

# 1 Samuel 23:1-29

## Introduction

When you look at Jesus, what do you see?

The Gospels are full of people who don't know what to make of him. The question we keep finding on people's lips is, 'Who is this man?'. They were drawn to him. There was much they liked and admired about him. At times, they were amazed by him. But they couldn't grasp his identity. Who is this man?

And not much has changed today, 2000 years later. Today, many people still see something special in Jesus. Something they like and admire. But they're still not sure what to make of him. Certainly, not enough to let him have any significant impact on their lives.

We need to see Jesus clearly. And that means we need to get our expectations of him right. Particularly as he claims to be God's promised King, the Messiah. That is where some of the difficulties lie.

I've called our first heading: the problem with Jesus.

## The problem with Jesus

And the problem is that Jesus didn't meet people's expectations. Although he claimed to be God's King, he didn't look much like a king. Much less, God's King. He wasn't what people expected. Or even hoped for. He wasn't the king they were looking for.

For a start, he was from a Nowhere place. A backwater called Nazareth. When Philip excitedly told Nathaniel about him. About Jesus *of Nazareth*. The one whom the prophets wrote about. Nathaniel couldn't have been more dismissive. **'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?'** he asked.

And Jesus didn't *look* much like a king. He didn't live in a palace. He didn't have attendants running around after him, doing his bidding. During his earthly ministry, he had no home and no money. He lived in poverty. **'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,'** he said, referring to himself. (Matthew 8:20)

Imagine you visit a friend and find they're got someone staying with them. This person hasn't got a place to live so they're sleeping on your friend's sofa. You make polite conversation and ask them who they are. And they tell you they're the future King of England. You would have your doubts.

Jesus didn't look much like a king either. His place wasn't at the centre of society but at the edges. On the margins. He hung around with the wrong type of people. With criminals and sinners. Not the kind of people you'd expect to find Prince William hanging around with.

His followers didn't do much to boost his credentials either. They had no qualifications. They were just working-class lads. With the odd tax collector and revolutionary thrown in.

When Jesus healed the sick and spoke with authority and did miracles, he looked the part. But he was also rejected and scorned. His enemies schemed against him. And he ended up being betrayed, abandoned, arrested and killed.

The Jews expected the Messiah, God's special King, to come in glory. They expected a liberator who would deliver them from the hands of the Romans and establish a glorious new kingdom. Instead, they got Jesus. How could *he* be the Messiah? What use is someone who ends up dead? It didn't stack up.

And perhaps people have similar misgivings today. They see in Jesus a good man. Even a holy man. But ultimately, a man whose life ended in tragic failure when it was taken from him, prematurely, at the cross. He doesn't look much like a great king.

And his own disciples had those same questions.

In Luke's Gospel, after Jesus had been killed, we're told about two of his disciples who were walking from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. As they walked, they talked. And a stranger came up to them and asked them what they were talking about. And Luke tells us their conversation.

**'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.'** (Luke 24:19-21)

They had hoped. But now, apparently, their hopes had been shattered. But then the stranger said this to them.

**'How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.** (Luke 24:25-27)

The stranger is the risen Lord Jesus. He has risen from the grave. And he says to them: 'You should have known...'

'You should have known that the Messiah had to suffer these things...' In other words, his sufferings shouldn't be an obstacle to recognising him. But evidence of his royal identity.

And then Jesus proves it to them from the Bible. Isn't that interesting! Which parts of the Bible did he take them to?

Luke tells us he explained what was said in *all* the Scriptures.

Isaiah 53 would be an obvious choice. The Suffering Servant, who suffers for the sins of his people.

Perhaps he took them to some of the psalms. Perhaps Psalm 22, which describes, perfectly, his sufferings on the cross.

But surely Jesus also took them *here*. To 1 Samuel. Surely, he reminded them of David.

David had been Israel's greatest king. And God had promised that one of David's descendants would rule God's people forever. God described this person as a new King David. An even greater King David. He would be the special King, the Messiah, whom David prefigured. So, by implication, if you want to know what the Messiah will look like. You need to look at David. You need to see what *his* life looked like to understand what the Messiah's like will look like.

And the pattern is very clear. The writer of 1 and 2 Samuel spends 20 chapters describing David's life after he was crowned. We get 20 chapters describing his reign. But we also get 20 chapters describing his life *before* he was crowned. Even though God had chosen him to be king, we still get 20 chapters before he comes to the throne. And those are the chapters we're looking at now. They describe a life on the margins. Life without a home. Facing rejection and betrayal. *Before* he comes to his throne.

The pattern is suffering first, glory later.

And that's exactly what Jesus says to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. **'Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?'**

We need to get our expectations about the coming Messiah right. And as we read these chapters, we can't reach any other conclusion than that Jesus, God's King, the Messiah, *had* to suffer, which is our next heading.

### Jesus had to suffer

So, please look down again at 1 Samuel. Chapter 23 is the story of two betrayals. In verse 1, David is told: **'Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing-floors.'**

David asks God whether he should go to their rescue. Really, it should be Saul who goes, as their king. But David asks God whether *he* should go. And God says, 'Yes'. At first, David's men seem hesitant about such a perilous mission. So, David asks God again. And he gets the same answer. 'Go and save the people of Keilah. I am giving the Philistines into your hands.'

So, David goes. And it happens just as God has said. David and his men defeat the Philistines and save the people of Keilah. It's a great day.

When Saul hears that David is in Keilah, presumably through one of his spies, he assumes he knows what's going on. He doesn't bother enquiring of God. He simply jumps to the conclusion that God has given David into his hands. He couldn't be more wrong.

David hears that Saul is scheming against him, presumably through a spy of his own – what impressive spy networks they both had! And David asks God whether he's in danger. Will the people of Keilah betray him. 'They will,' God says. It's a shocking betrayal. David is betrayed by the very people he had come to save.

So, he and his men move on. These are David's wilderness years. Living on the margins of society. He's constantly on the move. Going from place to place. With no place to call home. Verse 14 tells us that he travels around in the wilderness strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. And we're told: **Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.**

And then, in verse 19, we read of a second betrayal.

Ziph is in the territory of Judah. This is David's own tribe. Yet the Ziphites feel no loyalty to David. They're quick to run to Saul and offer to hand him over. Again, Saul, jumps to wrong conclusions. In verse 21, he says to the Ziphites, **'The LORD bless you for your concern for me.'**

But if Saul thinks that God's concern is for himself, once again, he's very much mistaken. God's concern is for David. And in the verses that follow, we read of another rescue. Once again, God delivers David. Once again, from Saul. And he does it, once again, in a surprising way. The action's in verses 24 to 29.

Saul heads to Ziph in pursuit of David. David's hiding in the Desert of Maon. When Saul arrives, David moves to a place called the rock. Saul learns of it and tracks him down. He gets closer and closer. Before we know it, he too is there, at the rock. Saul's on one side. David's on the other. David and his men are trying to get away. Saul and his forces are closing in. It's just a matter of time before David is captured. Then, suddenly, a voice is heard shouting to Saul. **'Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land.'** And just as Saul is finally about to catch up with David, he calls off the search and races away to fight the Philistines. And David escapes to the stronghold of En Gedi.

The irony of it is brilliant! Thanks to the Philistines of all people, David escapes. God can even use his enemies to accomplish his purposes.

David wrote about it in Psalm 54. The superscript says: *When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, 'Is not David hiding among us?'* It begins with a cry for help: **Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might.** And it ends with a song of deliverance: **You have delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.**

David is God's anointed king, his Christ, who is twice betrayed. But while he's rejected by his own people, even those he had come to save, he is not rejected by God. His trust is in God. And God vindicates him.

And as we read this, surely, we're meant to see the outline of the life of Jesus, *the* Christ, being sketched in.

He was rejected by his own people. Even those he came to save. He was betrayed and abandoned by his friends. Even his closest friends. His enemies pursued him. He was handed over by his own people and sentenced to death. Yet his trust was in God. And through his resurrection from the grave, God vindicated him.

The outline of Jesus' life is right here.

The rejection and betrayal that he suffered don't disprove his identity as God's king but confirm it. He truly is the promised descendant of David. David's life set the pattern. And Jesus' life followed it.

And before we move on, notice what comes in-between these two stories of betrayal.

Look again at verse 15.

**While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God. 'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You shall be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.' The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.**

Isn't that wonderful: **Jonathan... helped [David] to find strength in God.**

No doubt it was a huge encouragement to David to have his friend Jonathan with him. Having friends nearby in times of trouble can comfort us greatly. But what we need most is friends like Jonathan who will help us to find strength in God by reminding us of God's promises.

David was fearful. Saul was coming to take his life. But Jonathan tells him plainly: **'he will not lay a hand on you.'** Why? Because David had God's word to stand on. What had God promised? **'You shall be king over Israel,'** he says.

Jonathan was next in line to the throne. But unlike Saul, he had lined up with God's will and freely subordinated himself to David. And now he strengthens David by reminding him of God's promises. He helps him to find strength in God by reminding him of the word of God. That's where we find strength in our time of need.

What a great friend Jonathan is. He and David renew the covenant between them. And then they part. This is the last time they will see each other. And his last act is to strengthen David with God's word.

As we look at Jesus, it's clear that he too, like David, found strength for the path ahead of him by feeding on the word of God.

Here are three lessons for us.

### Three lessons for us

First, recognise Jesus.

A man who lived on the margins of society. Who was rejected by the religious leaders of his day. Betrayed by his friends. And handed over to death. May not look much like God's king. But God had prepared the way for his appearing through the history of his people, Israel. In particular, he had shown us what to expect his king to look like through the life of Israel's greatest king, David.

And if the pattern for David's life was suffering first, glory later, then we should expect it to be the same for the ultimate king, Jesus Christ. Jesus' sufferings don't disprove his identity but confirm it.

Here's the second lesson: expect suffering.

If we need to get our expectations right about Jesus, we also need to get our expectations right about what it means to *follow* Jesus.

If the pattern for David was suffering first, glory later. And the pattern for Jesus was suffering first, glory later. Then, surely, we should expect that same pattern of suffering first, glory later, to be true for us.

Jesus told us as much. In John's Gospel, he says to his disciples: **'Remember what I told you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.'** (John 15:20)

We need to get our expectations right.

We shouldn't be surprised if our faith causes problems for us in our careers, when we conduct ourselves in line with the teaching of the Bible.

We shouldn't be surprised if our faith causes problems for us in our relationships, when we try to tell our friends about sin and salvation.

We shouldn't be surprised if our faith causes problems for us in our families, when we stand up for the truth of the gospel in our homes.

If David was rejected and betrayed. If Jesus was rejected and betrayed. Then why should we expect to be treated differently.

In the book of Acts, we're told that the apostle Paul encouraged new disciples by telling them, '**We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.**' (Acts 14:22).

Some encouragement that must have been!

But how you hear those words will depend on your experience now. If your life is comfortable, then those words will be challenging. But if you're experiencing hardship because of your faith, then those will words comfort you and reassure you.

We should expect suffering before glory. But when we suffer, we can find strength in God.

So, here's the third lesson: Remember God's promises.

God's kingdom is coming.

One day, Jesus will be revealed as King for all to see. Every knee will bow before him in all his glory. And he will establish his kingdom in a new heaven and a new earth. Those who have endured suffering now, on account of his name, with faith and patience, will rejoice in glory with him.

The apostle Paul wrote: **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.** (Romans 8:18)

So, when you suffer today because of your faith in Jesus, keep looking ahead. Remember God's promises. Don't forget them. And thank God for friends like Jonathan, who will remind you of his promises and help you to find strength in him.

Let's pray.