



Do You Really Know the King?

A Study in Samuel

A Rude Awakening

1 Samuel 26:1-25

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith

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Trust Fall Gone Wrong

It was the spring of my freshman year of college, and I had been convinced to pledge a pretend fraternity, we called them social clubs, at college. I think back to those six weeks of pledging and take the bad with the good. I made lifelong friends, a few of which I keep up with in text form from time to time.

During one of our pledging activities, the members of the club blindfolded us, there was a lot of that sort of thing back then and led us to the steps of one of the buildings on campus one evening. They led us through the building and out the other side and perched us up on these big walls about half a story or so up off of the ground near the landing where the steps entered the building.

Looking back, it was clear they were positioning us for a trust fall. A time when you fall backwards into the waiting arms of others. However, at that point in time, I had never, ever participated in something like that. I had no idea what they were doing. They inched me out backwards, closer and closer to the ledge. But since I was blindfolded, I had no idea what I was inching toward.

They told me to cross my arms and hold them and then they shoved me backwards. It wasn't a little drop. This was like being shoved off of the roof of a house. Halfway down, I let go of the arm-cross and sort of splayed out like a starfish, effectively knocking down the entire gang of guys at the bottom. It was like a strike in bowling. I took them all out. I broke one guy's glasses and gave another a bloody nose and a fairly good shiner.

Had they just told me what they were doing, I would've prepared myself better. But it didn't have the same effect. I look back and years later I see how that is a flawed, imperfect picture of the personal power of God at work in my life.

I don't always see it, or I am not always aware of how God is at work. But I trust him increasingly and as I grow, I become more aware of God's very personal work in my life. In our text this morning, we see a notable example of faithfulness in David while God is at work. (read text)

Déjà vu All Over Again

The Scripture is revealing David's spiritual development over the course of three chapters beginning in 1 Samuel 24. There, David is conscience-smitten because he snuck up on Saul and cut off some of Saul's robe. David is remorseful over the entire ordeal in that cave. He does show the portion to Saul who "repents."

However, in chapter 25, David struggles to practice similar restraint in his dealings with an evil man named Nabal. David is on his way to kill Nabal and all of his men when Nabal's wife, Abigail, gently rebukes David. It is only after Abigail's providential wisdom that David chooses to restrain himself from taking vengeance on Nabal. He chooses to take Abigail's advice and trust God to deal with Nabal.

And now here we are in chapter 26, and we find David in similar circumstances as he was in chapter 24. God provides David another opportunity to trust Him and "get this right" as it were. We see that David grows spiritually here.

It is important to reiterate that David has made it clear to his men that he is convinced by God that it would be wrong for David or any of his men to kill Saul and remove him from the throne. This would be opposing God's anointed, and David steadfastly refuses to do so. David is determined not to harm Saul. Instead, David seeks only Saul's good.

As we pay closer attention to the text, we realize that there are some significant differences between chapters 24 and 26. In 24, David is retreating in a cave. Here, David is on the advance and wanders down into the heart of Saul's three thousand strong army. David takes the initiative and locates Saul.

It wasn't difficult to spot the physically imposing king. He would have been larger than the rest of the men. Plus, his armor was near the slumbering king. Sleeping next to Saul is Saul's uncle, Abner, who is also the leader of Saul's army.

The rest of the soldiers surround Saul and Abner, all asleep. This is no ordinary sleep. The Lord has brought a deep sleep on the entire army.

David has at least two men with him. A man named Ahimelech¹, who was a Hittite and David's nephew, Abishai are named. It is very possible that there were others with him as well. David invites one of the men to accompany him to sneak down into the middle of the three thousand sleeping men. Ahimelech is not interested and chooses to sit this mission out. However, if you know anything about Abishai, you know that he is on board for this.

Abishai is one of three brothers. Abishai, Asahel, and Joab. They are sons of Zeruiah, David's sister. They are loyal to David. Over time, Joab will be both a blessing and a frustration to David. And all three will bring David several times to the point of exclaiming, "You sons of Zeruiah! What will I do with you?" Ah, family.

But Abishai is no ordinary nephew and certainly no ordinary soldier. Abishai was a mighty man of valor for David². He was the chief of David's most elite fighting men, consisting of thirty warriors. Among those thirty, David had three of them that were the cream of the elite. And Abishai is listed on the same level as those three. Scripture tells us that Abishai killed over three hundred men with his spear. He is a fighter and a warrior almost unparalleled.

I often imagine what Abishai thought when he crept down among Saul. After carefully picking through all of those bodies, being extremely cautious along the way, you find yourself standing over the sleeping Saul.

Abishai offers to kill Saul with the spear, a weapon that Abishai was extremely skilled at using.

We are also reminded of one of Saul's earliest fits of mad rage when he tried twice to make a David-kabob with his own spear. Abishai comments, "Let me kill him here and now. I won't need a second attempt. I will finish the job in one."

¹ This is not to be confused with a priest from Nob named Ahimilech who was the only survivor of Saul's bloody slaughter of all the priests and the entire city.

² 2 Samuel 23:18-19

Abishai repeats the same thing said to David in the cave back in chapter 24. “God delivered this guy into your hands! Let me kill him and we will be done with all of this and then YOU will be king, just like God said you would be.” Once again, David forbids Abishai from killing Saul and explains why. Once again, David takes a few keepsakes and mementos from the trip, this time it is Saul’s water jug and spear near Saul’s head.

Then David puts some ground between he and Saul and wakes them up. David makes it clear. A man was in the camp who wanted to kill Saul – Abishai. And while Abner and every other man loyal to Saul slept, David saved Saul’s life. Again. Want proof? Come get your water jug and your spear.

It is interesting that David cries out to Abner and the soldiers rather than Saul. David rebukes them for not protecting the Lord’s anointed. As you read, you realize that David’s plan all along was to take someone, probably Abishai, down to Saul’s camp. It was a safe bet that Abishai would be ready, willing, and able to go down there. Except David’s plan was go there, take something that was Saul’s, and go back and once again proclaim his innocence. And further to rebuke Saul for listening to wicked lies and counsel concerning David.

David is condemning Saul’s secret service men. They were there to protect Saul, and they failed. I can only imagine how Abner’s heart dropped when he looked and saw Saul’s spear and water jug gone, confirmation that David was right. David saved the king’s life. All of Saul’s men, including Abner, failed him.

Wake Up, Little Saul-y

Saul comes to his senses here and addresses David. He repents and confesses to David and then covenants not to try to harm David again. David pleads with Saul to listen to David. Saul obviously believes that David is guilty of some wrongdoing, even if that wrongdoing is simply being popular in serving the Lord and Saul. David makes it clear that there can be only two sources for Saul’s belief here.

One option is that David has sinned and done something wrong, and the Lord had stirred Saul to pursue David. Except that isn’t the case at all. In fact, we know that the Lord has left Saul and has kept David from falling into Saul’s hands.

All Saul needs to do is tell David what the sin is that David has committed. “What have I done? What sin am I guilty of?” Saul has no response. Which means that option is off the table.

Which leaves one option: if David is innocent, then someone has been falsely accusing David of wrongdoing before Saul, characterizing David as an evil and dangerous criminal. If this is the case, those who have been lying about David must come under scrutiny and be held accountable.

Saul admits and confesses. Saul blesses David and goes home.

An Ever-Expanding Portrait of David

Here in the text we see two subtle comments about David. These comments provide insight as well as challenge us as believers. The first is found in David’s reason to spare Saul in vs. 9-11. David has grown significantly in his understanding of his own role. More importantly, David understands more clearly God’s active involvement in David’s life.

In both chapters 24 and 26, David’s objection in harming Saul is that Saul is God’s anointed. But in 26, David adds meaning when he lists various ways that Saul might die, either natural causes or in battle. Either way, it must be God’s doing, not David’s.

David was tempted to kill Saul in the cave in 24. After taking a piece of the robe, David feels intense remorse. But here in 26, he does not hesitate at all in taking similar actions, sneaking up on Saul to take something. But David has also learned from Nabal’s death and has seen firsthand how God can unexpectedly work in a life. With the Nabal episode, David has learned to trust God and wait on God’s perfect timing.

Trusting God isn’t just a begrudging surrender to His wisdom and plan. Trusting God looks like what David did in 1 Samuel 26. It is learning that it is ALWAYS better to wait patiently for God’s timing and methods.

Each one of us has doubted God somehow, some way because our timing is not coordinated with God’s timing. I am reminded that God answers our prayers most often with three options. Yes. No. And not right now. It is the not right now that bothers us. One, because we can’t really tell that the answer was “not right now” until it much later becomes “yes.”

I didn't marry Danielle until I was 33 about to turn 34. And it wasn't like we dated for years. We dated for about a year before we got married. But do you know what it is like to be single on a church staff? And it wasn't like I never prayed, "God, bring me a wife." I prayed all of those prayers. And the church doesn't know what to do with single people. The church worries about people being single almost as much as single people do.

In that time, during those ten years, God taught me some important lessons about contentment and completion. I can be content in any situation. Because if I am not content with God, I won't be content at work, at home, in life, in marriage, with kids. I also learned that the only relationship that completes a person is the one we have with Jesus. If you are single here today, trust God's timing just like David did.

And remember that God is working everything together for your good³, so if that means you need to wait on something, wait patiently, trusting the Lord. Trust in the Lord with all that you are and don't lean on your own understanding.⁴ Remember, He who started a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.⁵ Learn from David here.

And remember that God is working on your behalf. The invisible power of God is working to prepare and protect and provide for you. That is found in a second comment here in 26. The Scripture tells us that Saul and his men were sleeping because "a deep sleep from the Lord came over them."
(26:12b)

The word we translate as "deep sleep" is used elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is used to indicate a time when God caused a person to sleep so that God could perform his work without interference. The most notable use is found in Genesis 2:21 when God caused Adam to sleep deeply enough so that God could remove a rib and use it in the creation of Eve. At other times, this trance-like sleep became the occasion for a special revelation from God.⁶

God causes three thousand men to sleep and not wake up when David and Abishai slip into the camp.

³ Romans 8:28

⁴ Proverbs 3:5

⁵ Philippians 1:6

⁶ Genesis 15:12, Job 4:13, Daniel 8:18

After having spent two weeks this summer at various youth and children's camps, I can tell you that sort of deep sleep does not exist outside of God's special, divine and eternal power. I know this because each little peep and pop you hear while some kid wanders around looking for something pulls you from what little sleep you were able to find on a camp cot. So, for three thousand men to not wake up, that is incredible. David and Abishai have a conversation standing over Saul and Abner and it never wakes them up. We are not aware if David and Abishai suspect that God is at work here. But the Scripture is clear. God is personally involved in protecting and defending David.

And God is personally involved in protecting, defending, providing and strengthening you too. Like David, grow in confidence that God is trustworthy because God is personally working for you. David negotiates his way through these gritty details without always being aware of God's work on his behalf. You and I do not have to be ignorant of God's work.

Because God is personally involved in our lives, He took steps to provide for us a way to Him. The invisible God became flesh and lived among us. Jesus came personally and provided a way for God to work personally in our lives. Not just in general ways, but in specific, personal ways. And then, further, God provided His Holy Spirit to dwell inside of our lives to bring His work to completion. God is the ultimate Cause, constantly working in and around us to prepare, protect, defend, to make our pathways straight.

And He is doing that for you and me, even and especially when we can't see it or aren't paying attention to it. But because of that personal work, we can trust God confidently, fully and completely. David will not always be a great example of faith. But in 1 Samuel 26, we see that, like David, we can be convinced of God's personally active presence and power, guiding us to where we need to be. We don't have to sprawl and flail blindly, even when we aren't sure what God is up to.

Trust God that He is personally working to protect and defend you.