

## David Spares Saul

### 1 Samuel 24 **ESV**

<sup>1</sup> When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." <sup>2</sup> Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. <sup>3</sup> And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. <sup>4</sup> And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. <sup>5</sup> And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. <sup>6</sup> He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed." <sup>7</sup> So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

<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.

This is the word of the Lord

## Prayer

Father in heaven,

We thank you this morning for your Word.

By your Word you not only correct us of our sins, you also call us to yourself, revealing yourself to be patient and loving toward our sins and weaknesses.

Help us this day to have humble and receptive hearts toward your Word. And by your Word, shape us into the image of Jesus Christ your Son of Lord.

And now would the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight oh Lord our Rock and our Redeemer!

I pray this all in the name of Christ our King.

AMEN!

## Introduction

Most modern people are poor readers of symbols.

Because of this, the main way symbolism is employed in our culture is through corporate propaganda.

So it isn't that our culture lacks powerful symbols.

Instead, the power of symbol is used in such a way to sneak past us and manipulate.

Because of this, we have hard time understanding the symbolism of the Bible.

Biblical symbolism isn't try to sell us something.

So not only do we not buy what it's not selling, we often miss it all together.

I bring this up in my introduction this morning because the symbolism of clothing plays an important role in this morning's passage.

David cuts the corner of Saul's robe and it is a big deal.

In the Bible, what someone wears is very important.

After the fall, one of the first things God had to do with Adam and Eve is provide them with new clothes.

Adam and Eve didn't know how to properly clothe themselves.

In fact, you can easily trace the theme of clothing through the Bible's story of redemption.

Adam and Eve's new clothes, Joseph's special cloak, the garments of the high priest, Elijah's mantle given to Elisha, John the Baptists' garment of camel's hair, the father's robe given to the prodigal son, the scarlet robe placed on Jesus, the soldiers casting lots for Jesus' clothes, and the fact that we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

In one sense, the story of salvation can be told right there just by tracing the theme of clothing in the Bible.

It is important to understand this as we come to this morning's passage.

But is also important what this theme of clothing points to.

In [1 Samuel 24](#), David refuses to lift up his hand and put Saul, the Lord's anointed to death.

Instead, David entrusts himself to God's judge and vindicate on his behalf.

With this in mind, I have divided my sermon into two parts:

1. The Lord's Anointed (vv. 1-7)
2. The Lord's Judgement (vv. 8-22)

## The Lord's Anointed (vv. 1-7)

The first eight verses present the first of 2 occasions where David is given an opportunity to kill King Saul.

At the end of the previous chapter, chapter 23, God saved David by drawing Saul away to fight the Philistines.

Now, Saul has returned from dealing with the Philistines to hunting David once again.

The main point of this first section is that, even though David had the opportunity, he didn't lift up his hand to kill Saul because he is the Lord's anointed king.

The way the text makes this point is through the symbolism of clothing as I've already mentioned.

### Robes/Clothing

Indeed, up to this point in 1 Samuel there have been several instances where clothing has carried important symbolic value.

Back at the beginning of 1 Samuel, in chapter 2, we learn that Samuel's mother used to bring him a linen ephod every year when he served in the Tabernacle.

This was the same type of clothing that the priests wore and it symbolically pointed to Samuel's ministry.

In [1 Samuel 15](#), Saul tore the corner of Samuel's robe after Samuel told him that God had rejected him.

Samuel's response to this is that the tearing of the robe symbolically corresponded to God's tearing the kingdom from Saul.

Then, in [1 Samuel 18](#), Jonathan gave David his robe, his armor, his sword, and his bow and belt.

Jonathan's actions symbolically point to the fact that David had now become his equal, a royal prince in the house of the king.

Here in our passage, the robe of King Saul represents his authority as king.

When David's men encouraged David to kill Saul, David refuses to do so.

Rather David tears a corner from Saul's robe.

### Not Striking the Lord's Anointed

What should grab our attention at this point is what verse 5 states, "**afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe.**"

David didn't strike Saul, but when he tore the corner of Saul's robe, his heart struck him.

David understood the symbolic significance of tearing the corner of Saul's robe and his heart struck him.

Because he tore the corner of Saul's robe David "tore into" his men and would not let them attack Saul.

The word in verse 7 that the ESV translates as "persuade" literally has a more abrasive meaning.

In many cases it means to tear or divide.

One of the things that the text is trying to communicate with this use of words is this:

David was wrong to tear Saul's robe; but David was right to tear his own men in order to keep them from attacking Saul.

Even though Saul was a bad king, even though Saul was trying to strike down David, David would not strike Saul.

David respected the God-given authority of Saul and refused to take matters into his own hands by striking out against Saul.

Instead, David committed himself to God to deal with Saul and to vindicate him.

## Application

Now, none of you are in the exact same position as David.

But God has placed various authorities over each and every person that he calls them to submit to.

Children, you are called to submit to the authority of your parents.

Wives, you are to submit to the authority of your husbands.

Husbands, you are to submit to the authority of you civil rulers.

And, of course, as members in the church, you are called to submit yourselves to the leaders that God has placed over you.

Because we live in an egalitarian age, many reflexively respond to the language of authority in a negative way.

Authority is seen as something that limits and oppresses.

But the Bible presents a very different picture of authority.

The Bible shows that God is in authority over all and the source of all legitimate authority.

Moreover, from God's authority flows abundant life and blessings to His creation.

This teaches us both how we are to view and exercise authority.

We are to view the various authorities that God has placed over us as opportunities to receive blessing and life.

Likewise, if you find yourself in a position of authority, you should see it as an opportunity to provide blessings and life.

For David, he did all he could to not raise his hand against Saul, even though Saul was a bad king.

Rather, David raised up his voice to God to intervene on his behalf.

You should seek to follow David's example.

Children, when your parents fail you, do you seek to usurp their authority?

Or do you pray to God to help your parents?

Wives, when your husband fails you, do you respond by becoming a quarrelsome wife, like a continual dripping on a rainy day?

Or do you pray for your husband?

Husbands, when your civil rulers fail you, do you simply groan?

Or do you heed Paul's admonishment from

**1 Timothy 2:1-2 ESV**

<sup>1</sup> I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,  
<sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life,  
godly and dignified in every way.

Members of the church, when your leaders fail you, do you respond by speaking behind their backs?

Or do you act according to [Hebrews 13:7](#) which calls you to

**Hebrews 13:17 ESV**

<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Again, none of you is in David's exact position.

But there is still much to learn.

Rather than looking to usurp authority, you should seek to submit yourself to it and to lift up the situation to God when you are under failing authority.

## Looking to Christ

In addition to this application, it is also important for us to consider how this points us to Christ.

Think about what is going on here, David refuses to lift up his hand to strike the Lord's anointed.

Ask yourself the question, "Who is the Lord's anointed?"

In this passage the answer is Saul.

But the ultimate answer to that question is that Jesus is the Lord's anointed.

And, if you read [Acts 4](#), you find that the rebellious rulers of the age sinfully lifted up their hands against Jesus, the Lord's anointed, by putting him to death.

In a concrete, historical way, real men (Pontius Pilate, the priests, and the officers) struck the Lord's anointed.

But in a deeper way, it was our sin that placed Jesus on the cross.

As [Isaiah 53:5](#) puts so beautifully, "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

In other words, another way to view your sin in a way that is biblical, is to see your sin as raising up your hand against the Lord's anointed.

But of course, in the Gospel, the great reversal takes place.

In our sin we raise up our hand against the Lord's anointed.

But, on the cross, Lord's anointed offers us grace, mercy, and salvation.

By his wounds, we are healed.

## The Lord's Judgement (vv. 8-22)

It is clear that David won't raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, but verses 8-22 show us what David will do.

In these verses, David takes the opportunity to show Saul that he isn't out to get him.

Even though it was wrong for David to cut off the corner of Saul's robe, it does show that David isn't looking to kill Saul.

Remember, this is exactly what Saul's narrative is:

Saul has said that David and others in a conspiracy against him to kill him and take the throne.

If that were true, David would have killed Saul, but he didn't.

## David's Speech

David calls out to Saul to plead with him to cease his pursuit:

David shows deference by calling Saul, "My lord the king!" and by bowing down to Saul.

In verse 11, David even goes so far as to address Saul as "my father".

Remember, David is an adopted royal son and is truly the king's son-in-law.

Throughout this appeal, David shows great humility toward Saul.

Even though he is trying to show Saul that he is wrong, he does so in a way to give Saul all possible credit and to give Saul a way out.

In verse 9 David says, "**Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'?**"

David frames things in such a way to make it sound as though the only reason Saul is chasing him is because he got bad counsel.

We know Saul did have bad counsel, but we also know that Saul desires to kill David himself.

David's humility even goes beyond this however.

At the end of his appeal in verse 14, he refers to himself as a “dead dog” and a “flea” and asks why Saul would come after such a thing.

## Saul's Response

After David is done speaking, we see Saul's response in verses 16-20.

Based on what we have seen from Saul over the last several chapters, Saul's response is somewhat surprising.

Just as David referred to him as “father”, Saul responds by asking, “Is this your voice, my son David?”.

Saul begins to weep and confesses that David is more righteous than he is.

Saul agrees that David has been good to him in not putting him to death.

And, as Jonathan revealed in chapter 23, Saul now admits to David that he knows that David will be king.

Because of this, Saul asks David to not cut off his offspring when he comes to power and David swears to Saul that he won't.

Even though it won't last, Saul repents and turns from persecuting David.

## David Gives the Judgement to God

This interaction between David and Saul highlights the other side of the point that was highlighted in our first section.

In the first section we see that David would not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed.

Here, we see that David entrusts himself to God.

In verse 12, after he shows that he is not after Saul, David calls upon God to be his judge.

***“May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.”***

David isn't going to seek vengeance against Saul himself, but he is going to appeal to God to act on his behalf.

Over the past couple of sermons, as we've followed David in this flight from Saul, I have made note of the psalms that David wrote during this time.

Specifically I've highlighted how he went to the Lord for refuge when he was on the run.

But another theme that is present in these psalms is the fact that David calls on the Lord to act for him against his enemies.

David will not seek to vindicate himself, but that doesn't mean he isn't interested in being vindicated.

But for that, he entrusts himself to God.

Hear the words of [Psalm 54](#) again:

**Psalm 54:1–5 ESV**

<sup>1</sup> O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might. <sup>2</sup> O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth. <sup>3</sup> For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. *Selah* <sup>4</sup> Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. <sup>5</sup> He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them.

## Looking to Christ

Again here our minds should be drawn to Christ.

Because just as strangers and ruthless men rose against David, so too did they rise against Jesus.

In his crucifixion Jesus quotes from [Psalm 22](#) which says:

**Psalm 22:12–13 ESV**

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; <sup>13</sup> they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

And like David, Jesus also did not seek his own vindication, but lifted his voice up to the Father.

And it should surprise us that when Jesus did so on the cross, when he placed his trust in the Father, he quoted from David's own writing. [Ps 31:3-5](#)

**Psalm 31:3–5 ESV**

<sup>3</sup> For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; <sup>4</sup> you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. <sup>5</sup> **Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.**

Jesus committed his spirit into the hand of the Father because he trusted that God would vindicate him.

And this is also what you do when you place your trust in Christ.

You trust in Christ for the salvation of your soul, not looking to save yourself.

And if you trust in Christ for your salvation, you can trust him in all things.

Do so now, commit your spirit to Christ, and trust in God for your salvation and vindication!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!

## Prayer

Let us pray,

Father in heaven, we pray that we, like David and like our Lord Jesus Christ, would learn to commit our spirit into your hands.

You are gracious and trustworthy to receive us.

Even though we lift our hands against you and against your anointed, you are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love toward us.

Give us strength to turn to you in time of need, and patience to walk by faith through the trials of this life.

I pray this all in the name of Christ our king! AMEN!