



## "David – Part 2"

### Sermon Series: "Witnesses to God's Larger Story"

1 Samuel 24:1-22

By: Dr. Peter B. Barnes

August 15, 2010

#### 1 Samuel 24:1-22

#### David Spares Saul's Life

(New International Version)

<sup>1</sup> After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." <sup>2</sup> So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

<sup>3</sup> He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. <sup>4</sup> The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said <sup>[a]</sup> to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

<sup>5</sup> Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. <sup>6</sup> He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." <sup>7</sup> With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

<sup>8</sup> Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. <sup>9</sup> He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" <sup>10</sup> This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the LORD's anointed.' <sup>11</sup> See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

<sup>14</sup> "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?" <sup>15</sup> 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."

<sup>16</sup> When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. <sup>17</sup> "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. <sup>18</sup> You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. <sup>19</sup> When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. <sup>20</sup> I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. <sup>21</sup> Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

<sup>22</sup> So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

#### Footnotes:

- a. [1 Samuel 24:4](#) Or "Today the LORD is saying"

---

#### Introduction.

Many years ago, when I was about 10-years-old, my family visited Carlsbad Caverns in southeastern New Mexico while on vacation. I was fascinated by all the stalactites and stalagmites and the various rock formations down in the depths of that big cave. It was dark and damp and a little bit creepy deep in the bowels of the earth, but the thing that gave me the heebiegeebies the most were the bats! They would fly out from nowhere and scare you half to death. I haven't seen the bats fly out of the bridge at Town Lake here in Austin yet, but I suspect it will bring back some scary memories. When we completed the tour, I wasn't too eager to go back down in that



cave ever again!

Caves are interesting places. Not many of us choose to spend much time in them, unless we have to. Even though spelunking is a popular sport with some people, most of us would just as soon stay out on top of the earth in the open air as go inside a cave. My wife, Lorie, went spelunking once when she was in college, and she says it was one of the most frightening experiences of her life. She also says she wouldn't have gone down in that cave in the first place if she didn't like Jimmy Meldrum so much! You ask, "Who was Jimmy Meldrum?" Well, that's another story for another sermon!

Mark Twain had a different take on caves. He once said, "Cave is a good word.... The memory of a cave I used to know was always in my mind, with its lofty passages, its silence and solitude,...it's fleeting lights, and more than all, its sudden revelations..."<sup>i</sup>

Many years before, David found out that Mark Twain was right about caves, and we read about it here in our passage this morning.

### **I. Life in the Wilderness.**

When last we left our hero, David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel when he was a young man. Afterward he enjoyed a remarkable string of successes. He defeated Israel's most formidable enemy in slaying the giant named Goliath. Saul chose David to be his armor bearer, and he served in the king's court as a musician. The army loved him, and all the people sang songs about him. David trusted in God, and for a long time it seemed everything he touched turned to gold.

Then a strange thing happened. One by one, all those wonderful things were stripped away from him. David lost his job. He lost his security. He lost his wife Michal, and he lost his spiritual mentor Samuel. Saul was jealous of David, and the king tried to kill the young man on several occasions. So David fled to a place called Ramah and spent much of the next ten years of his life on the run. Whereas David once had wealth and power, fame and friends, security and a bright future, now he was running for his life in the wilderness and living in a cave.

Have you ever had an experience like that? Things are going well, life is looking up, you're riding the crest of the wave of success, and then all of a sudden the bottom falls out. If that ever happened to you, then you know how David felt.

En Gedi is a small oasis alongside the Dead Sea, the large salt lake at the southeastern corner of Israel. I visited there a number of years ago. Today there is a little park and a cluster of palm trees. There is even a stand where you can buy soft drinks and snacks and a bathhouse for changing and rinsing off the salt after you swim. (And you can buy Ahava products!) About 300 yards to the west there are a number of cliffs that rise about 2,000 feet above the plain which are topped by a plateau. The cliffs are deeply grooved by erosion over the years which make for a series of canyons and caves. The wilderness of En Gedi is a vast expanse of badlands, country as harsh and inhospitable as you are likely to find on earth. It was in this wilderness in the cave of En Gedi that David and his fighting men took refuge.

Over the years I've come to realize that in Scripture the *wilderness* is both *a geographical fact and a spiritual metaphor*. It is a time of testing and a time for clarifying one's values and priorities, and it's an occasion where we have an opportunity to get our relationship with God straight. But it is never an easy journey, and no one goes to the wilderness willingly unless he/she has to. God sent Moses and the people of Israel into the Sinai wilderness for 40 years. The Holy Spirit sent Jesus in the Judean wilderness for 40 days, and circumstances sent David into the wilderness of En Gedi for the better part of 10 years of his life. In the midst of his wilderness wanderings, David took refuge in the cave of En Gedi.

John Ortberg writes<sup>ii</sup> that the cave is where you end up when your props are stripped away. The cave is where you find yourself when you thought you were going to do great things, have a great family, boldly go where no one had ever gone before, but then it becomes clear that things will not work out quite like you



dreamed they would. Sometimes you are in the cave because of foolish choices. Sometimes it's a result of circumstances beyond your control. More often than not it's a combination of the two.

If you're not in a cave right now, wait a while. You will be. No one plans on ending up in the cave, but sooner or later everybody spends some time there. I know I have, and it's not a whole lot of fun. The hardest thing about being in the cave is that you begin to wonder if God has lost track of you. Did He forget His promises? Does He remember where I am? Is God really good? Does He care? Will I ever be anywhere but in this cave? Will I die here?

There is one other thing you need to know about the cave. It's also where God does some of His best work, and it is where He shapes and moulds the human heart. Sometimes, when all the props and crutches in your life get stripped away, you discover you still have God, and you find out He is all you really needed all along. That's what happened to David. Listen to one of his psalms written when he was in this cave in En Gedi.

**Ps. 57**

*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me,  
for in You my soul takes refuge.*

*I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings  
until the disaster has passed.*

*I cry out to God Most High,  
to God, who fulfills His promises for me.*

*He sends from heaven and saves me,  
rebuking those who hotly pursue me;  
God sends His love and His faithfulness.*

*They spread a net for my feet.  
I was bowed down in distress.*

*They dug a pit in my path,  
but they have fallen into it themselves.*

*My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;  
I will sing and make music.*

*Awake, my soul! Awake harp and lyre!  
I will awaken the dawn!*

*I will praise You, O Lord, among the nations;  
I will sing of You among the peoples.*

*For great is Your love, reaching to the heavens;  
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*

*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;  
let Your glory be over all the earth.*

*(Psalm 57)*

That's the song of a man who found refuge in God – in the wilderness, in the cave. David was able to keep his head through it all because he learned that when all else is stripped away, when the bottom falls out, God is enough. He will be with us, and He will see us through.

**II. Saul in the Cave.**

Once again, as he had so often before, Saul was pursuing David, seeking to take his life. The king's jealousy and anger consumed him, and Saul was committed to tracking down the man he thought posed the greatest threat to his throne. This time Saul had 3,000 men with him. David and his small band of fugitives were hiding in



a cave seeking to escape detection, and En Gedi was a perfect hideout. The lush vegetation provided a screen, and the caves were above the plain from which you could see everything. That's when Saul heard the call of nature, and he sought out a cave to relieve himself.

The king looked for a cave, and ironically he went right into the very one where David and his men were hiding. It is a great scene in the Bible. Saul couldn't see very clearly; his eyes were still adjusting to the darkness of the cave. There he crouched in the cave to go to the bathroom.

What vulnerability! It was the perfect opportunity for David to take revenge on the man who had been so unfair to him, the one who repeatedly tried to kill him. Saul was the cause of all David's heartache, and now David had the perfect opportunity for payback. David's companions realized the opportune nature of the situation, and they urged their leader to strike the king down. It would have been so easy to conclude, "Look at the opening God has provided for you! Take advantage of it!"

Instead, David quietly crawled over to where Saul was, and he cut off a portion of the king's robe. David resisted the temptation to take Saul's life and instead said to his men, "*The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him...*" (24:6). David would not give into the desire to take revenge, and he recognized that despite the fact that Saul was a bad king and had been completely unfair in his treatment of David, Saul was nevertheless still the king, the Lord's Anointed. As God's chosen leader of the nation, he still deserved respect and honor for the office, and it would be up to the Lord to determine when Saul's time in leadership should come to an end. David would have no part of it.

Many years ago when I was right out of seminary, I was an Assistant Pastor in a church in Alexandria, VA. I had a love/hate relationship with my boss who was the senior pastor, and while there were many things I admired about him and learned from him, we had some fundamentally different ideas about ministry and management. He was an Irishman with a fiery temper, and he could blast you out of the water with his anger and 30 minutes later want to hug and make up. I wasn't wired that way, and I didn't know how to respond.

On several occasions, members of the church came to me and expressed their frustration with the senior pastor, and it was clear they wanted to co-opt me in their complaint, which I was tempted to do because I agreed with them. However, I was studying the life of David in this passage at the time, and I read this very passage of Scripture. As I prayed about the matter, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit and I determined I would not raise my hand against the senior pastor, who was the Lord's anointed for that church in that season, and I would leave it to God to sort things out.

The desire for revenge is one of the most subtle temptations in life. We all face it at one time or another, and how we respond says a great deal about our discipleship in Christ. You might want to get even with your boss who promised you a promotion and didn't come through. You might have an ex-wife or ex-husband who walked out on you when you needed them the most. Maybe your mom or a dad who failed you when you were growing up, or perhaps you trusted a friend who betrayed you. It is so easy in these situations to become bitter and resentful, and we naturally want to get even. But God calls us to a better way of living and a higher standard of conduct. He invites us to entrust our way to Him and allow the Lord to be our defender and advocate, which leads to the final thing I want to talk about this morning.

### **III. Trusting in God.**

I believe the best thing to do in times of conflict is *not* to take matters into your own hands but to entrust your way unto the Lord. It doesn't benefit anyone to fly off the handle and exact revenge, and the satisfaction of vengeance is short-lived and turns bitter rather quickly. Whenever we try to manipulate a situation to our own ends, it usually backfires and only makes the problem worse than it ever was before. The better approach is to trust the Lord and commit your cause to His care.

Our God is a sovereign God, and nothing escapes His notice. He sees every situation in which we experience injustice or the failure of people to do the right thing. He notes the times when we get the short end of the stick or when we get the complete shaft, and He is in a better position to make things right in the long run than we



are. Our perspective is limited, we can only see so far, and God is the only One who really knows what is going on beneath the surface of things.

That's why you and I can trust God when things aren't fair. He is righteous and He is good, and He will make things right one day. Our job is not to take revenge but to trust that the Lord is big enough and good enough to work it out in a way He thinks best. If He loved us so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins, then He can be trusted to make things right eventually.

Philip Yancey has written that forgiveness is really an unnatural act, in that it requires us to go against our natural instincts of wanting justice, if not revenge. But forgiveness is the only way to break the cycle of blame and pain in relationships. It does not settle the questions of blame; it does not settle the questions of justice and fairness. Rather, it often evades these questions. But it does allow relationships to start over again, and it frees us to move forward. It loosens the stranglehold of guilt, and it puts the forgiver on the same side as the party who did the wrong – we're both sinners needing grace from a Savior.<sup>iii</sup>

In the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another person, I am simply trusting that God is better at justice than I am, and I leave the issues of fairness to the Lord for Him to work out. Wrong does not disappear when I forgive, but it does lose its grip on me, and God is able to take and redeem the brokenness of life we give Him.

### **Conclusion.**

John Ortberg writes<sup>iv</sup> that sometimes it feels like there is no way out of the cave. In those times all you can do is find refuge in God. That is when you come to learn that God knows something about caves, because His own Son Jesus suffered like all of us and logged some time in one Himself. Jesus, the Son of David, lost His position and His status as a teacher. He lost all His friends who deserted Him in His most critical hour of need. Not only that, He lost His life and He went to a cross and died. All His dreams appeared to die with Him. Then they put His body in a cave, but that was their big mistake. They forgot that God does some of His best work in caves. Jesus' body was there for three days, but the grave could not keep Him there. You see, the cave is where God resurrects dead things!

I don't know what cave you're in right now, my friend, but I do know God is there with you, and He can do His best work in your life even in that cave. When your dreams don't look like they will ever be fulfilled, when the deepest longings of your heart never get to see the light of day, and when you are treated unfairly at home or at work, or by your friends, remember God is there with you, and you can take refuge in Him. He will see you through, and He will make a way out of that cave sometime soon. You can count on it, because this is a witness to God's larger story! Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Mark Twain, in *Innocents Abroad*, p. unknown.

<sup>ii</sup> John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*, p. 138. Many of the thoughts on the cave I adapted from the chapter "That Sinking Feeling."

<sup>iii</sup> Philip Yancey in "An Unnatural Act" in *Christianity Today*, April 8, 1991, p. 37

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid*, p. 151.

