

1 Samuel 24:1-22

Introduction

What does the life of faith look like?

As we've read 1 Samuel, we've seen that God wants his people to depend on him.

But what does dependence on God look like in the details of everyday life?

What does it mean to trust in God through the ups and downs of our daily experience?

That's what David's learning as he flees from Saul.

These are his wilderness years. It's a time of testing and learning.

He's learning what it means to live by faith.

And here's the first thing he learns in our passage this morning... that we can learn with him.

He learns that faith trusts God's ways and timing.

That's our first heading: faith trusts God's ways and timing.

Faith trusts God's ways and timing

If you were with us two weeks ago, you may remember that, at the end of chapter 23, Saul broke off his pursuit of David to go and fight the Philistines. But there's very little let up for David. Here, two verses later, Saul's back.

Look at verse 1.

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told 'David is in the Desert of En Gedi.' So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.

And we can feel the tension. We're not told how it went with the Philistines. There are no details about that whatsoever. We're just told that Saul's back. He's only been gone for two verses. And once again, he's breathing down David's neck. The pressure's back on. And this time Saul has come in force. He's brought three thousand men to help him scour the desert. That's what you call a search party.

But then nature comes calling and Saul needs to relieve himself. So, he heads into the privacy of a cave.

And, would you believe it, it's the very same cave that David and his men are hiding in. They're at the back. No doubt sniggering to themselves as they watch Saul go about his business.

And they can't believe their good fortune.

Look at verse 4.

The men said, 'This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, "I will give your enemy into your hands to deal with as you wish."'

It's not clear where they've got that from. It's not anything we've read.

And they're very quick to jump to that conclusion. They don't enquire of the Lord to confirm it. They just presume to know what's going on.

It's very similar to the way Saul behaved in the previous chapter... wrongly assuming that God had delivered David into *his* hands.

If you remember, Saul heard that David had gone to Keilah. And he said, '**God has delivered him into my hands, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars.**' And as we saw, he couldn't have been more wrong. God helped David escape.

And David's men make the same mistake here. As they see Saul going about his business in the cave, vulnerable and unprotected, they assume that God has delivered him into their hands.

It should caution us against presuming to know the mind of God.

It's a trap we can easily fall into ourselves. A bit of good fortune comes our way. An attractive opportunity comes along. And we can be quick to assume it's from the Lord.

Imagine a man who's offered a promotion at work. It comes with a big pay rise. And a company car. And a lot more responsibility. This man quickly accepts the promotion, thanking God for his good fortune. When he tells others the news, they congratulate him and join him in thanking God.

But what if that hadn't been God's will? What about the impact the promotion would have on his family life? And on his involvement at church? And on his health? What if God had wanted this man to prioritise those things and turn down the promotion?

Imagine another man. A single man. He's in church one Sunday morning when a beautiful young lady walks through the door. He summons up the courage to go over and speak with her. And they hit it off straight away. He falls for her there and then. These things never go unnoticed. And before long others in the church come siding up to him, with a sparkle in their eyes. "We knew God had someone for you!" they say excitedly.

But *how* did they know? Of course, it might be God's will. In which case, praise God! But it might not be.

There is great danger in presuming to know the mind of God.

Those who are wise will always be cautious and seek confirmation of God's will.

That's what David fails to do.

Perhaps he felt there wasn't time. He needed to make a quick decision.

So, he listens to his men. He creeps up to Saul and he cuts off a corner of his robe. It's a symbolic act. Indicating that he's seizing the kingdom from Saul.

But then David's overcome with a guilty conscience. And it stops him in his tracks. He realises that this is wrong. And he rebukes his men and forbids them from harming Saul.

Perhaps you've been in situations like that. You've had to make a quick decision. You've listened to others and gone ahead. But then your conscience has stopped you in your tracks.

We need to keep listening to our conscience.

It can save us from a whole heap of trouble, if only we will listen to it.

It's a precious gift of God.

But we do need to educate our conscience.

Our consciences are not infallible. They are fallible.

There can be times when our conscience condemns us when it shouldn't. It *is* possible to feel guilty without cause.

Likewise, we can have a clear conscience when we should be feeling awful. We can declare ourselves to have a clear conscience about something when what we're doing is wrong.

We need to train our conscience with the word of God. The more we study the Bible and think about what God says to us in it, the more our conscience will be conformed to the mind of God.

And then we need to listen to it and not ignore it. We need to let it call us up short and correct us.

That's what David did.

And finally, the man of faith emerges.

He holds back his men and allows Saul to leave the cave and go on his way.

At that moment, David gives up any thought of seizing the kingdom from Saul by force. In effect, his men had urged him to bring his days of suffering to an end and to jump forward to the throne. They'd offered him a short cut. Instead, he chooses to trust *God's* ways and *God's* timing.

And as I read that, I can't help seeing Jesus once again.

Think back to the sermon we listened to last week... when we thought about his temptations in the wilderness.

Remember how Satan tempted Jesus.

'All the kingdoms of the world are mine,' he said. 'And I'll give them to you. All you need to do is bow down and worship me.'

He was offering Jesus a short cut. He was offering a way to avoid the sufferings that lay ahead of him and to jump forward to the throne.

But Jesus refused.

Yes, he would rule over the world. But he would come to his throne *God's* way not the devil's way. He would walk a path of suffering and not avoid it. Even if it meant going to the cross.

And there are many here this morning who are following Jesus along that path.

You are faithfully enduring sufferings and hardship out of obedience to God.

You could avoid those sufferings. There's a way out, if only you would compromise your faith.

But you're refusing.

You're trusting *God's* ways and *God's* timing.

And I want to say to you, see whose likeness you're bearing.

It's the likeness of King David. And of his greater son, Jesus Christ.

Keep going. Keep walking by faith. Keep trusting *God's* ways and *God's* timing.

And as you do, be assured that the day is coming when you will hear the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

So, then, David's learning that faith trusts *God's* ways and timing.

And he's also learning that faith trusts *God's* justice. That's our second heading. Faith trusts *God's* justice.

Faith trusts God's justice

Look down again at verse 8.

Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, 'My lord the king!' When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down to the ground. He said to Saul, 'Why do you listen when men say, "David is bent on harming you"? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD gave you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, "I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD's anointed."'

And then David holds up the piece of cloth that he had cut from Saul's robe as evidence that he means Saul no harm. He could have killed Saul but didn't. What further proof does Saul need that David is not a threat to him? He has not wronged Saul in any way.

And then David confronts Saul with his own wrongdoing. *He* is the one in the wrong. He's hunting David down without cause. He's seeking to take the life of his own son-in-law.

Which of the two of them is the evildoer? You just need to look at their deeds to see that it isn't David but Saul.

And, twice in these verses, David entrusts himself to God's justice.

Look at verse 12.

'May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.'

And again, in verse 15.

'May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.'

When we suffer unjustly at the hands of others, the desire for revenge comes very easily.

In the cave, David could have had his revenge. He could have taken Saul's life. But he didn't.

David leaves justice to God.

We'll see in the next chapter that he hasn't learnt to do that fully, yet. It's another area in which he will struggle.

And it's an area in which we can all struggle.

Perhaps there's been a time when you've taken matters into your own hands and got even with somebody.

Even if you haven't *done* anything, perhaps there's been a time when you've harboured a vengeful spirit and fantasised about what revenge might look like.

Perhaps for that person who's just stolen your parking spot so that you can't even park outside your own front door.

Perhaps for that person who's just cut in front of you with their shopping trolley and taken the last packet of double chocolate chip cookies.

Or perhaps for that person who's done something far more serious.

Perhaps you've imagined what you would do to get them back.

Perhaps you've had an imaginary conversation in which you've crushed them with some home truths in a way that's far from loving.

If you've ever harboured that vengeful spirit, be thankful for Jesus.

Where we fail, he obeyed.

1 Peter chapter 2, verse 23, Peter writes: **When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**

Through his obedience he has won our forgiveness. It's a wonderful truth that we'll celebrate as we share communion later.

And he has set us an example to follow.

Paul writes in Romans chapter 12, verse 19: **Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord.**

And he goes on: **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

There will be a day of judgement.

God sees everything. One day he will hold all evildoers to account. He will avenge all the wrongs that have been done. He will repay every evil deed and word.

We can trust his justice. No wrongdoing will go unpunished.

And on that day, those who depend on him... who endure unjust suffering without seeking revenge... who entrust themselves to his justice... will be vindicated.

And that's the note that this chapter ends on.

Saul recognises that David is the righteous one. He refused to take the kingdom by force. And refused to take revenge.

Look at Saul's words in verse 17.

'You are more righteous than I,' he said. 'You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly.'

Even more significantly, Saul acknowledges that David will surely be king.

Verse 20.

'I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.'

Then, he asks David to swear not to kill off his descendants and wipe out his name. And they go their separate ways.

Faith will be vindicated.

Like David, Jesus trusted God's ways and timing. He trusted God's justice. And he was vindicated through his resurrection from the grave.

One day, he will return. His life of faithful obedience to his Father will be vindicated for all to see, when he is revealed in glory as the King of the world. On that day, the kingdom of heaven will be fully and finally established in his hands.

And on that day, we will be vindicated with him... we who trust in his cross... who live the life of faith that he has modelled for us.

Life may involve trials and sufferings now. We may go through times of testing.

But those who trust God's ways and timing rather than their own. Who trust God's justice rather than taking matters into their own hands. Who depend on God in humble obedience. Will ultimately be vindicated in glory.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, please help us to learn what it means to depend on you day by day. Please teach us to live by faith, trusting in your ways and timing, and trusting in your justice. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.