

A Call of Nature vs. a Call of God

1 Samuel 24

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Now turn with me if you would to 1 Samuel chapter 24. The significance of the title will become apparent in just a moment. You remember in chapter 23 David had been pursued once again by Saul. At the end of chapter 23 David is on one side of a mountain, a hill, and Saul and his men are on the other side of a hill and in the perfect timing of God a messenger comes in verse 27 to tell Saul that the Philistines have made a raid against the land and so Saul and his men have to flee and deal with the Philistines. And that place was called the Rock of Escape. Now in chapter 24 it's back to where we were — Saul pursuing, once again, David. Before we read this passage together, once again let's look to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the Scriptures. We thank You that in Your wisdom and providence and provision You've given to us these books of the Bible, yet one book with one message — how sinners like us may be brought back into a right relationship with You through the dead and burial and resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You, our Father in heaven, for Your grace to us. You are the God of all grace. And tonight as we read this passage we ask for the blessing of Your Spirit. Come, Holy Spirit, illuminate these words that we may read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

This is God's Word:

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed." So David persuaded

his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After a flea! May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Well, may the Lord add His blessing to that reading of His holy and inerrant Word.

Once again David is in a cave. He's going to be in caves for several chapters now. He's on the run hiding from Saul. He's now in the far south in Engedi. Engedi is on the western shore of the Dead Sea and Engedi is an oasis in the desert, quite literally an oasis in the desert. High up on a hilltop there is a source of water. It was a place that shepherds would bring their sheep and goats to find water and surrounding this oasis there were caves. They're still there to this day and they're very large caves. Six hundred of David's men could hide in the darkness of one of these caves. It would be bigger than the size of this room, not

necessarily in height but certainly in width. And Saul, Saul and three thousand of his best troops are camped outside pursuing him.

Now I want to see three things in this passage tonight, the first in verses 1 to 7, and I want to put all three things in the form of a question. And the first question is — Will you run ahead of God's providence?

I. Will you run ahead of God's providence?

Will you run ahead of God's providence? David and his men are inside this cave. They've probably seen Saul's men, three thousand of them approaching. They've gone into the recesses of the cave and Saul, Saul comes in. Well how can I put this? He is caught with his trousers down. Don't you love the Bible? It is, I doubt we'd put this in the Bible and there it is. It's God's providence. Saul admits it when he talks to David. "The Lord put me into your hands." This is God's providence. David's men are cock-a-hoop. They are so excited they say to David, "This is the moment! God has provided it for you, David! Providence has opened and here he is!" He's a sitting duck, literally. "David, this is God's doing. I mean, we couldn't plan this. You couldn't plan something as good as this. He hasn't got his sword in his hand. You could just go up there and just kill him!" And David creeps up in the darkness. I've been trying to imagine it all afternoon. And he grabs hold, with his sword, he grabs hold of his cloak which has been thrown aside and he cuts a little bit of it off. It's a sharp sword. He made no noise. Saul was unaware of David being there. The men, can you imagine the men? The men are saying, "What in the world is David doing? I mean, this is God's opportunity to kill him!" And Saul is done and he's gone and the moment is over. The opportunity is gone. It's gone, like that. It was a golden opportunity. It was providence. It was God's doing. And David would not do it.

Now let's think about this for a minute. Let's think about it. Is this war? Well, sort of, but not exactly. The rules of warfare are not exactly in operation here. David is still officially in service to Saul. Many commentators say David should never have run away in the first place. One of my favorite Old Testament commentators, Alec Moyter — I was reading him this afternoon — and he says David should never have run away. Well, that's fine for Alec Moyter to say, whom I love dearly. I would cross the ocean to hear him, buy every book that he's ever published and he's just published one this week and he's eighty-something now. But David wouldn't do it. He wouldn't do it because Saul is the anointed king. He is the anointed king. He even in verse five has a pang of conscience. His heart struck him because of what he has done cutting off a piece of his robe. Even that seems to have touched his conscience because Saul is king.

Now, let's think about this. You know the boss has shamed you publically. I mean, one day for no apparent reason he puts you down and now he's caught — I was going to say metaphorically "with his trousers down" but you understand

what I mean — he's caught in something that would be a golden opportunity for you to just bring him down to the gutter where he belongs. Are you going to do that? That colleague who ran over you, passing by you and pushing you over because they wanted that advancement and you've got the perfect opportunity now because you've heard something about this person and at the water cooler what are you going to do? This is your opportunity. That mother who pushed your children aside because she was so intent on promoting her own — what are you going to do? David shows respect to authority. He could have argued as his men argued, this was God's providence, this was God's opportunity. He could have said, "Look, look, the end justifies the means." I mean doesn't the Bible say that? No, by the way. (laughter) But he could have argued that way. The end justifies the means. But he would not do it because he was the Lord's anointed.

Do you remember my question? You do remember my question. Will you run ahead of God's providence? This looked like God saying, "Here is your opportunity." You know, there are situations like that when providence seems to be saying to us, "Look, here's an opportunity for you to do something. Hang the consequences. Never mind ethics. Get rid of that sensitive conscience. Just do it." Do you remember Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth, widow as was Ruth? And you know, you couldn't plan this. She's out gleaning, Ruth and her mother-in-law they're out gleaning in the fields. According to Levirate Law they're gleaning in the corners of the fields just to provide some food for a days' existence, and lo and behold, whose field is it but Boaz. I mean, Boaz, Boaz is a kinsman redeemer. Boaz has Old Testament legal obligations to marry this woman except there's a nearer kinsman. I mean, so what does Naomi do? I mean this is providence. This looks like a golden opportunity. This looks as though God is saying, "Go for it." And Naomi says to Ruth, "Put on" — I don't know, what was it? Midnight Allure? Obsession? And at midnight, at midnight she goes and lies down under the corner of Boaz's blanket. Well that's Old Testament for she has crossed the line. I mean, she has crossed the line. And you can understand Naomi, because there was no future for Ruth unless she got married, but she ran ahead of the providence of God.

David refuses to run ahead of the providence of God. Do you know what this passage is about? It's about character. It's about character. You know, there are certain moments in our lives that define our character. I mean, think about it, there are certain moments in your life that define your character and some of the moments that come into my mind at the minute are not good ones. This is a defining moment for David. It's a defining moment for him as the anointed one, as a future king, because what he does here will be an example to his men and David behaves impeccably. It's not success that matters; it's how you achieve it.

I read on Twitter yesterday a friend of mine who said the opposite. I mean, hang how you achieve it. I want success. He was joking, I think, but folks, how much will you do in order to get what you want, maybe not for yourselves but for your children? And you will justify it in the name of providence because the

opportunity presented itself and you went for it even though everything about it said “Do not do this.”

You know, you can take providence into your own hands, you can take it into your own hands, and this is a defining moment for David. David's character shines here, Jesus-like. You know in the temptations, Jesus was offered the kingdoms of the world so long as He would bow down and acknowledge the devil. There's a little reflection of it here. David said no.

II. Will you look to the Lord for what is right?

Now a second question and it's in verses 8 through 15. Will you look to the Lord for what is right? Will you look to the Lord for what is right? David is standing outside, shouts at Saul, shows him the piece of robe that he's cut. He is respectful. I mean, you've got to put yourself in David's shoes here. This man Saul has been trying to kill him. There have been several attempts, eight or nine of them now. Saul has one thing in mind and that is to kill him and what does David do to his anointed king? He bows and in respect and he shows mercy and he shows integrity.

Now I think there's a lesson here and you're not going to like it. There's a lesson here about how we speak about those who are authority over us. Elected officials — mayors, senators, governors, the president. This passage is saying to us, you know you don't get worse than Saul. You don't get worse than Saul and David shows him respect. What does the New Testament say? “Whoever resists authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment. That's what the New Testament says. The New Testament says, “Honor the king,” or in the ESV, “Honor the emperor” — the ruler, the one in charge — honor him. That doesn't mean to say that you agree with him.

David I think is showing us here a lesson. It's a lesson. Do you know what the lesson is? The lesson is, the Gospel comes first. The Gospel comes first. The cross comes first. Your testimony to Jesus comes first. Your testimony to our Savior comes first. Will you look to the Lord for what is right as David does here?

III. Will you trust the Lord's faithfulness?

But there's third lesson in this passage and it occurs in verses 16 through 21 and here's the question — Will you trust the Lord's faithfulness? Will you trust His faithfulness? Now something really weird takes place at the end of this chapter and it's hard to put it all together because Saul has a funny turn. It's not genuine repentance, because all you have to do is go to the next chapter and you'll see that Saul is back to where he was. But Saul is filled with remorse. I mean, he understands that David could have killed him and David showed integrity and

respect. David wasn't about to kill the Lord's anointed. Saul has been behaving so badly and it looks — you know, if all you had was chapter 24 and you didn't have the rest of the Bible, you were in prison somewhere or on a desert island and this Bible had washed ashore and all it had was up to chapter 24 of 1 Samuel you'd be saying, "Saul has been converted! I mean, the Spirit has come and bang! Saul has been converted! All of a sudden he's conscious of his sin, he's crying out for mercy and pardon. I mean, this sounds like somebody who's been converted." Except that he hasn't been, because whatever is going on in this chapter, it's temporary. It is temporary.

You know, Jesus tells us in the Parable of the Soils that some seed, when it is sown it begins to germinate, and it begins to grow a little but the sun beats down on it and the rain beats down on it and it disappears. It withers away. Some of it is trampled underfoot and it never amounts to anything. There appears to be a sign of life but it's not true life. It's not regeneration. It's not true repentance.

There's a difference between being repentance and being sorry because one has been caught. Many of us can think of incidents where we've been caught and we're terribly, terribly sorry because we're ashamed and we don't want to look the person in the eye. We've been caught red-handed. But that's remorse. That's not repentance. Saul even confesses here something extraordinary. He says, "I know that you're the anointed king. I know that you're going to be king. I know that Israel is going to be yours." Jonathan his son has probably told him. God's word of promise to David is coming to him through his enemy, through his enemy. He even makes David swear that he'll be kind to his family, that something of Saul's lineage and genes will continue in Israel, that he won't wipe them out as was the custom in the ancient near east.

And look at the last verse, verse 22 — "Saul went home, but David didn't go with him." That was a wise move on David's part. David went to the stronghold. Turn to Psalm 142. We've been doing this in recent weeks, psalms that are written roughly at the period that David is describing in the incidents in 1 Samuel and in Psalm 142 this is a psalm of David when he was in the cave.

Now, he was in a lot of caves so we're not quite sure which cave, but I want you to see what it is that David learned in the cave. Look at verse 5 of Psalm 142 — "I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge.'" — You are my refuge. It's this morning's sermon again, isn't it? What do we do with our trials? What do we do with our sufferings? What do we do with our hurts? What do we do with our anxieties? You wrap them in a parcel and you give them to Jesus. "You are my refuge" — that's what David learned. He went to the stronghold. He went to the fortress. He went to hide in the Lord, that's what he did.

Do you know what David learned in this extraordinary period in his life when he's on the run? Let me put it in New Testament terms. Let me put it in the words that Sam used to the children tonight because it's perfectly appropriate: Jesus is all I

need. Jesus is all I need, and Jesus is all I have. "I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge.'"

Application: Can you say that tonight? You know, you're not even remotely going through what David is going through, I understand that, but in the problems and difficulties and hardship and circumstances that you are passing through, perplexing circumstances, can you say with David, "You are my refuge. Lord, you are the only One I've got and You are the only One that I need."

It's amazing to me that in these dire circumstances, David, in the psalms, seems to have learned so much of what it means to trust in God, to put his faith entirely in God, refusing to manipulate providence to get what he wants, but waiting on the Lord, waiting on God's timing, waiting on God's provision. O that we might say tonight with David, "You are my refuge."

Let's pray.

Father, at the end of this Lord's Day we thank You for these stories of David. Thank You that You taught him and now teach us through him to trust You in hard places, to look to You when the lights go out, to lean upon Your everlasting arms, to take refuge beneath Your wings, to say, "You are my refuge," because Lord Jesus You are the only One that we have and You are the only One that we need. Hide Your Word within our hearts for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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