

David and Saul in the Wilderness

I Samuel 26; Psalm 57

Introduction

Last week we saw how Saul was David's "graduate" school giant. His test was designed to teach David that he "could not save with His own hand." Chapter 26 is the final episode of that lesson and it reveals that David's time enduring Saul has not been in vain. Both Saul and Nabal had taught David to hear and cling to God's word and to wait for His deliverance (Hearing heart).

Many of the features of chapter 26 are similar to 24, but there are important differences. Let's look at several features that reveal the growth of David's character.

- First, note David's response to the spies' report that Saul and 3000 chosen men are pursuing him. Vs. 5: David *pursued* Saul. He sees that they are "asleep." In the first encounter, David and his men are hiding in a cave and Saul came to them, now David walks straight into the center of the camp. He is a much bolder man after seeing God's deliverance.
- Again, David is told that "God has given your enemy into your hand this day." This time Abishai volunteers to do it himself. David need not raise his hand against Saul. Abishai can do it with "one blow." **Imagine the pressure this time!!**
- David's response (vs. 9), shows us that he has learned that deliverance would not come from "saving with his own hand." (25:26) In vs. 10 David adds that, just as with Nabal, the "Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish."
- The words good and evil are used more times in chapters 24-26 than anywhere else in I Samuel. Their presence here points to the theological background that is involved in these tests. Good and evil remind us that David's test was an Adamic test. David was tempted to "take" with his own hands the "forbidden" fruit. Perhaps the greatest temptation for David was the opportunity to put an end to his trials. With the opportunities to kill Saul, David could not only obtain what the Lord had promised him, but he could also put an end to the wilderness. But David believed the Lord's word and refused to sinfully shorten his test. He was willing to endure and suffer long if necessary.
- So why did David, go into the camp? Vs. 12 hints at an answer. Rather than allowing Abishai to strike Saul with his own spear, David takes the spear out of *Saul's hand*. He is protecting Saul from bloodguilt. He went into the camp to do good to Saul. **Read vs. 23-24!!** The wilderness had been a good teacher:

"My Soul takes refuge in Thee"

Psalm 57 provides an important vantage on David's heart as he endured the punishing heat of Saul's pursuit though the wilderness. It also shows us the path that led from the first cave to chapter 26. The wilderness puts pressure on God's people. It exposes us to temptations to bitterness (vs. God's goodness) and despair (vs. hope in God's promises). In the face of these temptations, David turns to the Lord as his *refuge* and *salvation*. David uses the term refuge 37 times in the Psalms. In each case, it refers both to the greatness of God and to David's loyalty to Him above everything else.

- Psalm 2: “How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” Psalm 5: “Let all who take refuge in Thee be glad.” Psalm 7 “O Lord my God, in Thee I have taken refuge.” Psalm 11 “In the Lord I take refuge.”
- In the Psalms “refuge” takes on a dimension of personal loyalty over everything else. This is not in denial of Saul’s presence (positive thinking), but it’s *because* of his presence. Not simply running *from*, but running *to*.
- For David knowing the Lord as a refuge was a wonderful experience, but what got him to that place was a terrible experience. David started running for his life and running from Saul he found the life he was running for in the presence of God.

Notice how David’s determination to give thanks and the praise the Lord turned the wilderness into a picture of God’s steadfast love and faithfulness!! Though Saul hotly pursued him, the wilderness was full of the glory of God (vs. 4-5; 9-11)

- Ultimately the wilderness was full of the glory of God not the threats of Saul.

The Promised Land

David’s struggle with Saul should sound familiar to us. It’s a beautiful picture of his Greater Son. The final days of Jesus’ life were the ultimate wilderness. Like David, Jesus was tempted to take matters into His own hands and to remove himself from the place of testing.

- Luke tells us this is the test of the cross. 23:35-39 Three times Jesus is taunted to take matters into his own “hands” and come down from the cross.

The mystery of the Gospel is that this suffering was *the act* of victory and conquest. **Like David, Jesus refused to separate the cross and the crown.** In Hebrews 12:1 endurance is toward an end – victory. With the example of the witnesses surrounding us, examples like Joseph, Moses, and David, we are commanded to follow the example of Christ “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The place of temptation, the valley of the shadow of death, always leads to new life for the people of God. Jesus is the pattern for our lives:

“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly...For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:18-25)

Faith is the key. The wilderness is a place of opportunity, not of automatic blessing. Both Saul and David were there together, one was hardened and the other sought refuge in the protection and greatness of his God. For David, the wilderness was an essential time of preparation for the day he would become king. If the Lord has led you into the wilderness, do not harden your heart. Humble yourself under His mighty hand and allow his strength to be made perfect in your weakness. Because he *will*, at the proper time, exalt you as he did King David.