

The Christ Must Suffer III

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Date: 05 February 2012

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[0 : 0 0] Bow our heads and pray for just a moment. Father, our hearts are dark and weak, and we come to you and we pray as we open your word, you would pour your Holy Spirit into our hearts, giving us a hunger and a humility so we'd see Jesus Christ and in seeing him would love him above all.

And we ask this in his name. Amen. Well, it would be great if you opened to the passage that was read, 1 Samuel 23, 24.

1 Samuel is now my favourite book in the Bible. It is beyond doubt the best book in the Bible, and I'll take anyone on who doesn't think so. Actually, these chapters are some of the messiest in all the Bible.

It's great because, you know, very little seems to go right for the good guys. And God seems absent and silent, and when God does act, it's not, he doesn't do the kinds of things that he's supposed to.

And much of these books and much of what's going on gathers around the whole idea of leadership. One of the commentators calls 1 and 2 Samuel, looking for God's leader. By now, we've been pretty familiar with the fact that the books are God preparing the world for his Messiah.

[1 : 3 3] And the thing is that while we have ideas about what kind of leadership we prefer, God has his own ideas and they're not ours. And all of that is captured in that little word, Messiah.

Now, we use the word Messiah today as someone who's very good at something, who comes along and rescues the team. Ryan Kessler is the current Messiah for the Canucks.

And I've heard it said that the Republican Party needs a Messiah badly. The original word, the Hebrew word Messiah, simply means anointed, anointed with oil.

And both King Saul and King David were anointed with oil. And in the anointing, it shows that this person belongs to God above everything else.

They're meant to represent God to God's people. And as they are anointed with oil, they are also anointed by the Holy Spirit. And so from now on, they are called the Lord's anointed.

[2 : 3 8] And we do this most weeks. The word anointed is literally Messiah. And in the Greek, it's Christed. So the King, the anointed, Messiah, Christ, they are all exactly the same person.

I hope that's helpful. Well now, the problem for us in this last half of the book of 1 Samuel is that there are two kings and there are two messiahs at the same time.

And one is on his way out and one is on the rise. The one that's on his way out is Saul. Saul is a leader after our own heart.

He's the kind of guy, if you go to the bookshops and there are books and books and books and books on leadership and I've read a lot of them, Saul is the kind of guy you'd find a book written about.

He is tall, impressive, tall as a Douglas fir, he has gifts and strength and good looks and he's got the tactics on his side. And he is the man Israel demanded, this is the man who should lead us.

[3 : 44] He's the one we naturally choose. He's a good reflection of who we are. He's going to give us what we want. He's going to make us secure and prosperous, a guaranteed lifestyle that will continue to our great grandchildren.

And because he's such an able man, his failure is all the more a tragedy. Saul is our idea of a leader. But God's idea of a leader is David.

He is the king of God's choosing and his highest loyalty is to God. And he refuses to take things into his own hands and therefore he suffers and continues to suffer.

And as he suffers, he learns to trust God and he learns that the kingdom of God is a gift which he must receive, not something that he can go out and win.

He's a Messiah who suffers. And strangest of all, as we pick up the story, we are in the middle of a manhunt, as Dan pointed out.

[4 : 49] King Saul in a mad and blind, jealous rage is chasing David to kill him. And chapter 24, which we're going to focus on, does not make any sense unless you can see that David gets a golden opportunity to kill Saul, but he wimps out.

And why is that? So what I want to do, with your permission, is to fly over chapter 23 quickly and then settle down on chapter 24 and then just refer back to 23 at the end.

This is not a democracy. That's a nice way of saying that's what we're going to do. So David, in verse 15, we pick up the story.

David flees back into the wilderness of Ziph. He's ziffing around the wilderness. And there are two lovely ironies at the end of chapter 23. The first is in 15 to 18.

And the irony is that the crown prince, Jonathan, Saul's son, declares David to be king. He comes to find David, his great heart friend, and sees him for the last time.

[5 : 56] The last time these guys are going to see each other. And what he does is he strengthens his hand in God, verse 17, by saying to him, do not fear, for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find you.

You shall be king over Israel. I'll be next to you. Saul, my father, knows this. And it's filled with all sorts of little ironies. Saul, with all the army, can't find David in the wilderness of Ziph.

Jonathan can. And Jonathan says, you will be king. This is a very costly thing for him to say. And he goes on to say, what God says is going to happen.

And I'm going to stake my future on it. And he directs David to God's promise and he says, that's where the future is. The future is in God's promise. The future is yours. And then they leave each other.

And I think David needs all the strengthening he can get. As soon as Jonathan leaves, the Ziphites, and if you're looking for a name for a rock band, I don't know if it's taken.

[6 : 57] So, the Ziphites betray David to Saul and for the rest of chapter 23, David is a hair's breadth from death.

From death. Saul gathers his crack troops, has all the intel. David has a ragged band of 600 and no visible means of support. And the way the chapter is written is a pincer movement as Saul gathers around him.

Verse 26, Saul is on one side of the mountain, David on the other with his men. David is hurrying to get away from Saul as Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men are about to capture them.

A messenger came from Saul saying, hurry and come for the Philistines have made a raid against the land. That's the second irony. Just when it looks like it's curtains for David, who should become David's saviour?

The Philistines. The Philistines attack Israel. Saul has to pull off the chase of David because there's going to be nothing left to fight for. So David just squeaks out at the end of chapter 23 and he's on the edge of the Judean wilderness.

[8 : 06] He goes down to En Gedi where there are lots of rocks and caves and in chapter 24 the chase begins again. Well now, I wonder what you would call 1 Samuel 24.

It's always good to try and find a title for a chapter. Well, here are some that I thought of during the week which I've thrown away. The first is a royal bathroom break but I didn't think that was dignified enough.

of dead dogs and fleas. Not caving in the cave. Thank you. Okay.

What I'm really going to call it is radical reverence. Radical reverence. You don't get many bathroom scenes in the Bible. This is by far the most important one.

Saul has his 3,000 crack SAS troops. And in the middle of chasing and this exciting military action in the middle of the hot pursuit King Saul takes a restroom break and En Gedi is honeycombed with caves and some of them are shallow and some of them are very deep.

[9 : 24] And of all the hundreds and hundreds perhaps thousands of caves that Saul could have gone in to relieve himself he just happens to choose the very cave where David and the 600 men are hiding.

It's incredibly dangerous. No matter what David and his men do at this second there are still 3,000 crack troops outside and we read in chapter 24 verse 4 the men of David said to him here is the day that the Lord said to you behold I'll give your enemy into your hand and you shall do to him as I'm whispering because they're in the back of the cave as it should be good to you.

Then David arose and stealthily cut off the corner of Saul's robe but afterward his heart struck him because he'd cut off the corner of Saul's robe. Now since chapter 18 it's been very clear that Saul's had all the power and that David is the vulnerable one on the chase.

In just an instant in this bathroom break that changes completely. As Saul comes into the cave David's men very quietly start singing this is the day that the Lord has made.

They say David this is it God has arranged this just as he arranged the Philistines in the last chapter. Here is the guy who's the root of all our suffering who's been out trying to kill you.

[10 : 52] He's in our hands now. You've caught him with his pants down as it were. You could end this thing right now. I'm sorry one of the commentaries said that. It did really.

I thought I should throw that in. But you can understand this is the answer to our prayers. Surely this is a divine appointment. All you need to do is one thrust of the sword.

You will be king. But David does not. In the silence he takes his sword but instead of skewering and killing the king he cuts off a corner of Saul's robe.

And as soon as he's done it he's smitten with conscience because the tearing of the king's robe is a very big deal. You remember back in chapter 15 when God took the kingdom from Saul Samuel tore his robe and he said the kingdom has been torn from you.

But imagine David getting back with the men at the back of the cave and all he's got in his hand is a piece of fabric and the men say you know what?

[11 : 57] Where's the rest of the king? Verse 6 He said to his men the Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my Lord.

the Lord's anointed. Put out my hand against him seeing he is the Lord's anointed. So David persuaded his men with these words and didn't permit them to attack Saul.

And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way. This is why I've called it radical reverence. David has radical reverence not for Saul but for God.

what his men haven't grasped is that the Messiah and I mean David must suffer to enter into his kingdom and his reverence for God comes out of a name that he gives to Saul.

He calls Saul twice here and once later in the passage the Lord's anointed. It's not that David has a high view of Saul the person or of monarchy per se.

[13 : 01] He has a high view of the Lord. And this is one of the things you see that marks the Messiah out from every other king. He's chosen by God. He's anointed by the Spirit. He belongs to God.

He's God's. And David can see that if this is the kingdom of God we're talking about it cannot be taken. It has to be given by God and received by the Messiah.

Of course he could kill Saul. Take the sword in his hand. Take only a second or two. Because of his radical reverence for God. David has been learning to trust God. That God will bring about his promises.

And to take the kingdom by murder would be the quick and easy solution. But it's not the way of God. Because the kingdom belongs to God.

It's his to give. And the Messiah will not grasp it. He must not grasp at it. He must receive it. And this radical reverence has an echo in the same wilderness a thousand years later with the true Messiah.

[14 : 07] You remember straight after Jesus was baptized the heavens opened the spirit of God anointed him. And then God the Father spoke in an audible voice saying this is my son my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased.

And immediately Jesus goes out into the wilderness. And what does Satan do? Satan comes to and he says if you are the son of God if you really are the Messiah you haven't eaten anything for 40 days.

Sure you can command these stones to become loaves of bread. Take things into your own hands. You don't need to suffer to enter the kingdom. There's a quick and easy way. You deserve better. Or again at the end of the temptation Satan takes Jesus and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and he says look all these I'll give you.

All you need to do is bow down and worship me. One of the wonderful things about I shouldn't say it that way. One of the true things about Satan is that he never changes his tactics.

He still uses exactly the same tactic today. He will say look you can have gain without pain. You just need to take things into your own hands.

[15 : 25] Take that shortcut. It will be to your own advantage. Go ahead. And how does Jesus deal with Satan? He says it is written man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

He says life is about more than God. getting or food or drink or ease. True life is feeding on the word of God, hearing and doing the will of God.

I think it's remarkable that David has this insight here in the cave. But he's the only one in the cave who has the insight. The English translation in verse 7 where it says David persuaded his men is literally he tore them to shreds with his words.

I don't think if I was in the back of the cave and David didn't kill Saul I would have been amongst the 600 saying let me buy you I'm happy to do it. But David had to show these guys that the real conflict was not between David and Saul but between Saul and God.

Well after a few minutes a very relieved king joins the SAS troops. David steps out of the cave with the corner of the robe in his hand and he calls after the king and he bows to him as king and he says look king look what I have in my hand.

[16 : 48] I could easily have taken your life if I had wanted to. In fact there are 600 volunteers that I barely stopped doing it. He says I didn't do it because you belong to God.

You are the Lord's Messiah. And despite the fact that you have been trying to murder me for a very long time my first allegiance is to God I will not take revenge. I will not take revenge.

I will extend you grace. I am no more threat to you than a flea on a dead dog. It's the Old Testament equivalent of turning the other cheek.

And when Saul hears that it breaks his heart verses 16 to the end he breaks down and he weeps openly. And finally in verse 20 he concedes now I know that you shall surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.

He's known it of course since chapter 15 he's refused to accept it. Why is he weeping? I imagine it's because for the first time he's confronted the truth of the fact that he has turned a deaf ear to God and his rule is empty of the grace of God.

[18 : 06] And if you read on you will know these of crocodile tears. It only takes a chapter until Saul is chasing David to kill him again. Which just goes to show that if you forgive and extend grace to other people and turn the other cheek it may not change them but it will change you.

So as we step back from the passage the obvious question is where do you get this radical reverence from? And we all struggle with revenge and resentment.

Where do we get the power to deal with it? And I think this passage points us in three directions. We get it from the word of God, from the hand of God and from the judgment of God.

So I want to finish with these three things. Firstly the word of God. We go back to the David Jonathan paragraph chapter 23 verses 15 to 18. This lovely visit.

Just look at verse 16 please. And Jonathan Saul's son rose and went to David at Horesh and strengthened his hand in God saying to him, Do not fear for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you but you shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you.

[19 : 19] This is a lovely picture. He strengthens David's hand in God by literally taking David's hand and putting it in God's hand. And he does that by pointing David to the word of God given about the future.

Now there is, I think there's great good in hearty Christian friendships but this is more. Jonathan is specifically directing David to God's promise about the future and this is Christian pastoral care.

This is what we're meant to do for each other. There are times I think when it's right for us just to be with one another and not say anything. But the usual way we strengthen each other's hand in God is by directing one another to the promise of God in the past concerning the future.

Because when we're under pressure it's so easy to take our hearts off God's promised future. It's a wonderful provision isn't it? that God gives David at this time of extremis.

He sends this great friend Jonathan in an act of love. Jonathan points him to the word of God, assures and grows his faith and his hope. And when Jesus was tempted to take the easy and quick route what does he do?

[20 : 43] He returns to the word of God. He quotes the word of God. It is written not at Satan but at himself so that he might obey it. And when he's in the garden of Gethsemane facing his own moment of extremis there was no Jonathan.

He asked his disciples to stay and watch with him but they went to sleep. So if we're going to love and serve one another in this body we need to know the promises of God and then you'll be able to strengthen one another with the promises of God.

And if you feel you don't understand the promises of God take a highlighter and grab a Bible and start highlighting the promises. That's a practical suggestion.

I don't know if you are a highlighter. I am a highlighter. I have about ten colours and all of my books will be thrown away when I no longer need them because they're full of highlight but I can't remember my brain the memories it went when I was 40.

Anyway you could always get an iPod or something an iPad there. The promise of God. The word of God. That's where radical reverence comes from. Secondly it comes from the hand of God.

[21 : 58] Through all these chapters it looks like Saul has the power doesn't it? He's in control. David is a flea on a dead dog. Not a dead flea on a dog but a flea on a dead dog. I've lost count of the number of times Saul has tried to kill David and failed every time.

And the reason that he's failed is because throughout these chapters there's another power at work. It's the power of God's purpose which has been announced by his word.

Working silently inescapably toward the exalting of the Messiah. Remember Hannah's prayer. He will exalt the horn of his anointed.

And while Saul relies on military reconnaissance and intelligence and espionage he's supposed to be the king of God's people. But he stopped listening to God a long time ago and so all he's got is strategy and tactics.

And as we've watched Saul lose touch with the word of God he begins living in a fantasy his own made up world. And even though he's determined to kill David the invisible hand of God will not allow it.

[23 : 06] Even the Philistines are guided by the invisible hand of God. So at the end of 23 when it looks like David will be captured the Philistines attack. And I find this idea of the invisible hand of God through these chapters and if you take these chapters this afternoon 20 times in these two chapters the hand hand hand language is used.

It's vastly encouraging. It's not just that God has spoken clearly in the past. It's not just that he makes promises about the future. But right now the hand of God is working all things according to his purpose for the glory of his Messiah.

It doesn't matter what your circumstances are. It doesn't matter whether evil and darkness seem to have the other hand. There is no hand that can overcome the invisible hand of God.

And sometimes the hand of God works through those who love him like Jonathan. And sometimes it works through those who hate him like the Philistines. But God is still working his perfect will. And that is one of the reasons why the Messiah must suffer.

Because suffering qualified Jesus to be our saviour and king because he himself has suffered and has been tempted in that suffering. He's able to help us when we are tempted.

[24 : 21] So the radical reverence comes from the word of God and also from looking at the hand of God and finally the judgment of God. If you have your Bible open, just keep your finger in 24 and go over to Psalm 54 please.

Psalm 54, page 475. David wrote two psalms in the cave. This is one of them.

You see the heading? To the choir master with string and instruments. A masculine of David. That's a kind of a tune. When the Ziphites went and told Saul, is not David hiding among us?

Now you can see the desperation. He's facing his own death. Oh God, save me by your name and vindicate me by your might. Oh God, hear my prayer.

Give ear to the words of my mouth. David recognizes that he is beyond human assistance. And I think one of the reasons God takes us to that place is because that's where we learn to trust him truly.

[25 : 32] Verse 3. Because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked, for they, I'm sorry, wrong psalm, for strangers have risen up against me.

Ruthless men seek my life. They do not set God before themselves. Verse 4. Behold, God is my helper. He hasn't got any other. The Lord is the upholder of my life.

He will return the evil to my enemies. Here's the doctrine of judgment. In your faithfulness, put an end to them. See in verse 4 where he says, Behold, God is my helper. He's speaking to himself.

He says, Self, look, see, God is your only helper. The circumstances are desperate. But I put my trust in God. Now the trust in God and looking to judgment comes out in his speech.

So go back to 24. These are the last verses I'll read. Verse 12. When David is speaking to Saul out of the cave, he says, May the Lord judge between me and you.

[26 : 35] May the Lord avenge me against you. But my hand will not be against you. In verse 15. May the Lord therefore judge. May the Lord give sentence between. May the Lord see to it.

May the Lord please my cause and deliver me out of your hand. If you do not believe that God is the judge and if you don't believe in a judgment day, you'll never be able to turn the other cheek.

Resentment will always be a permanent companion. Even though you know resentment doesn't work. See, it's trusting God's righteous judgment. It's the only true ground for non-retaliation, non-violence, non-revenge.

This is the Old Testament equivalent of turning the other cheek. The reason that David does not kill Saul, the reason he can, is because he believes that God is righteous and that God will judge Saul.

And so he can entrust himself and his future to God and he can entrust Saul and his enemies to God. I know most people think the doctrine of judgment is harsh and intolerant. It's going to make you an awful person without any compassion.

[27 : 42] But actually the opposite is true. It's only because God will judge righteously, I don't have to. And this is exactly what Jesus did, exactly what he taught.

As he's nailed to the cross, he says, Father, forgive them. Why? Don't excuse them because they have no idea how wicked what they are doing is. And when we are injured and when we are abused and when we are discriminated against for doing what's right, God says, leave it to me.

Take refuge in me. This is what we learn in the Psalms, I think. This is what we learn through these stories. David is a wonderful model to us to come to God and to be honest with God about our bitterness, to pour out our anger and our sense of injustice and then say to hand over.

It's yours, Lord. You deal with it. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. This is who we are. This is what will change us.

This is the only hope for Vancouver. Not through us giving in to our resentment, but overcoming evil with good. So, let's pray that God would help us do this, shall we?

[28 : 56] It's good. It's good, mate. Thank you.