

## Don't Try to Fast Forward!

1 Samuel 24:1-22

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One of the features I like about a DVR or even a VCR is “fast forward.” When I record a TV program, I can push that button and quickly skip over commercials or whatever part of a program I am not really interested in watching. It is a great time-saver.

In a couple of months or so, I will be recording some football games. With the help of that fast forward button, I can usually watch a game that took three hours to broadcast in about 45 minutes.

Folks, wouldn't it be great if life came with a fast forward button? Whenever we encountered a part of life we found unpleasant, we could just push fast forward and go through that experience three, four, maybe eight times the normal speed.

So, if you get a head cold, you push the button and within a few hours, you feel great again.

A loved one dies – you push the button and instead of grieving for months, you feel fine in a few days.

Or perhaps you are anxiously waiting for a good thing to happen. You are a kid or maybe a parent who can't wait for school to start. So you push a button and the next three weeks go by in just a few hours – and it's the first day of school.

Or you are sitting in the pew this morning, not very interested in this sermon. So you push the fast forward button, and before you know it, the worship team is back on the platform leading our closing song.

Wouldn't that type of fast forward button be wonderful?

Perhaps, but friends, sometimes we are too tempted to fast forward, to push things ahead, to take shortcuts, even though that is not what God desires. And when we choose to do that, we often end up missing some important things the Lord has for us.

Today, our journey through the book of 1 Samuel brings us to chapter 24 (page 246). Here we see David resisting the temptation to push the fast forward button and become the king of Israel before God's time. Let's pause and pray that the Lord would speak to us through his Word this morning, and that we would hear and heed what he has to say to us.

A couple of weeks ago, we were exploring 1 Samuel 23. There we left David, the young man whom God has chosen to be the new king of Israel, on the run from Saul, the current king who wants to kill him. David had been betrayed by people in a nearby town. Yet, just as it seems that Saul is about to capture and kill David...

**1 Samuel 23:27-28a – A messenger came to Saul saying, “Come quickly, because the Philistines have raided the land!” So Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to engage the Philistines.**

As we have gone through 1 Samuel, we have seen that things that happen don't just happen. The Lord has apparently inspired the Philistine raid in some way just to divert Saul's attention and make sure that he doesn't capture David.

**1 Samuel 23:29 – From there David went up and stayed in the strongholds of En-gedi.**

David is learning, however, that his real stronghold is the Lord. He is the mighty fortress where he will always find refuge. 2 Samuel 22 is a song that David wrote after he escaped from Saul.

**2 Samuel 22:2-3 – The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock where I seek refuge. My shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold, my refuge, and my Savior.**

Friends, as we go through life, may we be learning that the Lord is one to whom we can turn for refuge and salvation.

David's growing faith in the Lord gives us a context for what happens next.

**1 Samuel 24:1-2 – When Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the wilderness near En-gedi.” So Saul took three thousand of Israel's fit young men and went to look for David and his men.**

David's little army consists of somewhere between 400 and 600 men. Saul's forces are clearly superior.

**1 Samuel 24:3 – When Saul came to the sheep pens along the road, a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. *David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.***

Now again, the things that happen in 1 Samuel don't just happen. There were probably a hundred caves in that area. Why would Saul choose this particular cave to use as a restroom? Because God has a purpose and plan. Knowing Saul is in the cave by himself, David's men are ecstatic.

**1 Samuel 24:4a – They said to him, “Look, this is the day the LORD told you about: ‘I will hand your enemy over to you so you can do to him whatever you desire.’”**

His men anticipate that David will sneak up and kill Saul. At that point, they think Saul's forces will join in acclaiming David the new king, and they will all be able to go back to their families and live normal lives.

However, that is not what David is going to do.

**1 Samuel 24:4b – David got up and secretly cut off the corner of Saul's robe.**

Saul had likely taken off the robe, and David was sending Saul a message. The king's robe stood for his royal authority, and by cutting it, David is apparently saying, “I am going to cut you off from the kingdom. You will no longer be king. I will be.”

Now, this taunting symbol seems pretty mild compared with killing Saul, but still David is conscience-stricken by what he has done. He feels guilty about cutting the king's robe. His

men are apparently saying, “David, why didn't you slit Saul's throat instead of his robe,” and he says to them:

**1 Samuel 24:6a – “I swear before the LORD: I would never do such a thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed.”**

David knows that the Lord has anointed or chosen him to be the new king, but Saul is still in that role. David is determined to do nothing to grab onto the throne and take it away from Saul. He is committed to having God give it to him. David is content to wait, not fast forward - wait, even in a cave, for that time when the Lord will make him king.

**1 Samuel 24:7a – With these words David persuaded his men, and he did not let them rise up against Saul.**

Many versions say “restrained” his men. In Hebrew, it literally says David “cut into them.” So, I think the NIV probably hits it on the head with “sharply rebuked them.” They want to kill Saul. David says, “You will do no such thing.”

**1 Samuel 24:7b – Then Saul left the cave and went on his way.**

David decides this is a good time to send Saul a little different message. Apparently when Saul is a safe distance away (safe for David), he calls to the king and says:

**1 Samuel 24:9 – “Why do you listen to the words of people who say, ‘Look, David intends to harm you’?”**

Then, holding up the corner of the robe, he says:

**1 Samuel 24:10-11 – “You can see with your own eyes that the LORD handed you over to me today in the cave. Someone advised me to kill you, but I took pity on you and said: ‘I won't lift my hand against my lord, since he is the LORD's anointed.’ Look, my father! Look at the corner of your robe in my hand, for I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. Recognize that I've committed no crime or rebellion. I haven't sinned against you even though you are hunting me down to take my life.”**

In other words, David is saying, “I am innocent and pose no threat to you or your throne.”

David then says (verse 12) that the Lord is our judge. He is going to decide this conflict between us, but I am not going to harm you. He quotes a proverb, not one from the Bible, but one known in Israel:

**1 Samuel 24:13 – ‘Wickedness comes from wicked people.’**

...meaning evil deeds reveal a person’s evil heart. His message is: I am not trying to kill you, Saul, but you are trying to kill me. If there is a guilty person, a wicked person in this conflict, it doesn’t seem to be David, but Saul. He concludes:

**1 Samuel 24:15 – “May the LORD be judge and decide between you and me. May he take notice and plead my case and deliver me from you.”**

Saul finds David’s words and David’s decision to spare his life very persuasive. Saul is moved to tears.

**1 Samuel 24:17 – He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have done what is good to me though I have done what is evil to you.”**

Saul, at least for the moment, realizes David is not his enemy. He tells him:

**1 Samuel 24:19 – “May the LORD repay you with good for what you’ve done for me today.”**

But Saul acknowledges something even more important. He says to David:

**1 Samuel 24:20 – “Now I know for certain you will be king, and the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand.”**

Then, just like Jonathan, Saul asks David to promise that when he becomes king, he will not take revenge and kill all of Saul’s family and relatives. Throughout history, that is how a new king has often treated the old king’s family.

David, however, agrees to not harm Saul’s family.

At that point (verse 22), Saul and his army return home to Gilgal, while David and his men return to their “fort” in En-gedi. Despite Saul’s words, David knows this is not over.

Unfortunately, the Spirit of the Lord has left Saul, and he has become a wicked man. And David knows wicked people tend to do wicked things. Though he is no doubt grateful that Saul is not currently pursuing him, David knows this time of peace is unlikely to last. In the chapters ahead, we will see that is indeed the case.

OK, that is our text. So what is the Lord saying to us today through this chapter? At least three things. David’s decision to not kill Saul and immediately gain the throne for himself reminds us that we should:

#### **#1 Honor the king.**

David’s vow to never raise his hand against the Lord’s anointed is indeed a model for us. Now, obviously, we don’t live in ancient Israel, and there is no king that God has chosen and anointed to reign over us.

However, 1 Peter 2:17 says Christians are to “honor the Emperor.” And Romans 13:1 says that every political authority has been established by God. If the Lord wanted the early Christians to honor Emperor Nero, we certainly should be honoring the American President – whether his name is Obama or Trump!

Now, I believe there are situations where political rulers forfeit their God-given authority. In my opinion, it was proper for Dietrich Bonhoeffer to be involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler. And certainly a case can be made that it was right for the American Patriots to take up arms in 1776 to free themselves from the authority of King George.

Yet, those are extreme cases, and in general, Christians today should show honor to their political leaders. And as long as there are peaceful means to remove a leader who has failed to do his job well – meaning elections – it

is difficult to believe that violent means such as assassination or revolution are appropriate.

David's decision to honor God's anointed king also points us to an even more important responsibility. Remember, Saul and then David, were God's anointed rulers, "messiahs" with a lower case "m."

Jesus is God's anointed ruler, Messiah with a capital "M" and is indeed King of kings and Lord of lords. It is always, always our responsibility to honor and obey this true king! That, in fact, should be our priority each and every day. May God fill our minds and hearts with a desire to never dishonor the King of kings, the Lord of lords, Jesus the Messiah!

## **#2 David reminds us that we should not take revenge.**

In the Solid Joys devotional a few weeks ago, John Piper noted that there are three reasons why Christians should not seek revenge:

**1<sup>st</sup> – We should forgive those who have wronged us because we have experienced God's forgiveness through Jesus.** This is spelled out in Ephesians 4:32. Now, exactly what forgiveness means in a situation where the person who has harmed us refuses to apologize and appears to feel no remorse is not always easy to figure out.

However, the basic thought is because we have been forgiven, we are empowered to forgive.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> – The Bible contains some pretty severe warnings to those who refuse to forgive.**

As Jesus says at the end of the Lord's Prayer:

**Matthew 6:15 – If you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

Again, understanding exactly what that verse means takes a little work. I think Jesus means that a refusal to forgive is an indication that someone may not have genuine faith in Jesus Christ. What is clear is that anyone who is focused on getting revenge should realize that his/her attitude is very displeasing to the Lord.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> – The last reason why Christians should not seek revenge is because that is God's job, not ours.**

He promises to make sure there will ultimately be justice. David was willing to let the Lord settle his conflict with Saul. He was confident that, in the end, justice would be done. For us...

**Romans 12:19 NLT – Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.**

Now folks, let me be clear. The exhortations the Lord gives us to forgive and the warnings he gives about what happens if we fail to forgive, ought to be enough to keep us from ever seeking revenge.

But, I think the reason the Lord gives us this third reason is because sometimes, sometimes when someone has hurt us really deeply, it just seems too hard to forgive. Oh, I believe eventually the Lord will give us the grace to do so, but at that particular point, we don't think we can do it.

Yet, even then, we should not let thoughts of taking revenge even enter our mind. Revenge is not our job, but it is the Lord's. No one is going to get away with anything. Those sins that have been done against you will be paid for, either by the Lord Jesus or by that person who has committed them.

No, we should not relish the thought of someone who has hurt us "getting what they deserve." The "love your enemies" command Jesus gave us prohibits us from doing that. Yet, we should be able to dismiss any thoughts of revenge and sleep peacefully at night, knowing that the Lord has promised to take care of things and make everything right.

Friends, I am a realist. I know that if someone hurts you or someone you love deeply, it is not easy to forgive. I know the temptation to take revenge is very real. Oh, most of us are not thinking about hiring a hit man or anything, but we have thoughts about how we might be able

to somehow get back at that person by making their life more miserable.

My word to you, friend, is – Don't go there! You don't have to go there. God will take care of it. He will make things right, if not in this life, certainly in the next. Any effort you make to take revenge will likely hurt you far more than it hurts the other person.

### **#3 David reminds us to be patient and not try to push the fast forward button.**

This takes us back to where we started this morning. The Lord had promised David that he would one day be king. Saul would fall, and David would rise to the throne. He had an opportunity to make that happen that day in the cave, but he refused to do so. He wanted to become king when the Lord gave him the throne, rather than grabbing the throne for himself.

It will apparently be about five more years before David actually becomes king. That may not seem like a long time, but when you are living in a cave, it is plenty long. It was very tempting to push the fast forward button and make those five years turn into five seconds. Yet, David was committed to being patient, to following God's timetable, not his own.

And friends, today we should want to do that as well. Doing so will not always take us on the easy path. In fact, it will often be a more difficult path. Yet, if that is the path God has chosen for us, it will certainly be the best path. Though the path will often bring us adversity, discomfort and even suffering, the Lord will use those things to strengthen our souls, draw us closer to himself, and help us become the men and women he has called us to be.

Friends, the main reason I am tempted to push the fast forward button sometimes is because I tend to make my own comfort and convenience a pretty high priority. Slowly but surely, I have learned that as long as I am doing that, I may miss the path that the Lord wants me to be on.

Now friends, it is not always easy to know when God wants us to be patient and wait and when he wants us to push ahead.

For example, my friend Joe has been working at a new job for about six months, and it is just not working out like he had hoped. He is thinking about quitting and finding something different. However, he wants to make sure he is doing what the Lord wants him to do.

Joe asks me, "Dan, I don't know if I should just be patient, hang in there and see if the job gets better or if I should just quit and move on. What do you think God wants me to do?"

My response is this: "Well Joe, that is not an easy question. But here are some things to keep in mind..."

#### **1) Pray that the Lord would make his will clear to you.**

Honest prayers, expressing your need for wisdom to the Lord are never a bad idea.

#### **2) Then ask yourself – what are my motives for wanting to make this change?**

If it is all about your comfort and convenience, recalculate. Ask yourself – will this change enable me to honor the Lord in greater ways?

#### **3) Am I cutting any ethical corners by quitting?**

For example, did I make any promises about staying at the job for a year? Even if the promise is not legally binding, the Lord usually still expects you to keep your word.

#### **4) Is this something I am trying to force?**

No, we should not just sit back and wait for things to happen, but sometimes we try to force things which are not intended to happen.

In this case, do you have another job opportunity? Or are you going to quit and expect God to provide another job, when maybe this is the one in which he wants you to be? If a door is closed, it is often good to try and open it to see if it is locked. But if it is locked, it doesn't make much sense to try and break the door down.

Friends, Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, said:

*“Patience is bitter, but  
its fruit is sweet.”*

Indeed, wise people in every culture and religion and ideology recognize the value of patience. For us as Christians, patience is really an experience of trust, of faith. It is believing that God’s timetable is better than our own.

Thus, for Christians, patience is not just a willingness to wait, but involves waiting with a confident expectation, waiting with joy – knowing that the Lord’s plan for our lives always includes what is for his glory and our ultimate good.

Oh friends, I am not pretending it is always easy to be patient, but it is a wonderful expression of our trust in the Lord, an indication that we truly believe his promises. When, by God’s grace, you practice patience, today and in the days ahead, the Lord will often use that to strengthen your soul, to encourage other Christians around you, and to quietly proclaim to a watching world – I am not going to try to push the fast forward button on life because God, the true God, the God of the Bible is someone who can be trusted.