is our help in times of need. Now, David's faith in God, as expressed in that psalm, is perhaps what we ought to expect of him.

In the wilderness of Ziph, just before this passage, he met the oasis of Jonathan, his best friend. And as I said, part of Jonathan's word to him was that he would become king and not Saul.

In fact, Saul really knew that David would become king. Jonathan's words, back in verse 16 to David, say this, or at least are described in this way.

There, Jonathan strengthened David's hand through the Lord. Or really, simply, in God. Many times in this chapter, the word hand gets used, symbolizing power.

[20 : 55] And this is showing us who has the real power. God. But Jonathan's words to David are not just a sort of cheer up, I'm on your side type word. It's not a sort of trite optimism, always look on the bright side of life.

Jonathan strengthens David's hand in God. How does he do that? In the words that follow. In effect, you will be king.

That's what God has promised. Jonathan strengthens David's hand in God by reiterating to him the promises of God. Now let's think about the significance of this and Jonathan's great ministry.

David looks around him. He's in a wilderness. He's been in a wilderness. He's going to another wilderness. He's on the run. Nowhere to lay his head. There's nowhere safe. When he's in Ziph, the Ziphites speak to, are going to betray him to Saul.

When he was in Kyla, the Kylarites betrayed him to Saul. When he was at Nob, they were on the side of Saul. Time and again that happens. No place that's safe.

[22 : 09] He's on the run. Saul and his men have an intelligence network throughout the country. Jonathan strengthened David's hand in God by reiterating to him the promise of God.

You will be king. You see, what matters is not what David sees, the enemy coming, Saul coming, people betraying him, a wilderness and no home and no refuge.

What matters is not what David sees in the circumstances around him, but what he hears in the word of God. For what he hears outweighs what he sees.

We live in a visual age where what we see so often outweighs what we hear. I suspect that's always been the case for human beings.

But in God, what we hear should outweigh what we see. Look around the world. Financial crisis, turmoil, warfare, refugees, poverty, earthquakes.

[23 : 26] Look around our own society. Pagan, secular, increasingly so. Churches more and more marginalized. When we look around the world, we can get daunted, discouraged and disappointed as Christian believers.

easy to be. How do we get strengthened in God? By trusting the word of God. It may not always look as though it's being fulfilled.

It may not always look as we see that God's word is coming true. That Jesus is returning. That the gates of hell will not prevail. That you and I as believers are becoming more like Jesus.

But God's word is always true. It may not always look apparent, but it's true. And Jonathan strengthens David in the midst of the turmoil and trial of being on the run by reiterating to him the promises of God.

Hearing God's word is what we need. It's what David needed. The function of the Bible is to strengthen us in God with the promises of God.

[24 : 47] We need to keep on hearing them and reading them and of course trusting them as well. God's promises after all are all that we need for life and godliness.

We need nothing more but to hold fast to the promises of God and yet so often we ignore them or keep them at arm's length.

Jonathan's ministry should not be underestimated here. Not that we can hypothesize what would have happened if Jonathan hadn't come. But the very fact that he came and strengthened David in God by reiterating the promise of God is directing us as we read this narrative not to see that it's a fluke or coincidence that David is saved and that's how he survives but to see that it is God's word triumphant and sovereign despite all appearances and so it remains today despite appearances.

Well stopping for a toilet break is not the usual thing you get in a narrative. If you read a novel or book not very often do you get told that the hero of the book stops and goes to the toilet for example.

I read crime fiction a lot and I can't remember as I was reflecting on this the last time I remember hearing that Inspector Morse or Hercule Poirot or whoever the great hero is has had to stop and go to the toilet.

[26 : 11] And yet here that's what happens. Saul stops for a toilet break. Well he probably needed it. We all do. But here it's a crucial stop.

3,000 men are outside a cave and Saul goes into the cave to relieve himself. It's a breathtakingly tense narrative because further in that cave was David and his men.

He's in the wilderness of En Gedi which are in the cliffs that overlook the Dead Sea on the western side of the Dead Sea. The wilderness of Judea it's just down south from where Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

It's a little oasis. I've been there and there are caves still there today. Somewhere presumably there's some graffiti Saul was here or something like that.

Well Saul is literally caught with his pants down. Surely, surely this is God's providence to David. Surely, surely God is handing Saul over to David.

[27 : 24] That's what David's men are whispering so quietly at the back of the cave. They say to David in chapter 24 verse 4, Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, I will give your enemy into your hand and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.

The trouble is David was never told that by God so we're not quite sure where they get their quote from. Surely we could reckon that they're right that this is God's providence at work.

That God is actually handing over this evil king. And David obviously has a sharp knife, sharp enough to be able to cut the cloak without pulling it so that Saul doesn't even feel it.

Got to be a sharp knife. Why not slit the royal throat and be done with it? Why doesn't David kill the king?

Surely if he did so we could argue that this is righteous regicide. But no. In fact just cutting the cloak makes David rather remorseful.

[28 : 31] David says in verse 5 presumably in a whisper, he was stricken to the heart because he'd cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. Why so remorseful?

Why not kill the king? The reason is that Saul remains the anointed king of God. And even though David knows he's to be the next king, Saul is still king.

And God is sovereign, not David. In verse 6 we read in chapter 24, 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.

Yes, David was anointed in chapter 16, king, but Saul had already earlier been anointed as king and still is king. David's anointing was for later, in God's time.

Cutting off the robe here reminds us of Samuel's words to Saul back in chapter 15, which I preached on a couple of years ago or something like that. I'm sure you've got good memories. And there when Saul catches his robe in chapter 15, verse 27, this is what Samuel says to him.

[29 : 49] As Samuel turned to go away, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe and it tore. And Samuel said to him, the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day and has given it to a neighbor of yours who is better than you.

What's wrong with David cutting the robe of Saul? Because it symbolically lays claim to the throne. And David by and large does not take initiative in these chapters.

David by and large is reactive. He never takes initiative against Saul other than to spare his life. It's precisely because David trusts in God's promise that he doesn't kill Saul.

The means does not justify the ends. As we saw two weeks ago. Let God fulfill God's promise in God's time. Same sort of issue as Abram having sexual relations with Hagar to produce a child back in the book of Genesis chapter 16.

Let God fulfill God's promise in God's time. And so David does not kill Saul. Consider if David did kill Saul, what would it do to his kingship?

[31 : 10] the assassinator becomes the king? The claim to his kingship would rest on his own ingenuity and knife rather than God.

It would compromise the initiative and the sovereign power of God to give David the kingship. And so he doesn't. Rather, let it be clearly God's work that brings David to the throne.

not David's work. And certainly not David the assassin. Let David's hands not be tarnished with the blood of Saul when he comes to the throne.

Something that David is actually rigorous about in the chapters that follow and into 2 Samuel as well. David neither hurries God's purpose nor doubts it.

He knows he'll be king and he trusts for God's timing. He's not trying to quicken God's deeds or promises but nor is he doubting them either.

[32 : 13] He did not consider kingship something to be grasped. By acting innocently, David in fact also exposes Saul's evil and paranoia.

So Saul goes out of the cave and these ravines are quite steep and presumably Saul is on the other side of the ravine. A similar incident happens I should say in chapter 26 not a toilet incident but a camping incident where in the night David goes and takes the spear of Saul in chapter 26 and then the next morning shouts across the ravine.

It's close, you can hear easily but it's quite a distance if you started wanting to pursue all the way down and all the way up and you've got a fair head start to get out of the way. So two incidents where Saul could easily have been killed by David chapters 24 and 26 both times David refrains and in this incident in chapter 24 David then calls out to Saul in verses 9 to 11.

Why do you listen to the words of those who say David seeks to do you harm? This very day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into my hand in the cave and some urged me to kill you but I spared you.

I said I will not raise my hand against my Lord for he is the Lord's anointed. See my father remember David was married to Saul's daughter see the corner of your cloak in my hand for by 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.

[33 : 54] I have not sinned against you though you are hunting me to take my life. And in all of this David is trusting God. Verse 12 May the Lord judge between me and you.

Verse 14 the same sort of idea. Rather verse 15 may the Lord therefore be judge. Again you see David is acting in direct relationship to God something that Saul is not doing.

And Saul replies with shame and guilt. in verse 17 you are more righteous than I for you have repaid me good whereas I have repaid you the evil.

Humanly David had every reason to take Saul's skull. Unjustly pursued his life at threat time and again. He could argue that this was simply self preservation.

But non-retaliation is a strong mark of trust in God. To repay evil with good is a mark of strong trust in the promises of God.

[35 : 09] You see we often want vengeance. We often want justice now when we've been wronged. We want to retaliate and we don't want to turn the other cheek. We don't want to repay evil with good but we want to give as good as we get.

Why should we like David refrain in obedience to Christ's commands? Because we trust the promises of God. That God is judge and that all will face a perfect judgment before his judgment thrown on the final day.

Let him be judge not us. Let us turn another cheek. Let us not retaliate. Let us repay evil with good as we're commanded to do as David has done strengthened in God by the promises of God to act in such godly ways.

Without a doubt this family history of David's greater son strengthened in God great David's greater son when he was pursued unjustly and to death.

Not my will but yours be done. Forgive them for they know not what they do. How on earth could we act in that way as David did as David's greater son did by being strengthened in God by the promises of God.

[36 : 48] For all we need for life and godliness are the promises of God. Amen. Amen.