

David at Keilah

1 Samuel / 1 Samuel 23:1–14

1 Samuel 23:1–14 ESV

¹ Now they told David, “Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors.” ² Therefore David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?” And the Lord said to David, “Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah.” ³ But David’s men said to him, “Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?” ⁴ Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, “Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand.” ⁵ And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

⁶ When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. ⁷ Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, “God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.” ⁸ And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. ⁹ David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod here.” ¹⁰ Then David said, “O Lord, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. ¹¹ Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please tell your servant.” And the Lord said, “He will come down.” ¹² Then David said, “Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?” And the Lord said, “They will surrender you.” ¹³ Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. ¹⁴ And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.

Prayer for Illumination

Father in Heaven,

We thank this morning for your Word.

We pray that this morning you would help us your people to hear your voice from your Word.

Your voice which is powerful and full of majesty.

Your voice that flashes forth flames of fire and shakes the wilderness.

Your voice that calls into existence things that are not and raises life from the dead!

We pray that this morning you would grant us life from your word.

I pray now that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts would be pleasing in your sight; O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

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

Amen.

Introduction

Who do you turn to when you need advice?

Who do you call when you need help?

Perhaps a parent, a spouse, a close friend, or a pastor

It is natural to turn to others to help navigate life's complexities.

Not only is this natural, it's also biblical.

The Bible teaches that there is wisdom in counsel.

And, the Bible also shows what good counsel and bad counsel looks like.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, provided Moses with good counsel on how to rule the people of Israel.

Solomon's son Rehoboam, on the other hand, received bad counsel from his friends, leading to the division of the kingdom of Israel.

For Christians, the primary foundation of all good counsel (for ourselves and for one another) is from God.

God speaks to us from His Word and we are wise to turn to God's Word for counsel and to speak God's Word to one another for encouragement and wisdom.

This theme of receiving and rejecting wise counsel is central to the story of 1 Samuel and in this morning's passage.

Saul has rejects wise counsel while David turns to the Lord for counsel.

Saul attempts to grasp to the kingdom that is slipping from his hands, while David patiently waits for God to place the kingdom into his hands.

With this in mind, I have divided this morning's sermon into two points:

1. Seek God's Counsel
2. Seek God's Gifts

These points don't divide up the text but are rather seen throughout the whole passage.

Seek God's Counsel

By the time chapter 23 begins, David and his men have sought refuge from Saul in David's tribal territory of Judah.

In verse 1 David's men inform him that the Philistines are attacking the Judahite city of Keilah.

Inquiring of the LORD

In verse 2, David inquires of the LORD to see if he should "**go and attack these Philistines**".

God answered David and told him to "**attack the Philistines and save Keilah**"

When David's men express their fear to David, he inquired of the LORD again in verses 3-4 and God told David, again, to go down.

So David and his men went down and defeated the Philistines and saved Keilah.

As has happened already a number of times in 1 Samuel, David and Samuel are being compared.

If you go back to our passage from last week, [1 Samuel 22](#) presents King Saul with his counsellors.

Saul sits in judgement on the heights of Gibeah with his counsellors around him.

Chapter 23 presents the stark difference in the kind of counsel that David and Saul seek.

The LORD has abandoned Saul because Saul has refused to listen to the counsel of God through the prophet Samuel.

After his repeated rejection of the Word of the Lord, God gave Saul over to his own counsel and his own wicked counsellors.

And as we have seen over and over again, as Saul rejects God's counsel, and he descends deeper and deeper into wickedness.

In chapter 22, he turns to the counsel of the wicked Edomite Doeg, who kills the priests of God.

But with David the opposite is shown.

Even though David has been under constant persecution from Saul, he consistently seeks God's counsel.

Abiathar and the Ephod

Indeed in verse 6 of our passage, we are given more detail about how David turns to the Lord even as Saul turns toward wickedness.

Verse 6 states the following, "***When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand.***"

Among other things, this verse provides us with an interesting chronological detail.

It seems as though David's deliverance of Keilah from the Philistines happened around the same time that Saul had Doeg kill all the priests and the inhabitants at Nob.

David is saves an Israelite city from the Philistines while Saul puts an Israelite city and its inhabitants to death.

But beyond this, we are given even greater insight into David's dependance on the Lord during this season of testing and trial.

Based on what we have already learned about David's flight from Saul we know the following:

- i. There is at least one prophet in David's camp, the prophet Gad, who delivered God's Word to David telling him to go to Judah in the last chapter.

- ii. And, there is now a priest in David's camp, who has brought the ephod in order that David might more readily inquire of God; something David is keen to do.

While David isn't yet the king, he looks more and more like the king:

He is delivering Israelite cities from the Philistines and he has a priest and a prophet who provide him with counsel from God!

And David is keen to receive such counsel from God because he seems to always be under threat!

Verses 7-8 show that Saul has discovered David, and is going coming to Keliath to kill him.

So, in verses 9-12 David asks Abiathar for the ephod so he can inquire of God whether the men of Keliath would protect David and his men from Saul, or if they would give them up to Saul.

Again, David and Saul are being compared here:

David saved Keliath from the Philistines.

Saul, on the other hand, had Nob and its inhabitants put to death.

Saul is only interested in coming to Keliath when he learns that David is there.

And it's likely that Saul would put the inhabitants of Keliath to death for sheltering David just as he put the inhabitants of Nob to death.

When David consults the ephod, God informs him that the inhabitants of Keilah would give him up, so David and his men are once again on the run.

What Counsel Are You Seeking

One of the central things you are to see from this passage is how David responds in distress.

Unlike Saul, when the chips are down, David seeks God in order to know what to do.

This should lead you to consider a question: Who do you seek counsel from when things are bad?

We live in a day of more "counsellors" than perhaps any other time in history.

First there was the search engine:

By simply going to Google, you could access millions of "counsellors" about any number of problems.

But the search engine was eclipsed in the past several years by the world of "influencers":

All vying to be your digital "counselors" on any given topic in a more "personal" way than a mere Google search.

But now even the influencer is about to be eclipsed by the ultimate counselor: Artificial Intelligence.

The "AI counselor", which promises to be your "one stop shop" for any and all of your counseling needs.

Of course, you're free to use search engines, learn from influencers, and even utilize artificial intelligence; granting that you use them with restraint and wisdom.

But what does God's Word say about where we should turn for wisdom and guidance and instruction?

David is just one of many biblical examples that call us to turn to God and to His Word when we are in need!

David's first concern before he acts or when he is in need of counsel is to turn to God.

This doesn't mean that David ignored all counsel besides God's Word, but it does show us David's desire to hear from God.

We are to seek counsel from God's word and our instinct should be to turn to God first.

Consider the testimony of these Psalms that were written by David, where we are encouraged to turn to God in times of need:

Psalms 16:7–8 ESV

⁷ I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. ⁸ I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Psalms 25:4–5 ESV

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation.

Psalms 37:23–24 ESV

²³ The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; ²⁴ though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.

Psalms 143:8–10 ESV

⁸ Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. ¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!

In a world filled with false counsel, consider David, how he turned to the Word of God for counsel in time of need and ask yourself:

Do I turn to God's Word?

Do I know God's Word so it can instruct me?

Remember Paul's exhortation to the Colossians in

Colossians 3:16 ESV

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Let God's Word dwell in you richly and turn to it to guide your life and give you counsel.

Seek God's Gifts

This brings us to our second point and the second theme of this morning's passage which is to seek God's gifts.

Just as David's inquiring of the Lord is found throughout the passage, there is another repetition in this passage that speaks to this point.

Six times in this passage there is an emphasis on “the hand”.

In verse 4 God tells David that he will give the Philistines into his hand.

In verse 6 Abiathar comes to David with the ephod in his hand.

In verse 7, Saul believes David has been given into his hand at Keilah.

In verses 11 and 12 David asks God if the men of Keilah will deliver him into Saul's hand.

And finally, in verse 14, Saul sought David but God did not give David into Saul's hand.

In the Bible the hand is often a symbol of power (the Scripture speaks of God's mighty right hand!).

And, this theme of the hand has already been present in the ongoing comparison between David and Saul in 1 Samuel; these are the two kings, and they will rule by their hand.

Over the past several chapters, the kingdom has been slipping out of Saul's hands even though he is repeatedly shown holding his spear in his hand.

Saul tries to maintain his grasp on God's kingdom through the power of his spear; through force.

But he is failing!

God is with David and David keeps slipping through Saul's hands.

On the other hand (pun intended), God is delivering the kingdom into David's hands.

And all the while David's hands are being filled with things that contrast with Saul's spear.

While Saul holds the spear, David's hands play his lyre; they are filled with holy bread from the priest Ahimelech; and they are given the sword of Goliath.

While Saul attempts to wrest the kingdom by force with his spear, David receives the kingdom by faith in God.

With Saul and David, we have a comparison that should inform you as a Christian.

Another question should guide your thinking here: What are you seeking to fill your hand with?

Are you following the path of Saul: gripping a spear tightly in order to forcefully grasp a kingdom for yourself?

Or, are you following the path of David: trusting God to fill your hand with his gifts in order that you might receive His Kingdom?!

This comparison of David and Saul teaches the same principle that Jesus taught his disciples in,

Matthew 16:25 ESV

²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

David was willing to lose, trusting that God would vindicate him in the end.

Of course, Jesus' own ministry demonstrates this principle as well.

Jesus was willing to lay down his life in order that He might take it up again.

And, this principle instructs us in how we are to come to Christ.

To come to Jesus, you must let go of whatever else you are filling your hand with.

You cannot receive the Kingdom of Christ if you are holding on to your spear like Saul.

God wants to fill your hand with Christ.

But the temptation is to turn for the spear like Saul.

To turn to all the infinite possibilities of satisfaction and security that the world can offer you:

More control, more money, more health, more beauty, or any of the other things that you think will complete your life.

But those temptations, like all temptations, are lies.

Only Christ can complete your life.

He is your fulness and your completion.

All your desires for belonging, fulfillment, and blessedness can only be found in Christ.

It is in his presence that there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore.

And this morning Jesus calls you from His Word to lay down your spear in order that He might fill your hand with his blessings.

He offers you His grace from His Word, and from His table.

Take hold of His grace, even as you will fill your hands with the bread and the cup this morning!

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

Prayer of Consecration

Let us pray,

Our Father in Heaven,

We offer you thanksgiving for your grace this morning.

We thank you that you have filled our hands with your grace and with your love in and through your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We confess to you that we often attempt, like king Saul, to fill our hands with other things, things that would seek to keep us from your grace and love.

Remove these things from us, and turn us again to your Word and your grace!

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

AMEN!