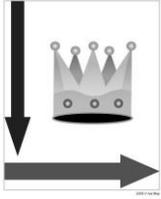


Week Sixteen: The King God Wants - 1 Samuel 24; Psalm 57



Overview

Before Jacob's death in Egypt, Jacob calls for his sons and confers a blessing on them. He singles out Judah as the one through whom God will fulfill the messianic promise in Genesis 3:15, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, not a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people" (Gen. 49:10).

Nearly four hundred years later, the LORD fulfills the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-14, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions."

God does exactly what He promises when He raises up Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt and Joshua to lead Israel into Canaan. After Joshua and the elders die, Israel does what is right in their own eyes and plunges into terrible sin. After seven cycles of sin, Israel demands a king like the nations around them, just as God promised in Deuteronomy 17:14. During this dark period the LORD highlights the fulfilling His promises regarding Judah in the story of Boaz, a man of Judah, and Ruth, from whom descends a man named David.

God at first gives Israel the king they think they want. Because of Saul's disobedience regarding the destruction of the Amalekites, Samuel informs Saul that his kingdom will be given to another. God schools Saul's replacement, David, in the fields of sheep and their predators. A visit and an anointing from Samuel interrupt David's boyhood, and, later, God uses David's musical ability to promote him as the minister of music in Saul's household. God uses David's expertise with the slingshot to distinguish him as Israel's military hero, which provokes Saul's jealousy. Eventually, however, the anointing fades into the background, as King Saul focuses on David's destruction. This lesson will focus on the period between David's anointing and David's ascension to Israel's throne.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of the lesson, students will understand that God develops and matures the faith of those who live in the "gap period" between the promises made by God and their fulfillment.

Key Truths

A promise made by God obligates Him to act in its fulfillment.

A promise made by God must be interpreted by God. Man must wait upon God to keep His promises and to interpret His promises. God rarely fulfills His promise in ways expected by man.

God lets a man know in advance what He plans to do, not so that he can run out to fulfill God's plan, but so that he can experience God in the process.

Lesson Outline - 1 Samuel 24; Psalm 57

1. Attributes of "a man after God's own heart."

David's life is unique in Scripture; the psalms he writes—especially psalms written during specific situations—give unprecedented insight into his innermost thoughts and struggles, while the stories let the reader see what is happening on the outside. At times, it is almost possible to dwell in David's mind—to hear his thoughts while seeing out of his eyes. Psalm 57, "a Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave" offers exactly that opportunity. We get to see David's heart.

When God rejects Saul, He seeks "a man after His own heart" to be the next king of Israel (1 Sam. 13:14). Saul was the king Israel wanted; David is the king God wants. Does this mean that he is perfect? No. But he exhibits the heart attitudes that God seeks. Psalm 57 and 1 Samuel 24 demonstrate the heart attributes of the king God wants. The king God wants fights and wins battles before the crisis ever comes, acts out of a heart of trust, acts out of a heart of meekness, and acts out of a heart of repentance and faith.

- **Fights and wins battles before the crisis comes (Ps. 57)**

Psalm 57 begins with a desperate cry, "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me" (1). This is appropriate Saul is trying to *kill* David, and he has brought 3000 men with him to accomplish the task (1 Sam. 24:2). But in Psalm 57 we see David fight and win the real battle in the situation. God has made him a promise—that he will be king over Israel—and David's real battle is whether he will believe the promise and walk in faith, or he will succumb to fear and act in his own power to defend himself. This battle consists of three elements:

- A crisis (Ps. 57:1-3): The question David must answer is, "Who is actually responsible for my life?" If David is truly responsible for his own life, he must take the situation into his own hands and fight. If God is responsible for David's life, David must depend on Him. David answers the question in verses 1-3. Where is his genuine safety? Under God's wings (like a hen protects her chicks from a predator). Who is God? The One "who performs all things for me" (2), the One who "shall send from heaven and save me," who "reproaches the one who would swallow me up" (3).

- A legitimately terrifying enemy (57:4, 6a): Saul and his army are like "lions," like "the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (4), who have "prepared a net for my steps . . . dug a pit before me" (6). And there are 3,000 of them. Visualize that

- Grasping God's perspective by faith (57:5, 6b-11): Even as David looks at the enemy, he exclaims, "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be above all the earth" (5). Even though his enemies have tried to trap him, David

can say, “Into the midst of [the pit] they themselves have fallen. Selah” (6). Can David see this, from within the cave? No. He can only grasp it by faith. But by this time he has won the battle. He knows who is responsible for his life. If God is genuinely the One who is responsible for David’s life, no matter how terrifying the enemy is, the enemy is already beaten. God has allowed David to fight the real battle—the battle for his faith—before Saul enters the cave. He can come with a heart that is “steadfast;” he even announces it joyfully to God: “My heart is steadfast” (7). He is ready for the encounter with Saul.

- **Acts out of a heart of trust (1 Sam. 24:1-4)**

David and his men are hiding in the back of the cave, and it *just so happens* that it’s on the road Saul is traveling, and it’s the cave Saul picks for his bathroom break. To David’s men, this is the perfect opportunity: “Then the men of David said to him, ‘This is the day of which the LORD said to you, “Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you”’” (4). They see David’s circumstances and attempt to interpret God’s promises to David in light of what they see. Not David, though; David cuts off a corner of Saul’s robe instead of cutting off Saul’s head. To David’s men, the vulnerability of their enemy seems like God’s hand in action, but David knows that God can be trusted to fulfill His promises in His own way, in His own time. Anything before that is scheming, not faith.

- **Acts out of a heart of meekness (1 Sam. 24:4)**

David could kill his enemy; he certainly has the strength. But meekness is strength under control—strength restrained in the service of a greater plan. This is a character trait that David will demonstrate over and over, as he refuses to use his strength to defend himself. He will wait for God’s strength to manifest itself in God’s time.

- **Acts out of a heart of repentance and faith (1 Sam. 24:5-15)**

David demonstrates a tender heart: “Now it happened afterward that David’s heart troubled him because he had cut Saul’s robe. And he said to his men, ‘The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD’” (24:5-6). What does David understand about Saul? Even though he is unjust, violent, and murderous, he is the LORD’s anointed. God has put him into his position, and it is up to God to remove him. So David acts in repentance, exposing himself and his actions to Saul. This exposure is a step of faith, which David demonstrates in several ways:

- Restraining his men (7): David doesn’t even commit murder-by-soldiers. He refuses to let anyone else get his hands dirty by hurting Saul.
- Exposing himself to the enemy (8): David deliberately draws Saul’s attention (and thus the attention of 3000 very interested warriors). He puts himself in the most vulnerable position possible—“stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down.” It’s hard to defend yourself with your face in the ground.
- Acknowledging Saul’s anointing (10): David publicly admits that Saul is the

“LORD’s anointed.” This is not the action of a man interested in seeking his own kingdom.

- Offering the situation to God (11-15): David actively invites God’s judgment to come between himself and Saul. He leaves all vengeance to God, and he expects God to act on his behalf: “Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between

you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand” (15). David is publicly, in front of his own men, Saul, and Saul’s 3000 men, refusing to fight Saul and inviting God to come between them. He exhibits total dependence on God and, almost in a legal sense, gives up his right to fight for himself.

2. **God’s response to such a heart:** God is always pleased to act for the person who will just step out and trust Him. Isaiah 64:4 says, “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him.” And God *does* act for David, in ways only He can:

• **God moves in the heart of David’s enemy (24:16-19)**—Saul begins to cry (16), acknowledges David’s righteousness and his own evil (17), and responds to David’s mercy with humility (18). He blesses David—“Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day” (19). Only God can reverse a heart from a desire to murder to a desire to bless. The beauty of this reversal is that it is a fulfillment of David’s faith in Psalm 57:3: “He reproaches the one who would swallow me up.” David has staked everything on God’s faithfulness, and God has come through.

• **God reaffirms His promise through the most unexpected source (24:20-21)**—Saul acknowledges, “And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand” (20). God has reaffirmed the promise He gave David as a young man, when Samuel anointed him—and through the mouth of the very person who has most opposed the promise God has a fine sense of irony; only He could accomplish this. Saul even asks David to show mercy to Saul’s descendants and to Saul’s name, to which David gladly agrees.

- God delivers David out of the immediate danger (21)—though David will experience conflict again, for this day, he can have peace. Saul goes home; David goes to the stronghold.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

- For the person that trusts in God, the first battle in any set of circumstances is the battle of faith—can God *really* be trusted to do me good, to deliver me, to keep His promises?
- God is powerful enough to work in the hearts of His people’s enemies, and He excels at reversals.

- Every time God makes a person a promise, that person lives in the gap between the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. The battles that occur in the gap time reveal a person's view of God—as big enough to keep promises, or too small to be trusted.
- God always acts on behalf of those who trust in Him.

Summary

God speaks His promise back to David through the person who has most resisted the promise.

God acts on behalf of David when David steps out and trusts Him.

God reveals that He controls the hearts of kings and can be trusted with the life of His future king.

Discussion Questions

What does David learn about God from this confrontation with Saul? What do his men learn from him about faith? What does this tell you about the influence of the person who will step out and trust God?

What did David know about God that allowed him to win the inner battle in Psalm 57? Where had he already seen God's hand deliver him from enemies?

What does this lesson teach you about acting in faith? About acting in your own power, for your own defense? What does God look for in a person?