

Facing Our Enemies

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, if you do have your Bible on the phone or if you have your Bible in hard copy, please look up 1 Samuel 24, and we're going to look at this story and try and bring God's Word into our lives through that study.

And I have to say I wrestled with this passage, and quite often we'd wrestle with passages similar to this. It's difficult sometimes to look at a situation like this, so different from our own situation, in many ways, and to recognize its relevance and significance and not just the context, but to take it from its context also and apply it into our own lives, because we believe that Bible is God's living Word, and every part of it is important for us.

So it's really important that we do that tonight. But it's also really important that you do that and that I do that all the time with the Bible, that we meditate on it, that we listen to it, that we pray about it, and when we don't understand it, we don't just kind of write it off, but that we find ourselves challenged to ask the question, well, what is God saying through this?

And that will happen hopefully in sermons, but sermons can only really be kind of a taster. They can only... They're never a substitute for you opening God's Word, for me opening God's Word and meditating and praying over it.

And we always are taking God's Word, and I hope, asking Him to reveal Himself to us in it, even though the situations that we find ourselves in and that they were in and David was in, it is very different from us.

[1 : 4 4] But I think in a passage like this, in a chapter like this, there's the outworking of at least three very important Bible truths. The first one being that God's mind doesn't work like ours.

Isaiah 55 says, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways, declares the Lord. As high as... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts than your thoughts.

That's always really important when we're coming to the Bible. Otherwise, just God is just like us. He's just one of us, or just maybe a wee bit better than us. But He is God, and He is different from us, and it's important for us to remember that.

Especially maybe when it comes to understanding a little bit more about the nature and the existence of evil in the world, and God's purposes through that. Because very often, it doesn't conform to our norm.

If we were God, we would do things very differently. We would act in a different way, surely. We often maybe have the argument put to us, well, if God is all powerful, why doesn't He do something about evil?

[2 : 5 0] Or if He's all powerful, He can't be all loving, and if He's all loving, He can't be all powerful. Why does He allow evil to flourish? What is a Ukrainian Christian family thinking today, as opposed to two weeks ago, 14 days ago, and what's happening in their lives?

What are they doing with the reality of evil that they are facing absolutely, brutally in their lives? So, we always come to a passage like this, which does deal with evil, and a terrible way that Saul is acting.

And David was given the opportunity to deal with that evil. Why didn't David do something? Why didn't David deal with Saul at this opportunity that he had, when his men even said, look, this is God's promised outworking.

You're the next king. You've been the anointed one. God has rejected Saul. This is your opportunity to get rid of him, surely. He's determined to kill you. If you don't kill him, he will kill you.

The relentless pursuit will never stop. Why didn't David do something about it here? What is behind this story?

[4 : 05] And if we read on in the next chapter, and then in the chapter after that, we find out that Saul went after David again, and Saul, and David spared Saul again.

And it brings me to the second big truth from Scripture that may be applied into the story as we look at it. Where Jesus says, you have heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I tell you, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

So Jesus tells his centuries later to love our enemies. And we know that David is a man after God's heart, God's own heart.

We know that David is chosen to be the next king, imperfect though he is. But his heart motive was to love the Lord and to serve the Lord. And even when he failed in that, what he did was he confessed his failure, repented and turned from it and was changed.

[5 : 12] But here we have surely circumstances for this man of God, this follower of the Lord. Surely the circumstances he found himself in brought him, brought conflict into his own experience and great pain because he loved Saul.

Saul was kind of like a dad to him. Jonathan was like a brother to him. There was a deep bond of love between that family. David wasn't a member of that family.

He made a covenant we saw last time with Jonathan. He was loyal to the king. He loved Saul. He knew that Saul was anointed by God. And yet the circumstances were dreadful that he found himself in.

Where was the blessing for David in this situation? Because we see two things happening in the story. One is that David is opposed and then we also see that David had an opportunity to do something about it.

So we see from the story that he's being opposed by Saul and it seems strange, doesn't it? Because David is God's anointed. David in the previous chapter is fighting for God's people against the Philistines with God's blessing and he's fighting under King Saul.

[6 : 36] And yet Saul hates him. Saul is jealous of him. Saul wants rid of him. Saul is pursuing him. And it seemed that all the circumstances, and if you go back sometime and read the previous chapter, chapter 23, it does seem that all the circumstances seemed against David.

And Saul was closing in on him. A bit like what's happening in Ukraine just now. All the forces of Saul, Saul took thousands and thousands of men and they were just coming closer and closer to David.

And David was going to have no chance of escape. And then just at the end of that chapter, the last minute, the Philistines were attacking another place and Saul had to take all his armies and David was provided with a way out by God in that circumstance.

But here it happens again. Saul comes back to pursue David again. Now, there's lots of things going on here, but one of the things that's definitely going on with this opposition is an unseen battle.

There's an unseen battle happening between good and evil, between God's chosen seed and between Satan who wants to destroy God's seed. Because we know, don't we, from the beginning of Genesis, that God promised a seed of the woman would come and would crush the serpent's head pointing forward to the victory of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 01] And under the Old Testament, we have this invisible battle going on where Satan is seeking to destroy the line of Jesus, the genealogy of Jesus, the people of God, so that this Messiah will not come and he brings chaos as a result.

And that's part of the opposition that David is facing. And Saul is maybe an unwitting instrument of the evil one in seeking to destroy David.

But then in this story that we have, an interesting story, David has an opportunity, you think, to take the kingship from Saul in this cave.

Surely that was God's will. Surely all the circumstances pointed towards this being what God wanted to happen. And that was the powerful argument that his men were saying, look, God has promised you the kingdom.

God, He's brought your enemy into your hand. This is your opportunity now to take over the kingdom. And I guess, so I think probably David was tempted because we're told in verse, in some of the early verses, one of the early verses that he, so what happens, what happens because it's very down to earth, it's very, Saul goes into the cave because he needs the toilet.

[9 : 23] Probably goes in to rest as well. It doesn't say that, but it does say he goes in to relieve himself. And so he went into the toilet and in all probability he was there for quite a while, maybe resting in the cool of the cave while his men, his great fighting men were outside.

And it was told that David, the men said, there's Saul, get him now. Probably because he was resting by this point and sleeping. And David possibly was tempted, he went up with his sword.

But when he went there, what he did was he simply cut off a corner of Saul's robe, his kingly robe. Now you might, you might say, the only reason he did that was to later on go, now, see what I did, see, I could have killed you, but I didn't.

And that's true. But there was also a symbolic act in that because there was, it was symbolic of seizing the power and seizing the rights of kingship by cutting off the robe, by destroying that corner of the robe.

It was a, it would have been seen as a symbolic act by David in so doing. It was almost saying, I'm not going to kill you here, Saul, but I'm telling you that I'm going to take over the kingship.

[10 : 34] And that's, I think, why a few verses later that he's convicted in verse five, he says, you know, then David arose and cut off the corner. But afterwards David's heart struck him.

Just, he was, well, why was he convicted? Why did his conscience trouble him about that? Because he thought even that was a step too far. It was a step too far to stand against the Lord's anointing, because he recognized Saul was still the Lord's anointed, even though the Lord was going to turn his back on him.

It wasn't up to David to grab the kingdom, he had to wait until God's time. God would remove him. He had been given no command by God to destroy Saul.

He had to wait for and had to wait on Lord's timing. He had no evil. We're told that in the chapter, no verse 13, no evil in his heart towards Saul at all. He loved Saul.

He was loyal and obedient. And so he felt even convicted that he cut off the corner of the robe, which was a kind of, in a sense, an act of treachery against the king.

[11 : 43] He loved Saul despite Saul's behavior. He was a servant to Saul. And he protected Saul's men, his own men from Saul in verse 17. He said, the Lord, so David persuaded his men with his word did not permit them to attack Saul.

It's a really strong word that's used there. So they held them back, saying, no way, you're not going to do anything. And they almost he had to physically stop them from taking this opportunity of getting rid of the evil king, Saul.

And through this, he was revealing that he trusted God and trusted God's timing. And he trusted God to be the one who would judge evil. In verse 12, he speaks about being the one who trusts in God.

You know, may the Lord judge between me and between you. And then in verse 15, may the Lord therefore be judged and give sentence between me and you. He knew that God would deliver him.

He trusted in God. And he trusted that God would deal with evil in God's time. And more than that, he even promised to protect Saul's family line at the end of that chapter when Saul pleads that he would protect his family line.

[13 : 03] He loved Saul. He loved his enemy in the way that Jesus called his followers to. But he certainly wasn't naive either.

David swore this to Saul last verse. Then Saul went home. Did David go home with him? Not a chance. David and his men went up to the stronghold. So while they recognized what was happening and recognize God's hand, he wasn't naive and he didn't go and pretend everything was rosy in the garden.

So that's the second biblical principle that we take from this story about loving our enemies. The third, I think comes from 2 Corinthians 7.10, Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

And we see that, I think, in Saul himself. Because Saul was regretful. You read that in the last few verses, Romans verses 16 to 20. You know, he wept and he was sad.

You're so much more righteous than me, David. You've done the right thing and please forgive me. He's the very opposite of David in many ways because they're tears of exposure.

[14 : 17] He's been exposed before all his men and there's a degree of humiliation as David comes out and confronts him in front of all his men. And that kind of exposure from of his behavior happened several times in Saul's life, which you've read before.

He was remorseful, especially about being found out and the darkness of his motive being exposed. And the torn robe that David, you know, the little bit of robe that David showed him saying, look, I could have killed you today and I didn't.

I just cut off this bit of the robe. Just have reminded him of a previous intervention between himself and Samuel when he was told that he wasn't going to be God's anointing.

As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe and it tore because Samuel had told him that he was no longer to be the king. Samuel the prophet said to him, the Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it into one of your neighbors to one better than you.

He who is the glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind for he's not a human being that he should change his mind. And just as Saul grabbed the hem of his robe and tore it, so David tore the hem of Saul's robe and tore it and it must have reminded him of this prophecy that the kingdom was being taken from him and given to one who was better than he was.

[15 : 55] He recognized David's righteousness but he cared more about his name than anything. Just, he said, just don't let my name be forgotten, Saul says.

But he doesn't change. Two chapters later, he's got another 3,000 men. He's sworn to kill David. He's breathing out evil against David and wants him destroyed his life.

He's like a bit like a spoiled child. His life was all about himself and his popularity, his position, but his motives were wrong in his life and heart.

So we have that threefold truths, I guess, from Scripture about true repentance and also about forgiving our enemies and about God's ways not being our ways.

How can we see God as He is? How can we love our enemies in the way that God commands us to? How can we repent and change as He wants us to do in that passage from Corinthians?

[16 : 57] Because of the greater Son of David, because of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. The one who is in the... David was in the genealogy of this great King and whose footsteps he followed Jesus being the greater Son of David.

Because remember, Jesus, just like David here, Jesus was also given the opportunity to take the kingdom a different way. He rejected the temptation to a shortcut to the throne.

Remember when he was in the desert? His temptation and the devil said to him, took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

All this I will give to you, said if you'll bow down and worship me. You don't need to go the cross. Jesus said to him, away from me Satan. So it's written, worship the Lord and serve Him only.

Jesus had already been in obscurity for 30 years. He was hungry. He was facing the future and the cross and facing all that he had to face.

[18 : 09] And he knew they'd be suffering. Knew they'd be a battle, but he knew that there was no crown without a cross.

And he invoked God's word. He rejected a shortcut. Just as David had rejected a shortcut to the throne here. So Jesus did because he recognized that if he had given in to Satan then, and death would have won.

But David, Jesus also rejected demanding justice at the expense of love. Because David could have in a sense claimed justice here.

He could have claimed that it was his right to take Saul who was seeking to destroy his life and it would have been a just act. But he loved Saul. And in loving Saul, he was loving his enemies because his heart was right with God.

And so Jesus is also the same. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before the crucifixion, put your sword back in its place, he said to Peter.

[19 : 18] For those who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my father and he will at once put at my disposal 12 legions of angels? How then would the Scripture be fulfilled that we say it must happen this way?

Jesus couldn't fight evil and be just at the expense of his mission which was to love and to rescue his people.

He could have called on 12 legions of angels at that point and been utterly and entirely just in so doing.

It couldn't dovetail with his love and his desire that his love and his justice would meet on the cross, the only place where it can meet. And that reveals to us at least partly the answer to the problem of evil which is always difficult, isn't it?

But the cross is God's only and ultimate answer to evil's reign. You know, when we have all these questions about darkness and evil which will remain for us, whether we see it in the universe or whether it's in our own hearts and when people talk about specific evil, why doesn't God stop it?

[20 : 37] Why doesn't God stop putting in what He's doing at the moment? There's no easy answers to that. But what we do believe is that what Jesus did on the cross is the only possible place for God's justice and God's love to be satisfied.

It's the only place, it's the only place that He could redeem us and buy us back. It's the only place that His justice is satisfied and that evil is ultimately defeated and will therefore be destroyed.

The resurrection is that great hope for us. And so we see in the cross, we go back to that first verse we looked at, that His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than ours.

Nobody would make up the cross as the answer. Nobody would do that because it's unique that we have a God who comes to us in the person of Jesus and who faces all the darkness of evil and is patiently teaching through His life and then witnessing through His death that He loves us more than we can ever begin to imagine.

So a response then to this greater King, King Jesus, as Christians is to live as children of the King and become like our King.

[22 : 13] And that means if we shadow into this passage here, it means that we must let Him into our heart in the way that Saul didn't.

Saul is a warning to us, he was remorseful, he was religious, he was privileged, he talked a good game but he didn't let God into his heart to change it.

And you have to ask the question and I have to ask the question, are we letting God into our heart to the darkest place, the place that needs His light? Do we entrust ourselves to Him even when we don't understand the evil that we might be experiencing, the circumstances that might militate against us believing in a loving God?

You know, David could have thought, well, where in earth is God now? Where's all the promises? Come on, God. But he trusted because God had transformed his heart and he believed in the God of love and grace.

It's the only hope that we have in suffering. And I mean, encouraging and challenging us all to move beyond the shallows.

[23 : 28] And the challenge is also to obey, isn't it, even when we're tempted not to? When all the circumstances around us and maybe all the people around us say, don't do that, don't obey, don't be ridiculous.

Surely God doesn't want you to do this, that or the other. The only way we can obey Him when we're tempted not to is to know His mind, to know His word, to recognize there's no shortcuts in God's timing and to look for His hand through the suffering and trust Him.

There's no shortcut to knowing God's promises through His word. You know, I said that at the beginning about wrestling with Scripture. We need to do that. It's not just ABC and everything simple.

We need to wrestle with God's word and God's truth and know His promises lean on Him and go to Him, wait for Him and wait on Him.

And these are tough days to do that. I don't suggest for a moment it's not, it's easy to believe and it's easy to understand or understand or accept what's happening in the world.

[24 : 38] We cry out for the oppressor to be dealt with. We cry out for justice, but we still live to forgive our enemies. We must love our enemies.

That is the third thing we learn. It's so easy, isn't it? In our own little lives, to pay back evil for evil, to be revengeful. I sat slobbered out last night before going to bed and watched a film that I'd watched several times before because it appeals to me and it's called Shooter.

And it's just a silly film, but it's a film that's just full of good old fashioned revenge. And you know, that appeals to us, doesn't it?

That the bad guy gets done in at the end and the good guy does all these ridiculous things and manages to, you know, wipe the whole slate clean.

Ludacris shouldn't really watch these films. But that isn't that, that's within us, isn't it? That desire for revenge. But sometimes it's more than that.

[25 : 44] It's also a desire for justice. We want to see good prevailing over evil. But as Christians, we are called to walk a different road, a road that is not about revenge, but is a road about trusting God and His justice and that He will be the one who will deal.

This is God's, He will repay. And it means that together, even with our brothers and sisters who sometimes we think are our enemies, maybe because of what they say or what they do, we're to be honest with them.

David was honest with Saul. You know, David didn't sugar-soap what was happening. He told Saul, look, Saul, you're doing crazy. What are you doing this for? You're doing this. This is wrong.

And he brought conviction into Saul's life and sometimes we need to be like that as we love one another and even love those that maybe we think are our enemies. Doesn't mean that we're naive.

David wasn't naive. He wasn't a doormat. He spoke the truth into Saul's life and we need to speak the truth and live the truth into our own lives and into the lives of one another.

[26 : 57] But we must love our enemies. We love our enemies. We love those who persecute us. We show them a different path. We don't want revenge. We don't want God to bring down justice.

Bring down fire on them for our sakes. We want them to turn to know and love Jesus also because that is how God has treated us. And lastly, we do what we do do is we call out to God for justice.

If God isn't just in the whole thing's a bogey, isn't it? God is just and we stand up and recognize that God stands up for the truth.

We cry. You know, I read that Psalm at the beginning. These difficult Psalms. We read them and we understand them because we see that it's right to cry out against what's happening.

Psalm 57, for example, speaks about this David is crying out for justice and it says that he did that during the time that Saul was pursuing him. It's not that he found this easy.

[28 : 03] It's not that he didn't question what was going on. He cried out to God. He said, what's going on, God? Deal with it, please. Bring justice. And that we cry out to God in justice.

And we do so with the confidence of crying out to our risen Savior who's defeated death and who has acted utterly and completely injustice and in love on the cross, but will one day return to destroy evil.

It will be utterly annihilated from this universe that Corey mentioned this morning. And the new heavens and the new earth will be ours, injustice and love.

And that's what we hope for. And that's what we believe in. So you're broken maybe tonight by the ongoing reality of evil around us and maybe sometimes inside us, the only place we can go is to Jesus and to cry out for His help, His forgiveness, His justice and His love.

That's why we celebrate the Lord's Supper because it's just that great reminder to us of who Jesus Christ, the greater David is, the great shepherd of the sheep, the King of kings who we love and serve.

[29 : 23] So please consider these kind of chapters which sometimes seem a little bit distant from our culture and our understanding and remind ourselves that God was dealing with real people in the Old Testament a long time ago, just like us, and that He was revealing Himself through them and pointing forward to the great Redeemer, Jesus Christ, that we look back and that we invite into our hearts and lives.

Amen. I'll pray briefly. Lord God, help us to know You and love You better. We pray. And understand the complexity of Your justice and Your love, but know that there is no other way that You could have redeemed Your people and showed Your love and mercy and been utterly and completely just, except by the cross.

Amen.