

### 3. If God is for us

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we're going to turn to our Bible reading, which is 1 Samuel 18 on page 241. Continuing the series, we began on David a few weeks ago, David God's flawed but faithful servant. Now, when we're reading biblical narrative, it's not like reading New Testament letters. We've got to read quite a long sweep to get the flow of the story. So I'm in fact going to read two chapters today, 1 Samuel 18 and 19, and break off in the middle for a song.

So 1 Samuel 18 verse 1, which follows immediately, of course, the story we looked at last week, the great duel with Goliath in the Valley of Elah.

As soon as David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own son. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor and even his sword and his bow and belt.

[ 1 : 17 ] And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, and so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the woman came out of all the cities of Saul, singing and dancing to meet King Saul with timbre, with songs of joy and with musical instruments.

And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very angry. And this saying displeased him.

He said, they have ascribed to David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed thousands. What more can he have but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day on. The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre as he did day by day.

Saul had the spear in his hand, and Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, I will pin David to the wall. But David evaded him twice. Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul.

[ 2 : 33 ] So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. He went out and came in before his people, and David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him.

And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. And all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them. Then Saul said to David, Here is my elder daughter Merab, I will give her to you for a wife.

Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles. For Saul thought, Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him. And David said to Saul, Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?

But at that time, when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel, the Mehalothite, for a wife. Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David, and they told Saul, Saul, and the thing pleased him.

Saul thought, Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Therefore Saul said to David a second time, You shall now be my son-in-law.

[ 3 : 45 ] And Saul commanded his servants, Speak to David in private, and say, Behold, the king has the light in you, and all his servants love you. Now then, become the king's son-in-law.

And Saul's servants spoke these words in the ears of David. David said, Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man, have no reputation?

And the servants of Saul told him, Thus and so did David speak. Then Saul said, Thus shall we say to David, The king desires no bride price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.

Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hands of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, It pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law.

Before the time had expired, David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law.

[ 4 : 45 ] And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, that Michal's son's daughter loved him, Saul was even more afraid of David.

So Saul was David's enemy continually. Then the princes of the Philistines came out to battle. As often as they came out, David had more success than all the servants of Saul, that his name was highly esteemed.

Now we're going to continue our reading, and we're reading chapter 19. If you thought chapter 18 was a bit odd, wait till we read this one. Continuing the story, it's the two chapters are really in unity. And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David. And Jonathan told David, Saul, my father, seeks to kill you.

Therefore be on your guard in the morning, stay in a secret place, and hide yourself. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you.

[ 6 : 01 ] If I learn anything, I will tell you. And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you.

For he took his life in his hand, and he struck down the Philistine, and the Lord worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?

And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore as the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death. And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things.

And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before. And there was war again. And David went out and fought with the Philistines, and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him.

Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lyre. And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear.

[ 7 : 12 ] But he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night. Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning.

But Michal, David's wife, told him, if you don't escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed. So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped.

Michal took an image and laid it on the bed, and put a pillow of goat's hair at his head, and covered it with clothes. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, he is sick.

Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him. And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with a pillow of goat's hair at its head.

Saul said to Michal, why will you deceive me thus, and let my enemy go, so that he may escape?

And Michal answered Saul, he said to me, let me go, why should I kill you?

[ 8 : 11 ] Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and lived at Niath. It was told Saul, behold, David is at Niath in Ramah.

Then Saul sent messengers to take David. When they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. Then he himself went to Ramah, and

came to the great well that is in Seku.

He asked, where are Samuel and David? And one said, behold, they are at Nieth in Ramah. And he went there to Nieth in Ramah, and the Spirit of God came upon him also.

As he went, he prophesied, until he came to Nieth in Ramah. And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel, and lay naked all that day and all that night.

[ 9 : 18 ] Thus is he said, is Saul also among the prophets? Amen. May God bless to us these rather lengthy readings from his word.

Now we have our Bibles open, please, at our reading, and we'll have a moment of prayer before we begin. Let's pray. God our Father, what a privilege it is that you have given us the written word for our learning.

All of it, parts of it which seem difficult and irrelevant, as well as those which immediately throw light on who you are and what you are doing. And so I pray that you will take my human words, in all their weakness and imperfection, you will use them faithfully to unfold the written word, and so lead us to the living word, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. People sometimes ask me, what do you read when you go on holiday?

I don't know if they're expecting me to say Calvin's Institutes, or the complete commentaries of Wesley, or something like that. I pray I have to disappoint them, because I'm very fond of thrillers.

[ 10 : 40 ] And I particularly like the type of thriller where there are moments of great crisis. The heroine is trapped on the railway line. The train is heading towards her at tremendous speed, and the hero, having escaped from his captors, is rushing in his car.

And the point is, will he get there in time? But the point about these stories is, they are far more exciting to read than pleasurable if you were actually involved in them.

You know the Chinese proverb, may you not live in interesting times. And David most certainly lived in interesting times. And for a good few chapters now, David's story is going to be dominated by these hair-breadth escapes, by continual persecution from Saul and from others, where over and over again, he is not certain, if he is going to make it.

It is a very human story. It's a very messy story. I'm sure as we were reading it, you were probably wondering and thinking, this is not particularly edifying. What on earth has this got to do with the gospel?

But the way the Lord works is not just in the great set pieces of life, like the story of Goliath, as we read last week, but in the tangled business of life, where his presence is not obvious.

[ 12 : 07 ] So often, particularly in the Old Testament, we have these long chunks, these books even, like Esther, where he appears to be totally absent.

So much like our own lives. Is that not the case? We believe. We really do trust in him. We sing the words we've sang, I trust in him. I trust in him.

And then over and over again, comes those situations. We wonder, well, do we really trust in him? Or do I trust in my bank balance? Do I trust in my relationships? Do I trust in my job?

Do I trust in all these kind of things? That's what's at the heart of this story. David is anointed. David is chosen. And yet, everything that happens seems to be going against that.

Back in chapter 16, Samuel anointed David as the next king of Israel. And the present king of Israel seems to be doing everything he can to prevent that happening.

[ 13 : 04 ] But it seems to be the key to this whole story, to these two chapters, is chapter 18, verse 12. Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.

Several times throughout the chapter, the Lord was with him. This is a phrase that dominates this chapter. Or chapter 19, verse 5, the Lord worked a great salvation for Israel.

Emmanuel, God with us. That's the very heart of the gospel. That's the very heart of David's experience here, even when it didn't look like it. Remember, this is not a character study of David.

This is a story of God. And God in David's life. So what is this story telling us? Remember last week, I gave the title to the sermon, We Are Not David, but David's God is Our God.

Indeed, I would want to write that over the whole story of David. What does this story tell us about David's God? What he did in David's life? And how that applies to us?

[ 14 : 15 ] I'll suggest three things. First of all, the Lord provides generously. That's the first thing this story is saying, this collection of stories. The great faithfulness and generosity of the Lord.

This Lord who was with him wasn't just a religious idea, he actually provided generously. First of all, he provided his presence. The Lord was with him.

Unseen, but real. Now, I'm sure there are occasions in all our lives when these words can seem real. He actually, not just words on the page, times when the way our lives are going, the circumstances, prove to us beyond a doubt that the Lord is with us, that the Lord is real. I'm perfectly certain everyone here has many times, perhaps many more times, when we hold on to that. We hold on to it often in the dark. We believe it, but it's hard to believe. Isn't that our experience so often? And David in Psalm 59 says this. Psalm 59 is the psalm which he wrote about.

[15:29] I thought we would sing Psalm 59, but the words are a wee bit odd sometimes. I thought there's probably enough oddity in the chapters without getting oddity in the hymns as well. Anyway, he does say in Psalm 59, verse 16, I will sing of your strength.

I will sing aloud of your steadfast love. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. Let's echo in other psalms, the two we sang, 91 and 34.

The Lord is with us wherever we are. Notice, in the day of my distress, not the Lord was with me in the day of my rejoicing, but the Lord was with me in the day of my distress.

But often we are practical atheists, aren't we? We live as if God and think as if God were not with us. So when I say the Lord provides generously, that's the first thing, his own presence.

That, of course, involves everything else. But the Lord knows we're human. The Lord needs, we know, tokens of that presence. And what does he do here? He gives David the gift of Jonathan's friendship.

[16:38] Verses 1 to 3. The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. Soul in the Old Testament doesn't mean some disembodied entity inside us.

The soul is us. The soul is who we are. Bless the Lord, O my soul, says the psalmist, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. A true and deep friendship.

C.S. Lewis wrote on this wonderfully in his book, *The Four Loves*, talking about strong, deep friendships. Now remember, this is genuine friendship. Jonathan didn't invite David onto Facebook just to build up the number of friends he had.

This was true, deep friendship which hurt Jonathan and hurt him badly. Because Jonathan was, see, Jonathan making a covenant with David in verse 3, verse 4, stripped himself of his robe, his arm and his sword.

Jonathan is virtually saying, David, I'm standing down for you. You are the one, not me, to take on the kingdom. I have to say this because so many people speaking and writing on David get this so badly wrong.

[17:54] The relationship between David and Jonathan has nothing to do with homosexuality, whatever some people might want to say. Because everyone in this chapter loves David.

women love him, people love him, everyone except Saul loves him. It's a term of very deep, very profound, very unselfish friendship.

And we'll see more of this in chapter 20 next week. Jonathan, like John the Baptist, was willing to decrease that David might increase.

You see the gospel story here. Remember John the Baptist hearing of the great, wonderful things that Jesus was doing said he must increase and I must decrease.

This is true friendship. Not what he can get out of it. He's always friendly with David because David was useful to Saul. It's so important that we really need to rehabilitate friendship in our society.

[18:54] Friendship, deep, true friendship, deep fellowship of heart and mind. Remember, these are real men. These are not a couple of wimps. Oh, we do need real men in the Christian church, don't we?

Jesus does not call men to be less than men in his kingdom. The Bible is full of real men and of feisty women as well.

When God calls us into his kingdom, he makes us more human rather than less human. He created us in his image. He wants to refine that image.

So, the gift of God's presence, the gift of Jonathan's friendship, and thirdly, the gift of Michal, Saul's daughter. Now, sadly, this is to go sour, but at this very moment, it's wonderful.

Verse 28, when Saul saw and knew the Lord was with David and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, Saul was more afraid.

[20:03] This is a tremendous gift of God. And in chapter 19, she saves him from her father. See, one of the ways in which God shows his presence, I believe, is by those special people he brings

into our lives to enrich them.

We are not David, but this is the way that God works. God assures us of his presence often by the tenderness and love of others.

And it's one of the great blessings in our lives, isn't it? Those special people whom God has given us to be our companions, to be our soulmates, and to stand with us and travel with us in the great battle.

So that's the first thing this story is telling us. The Lord provides generously. There is nothing niggardly about God, nothing grudging. He provides generously. But secondly, the Lord protects consistently.

That's the positive side, if you like, first. That the Lord provides generously, but he also protects consistently. There are always enemies. There is always hostility.

[ 21 : 11 ] Now, who is David? David is the Lord's anointed, whom God intends to set on his holy hill of Zion. Both Saul and the Philistines attempt to prevent that.

Just as throughout history, people have tried to prevent God's purpose going ahead. The fact that the success rate is absolutely nil has never deterred God's enemies from trying to prevent it. Everything Saul does makes what he wants to prevent more certain. Notice back in chapter 18, verse 8, they have ascribed to David ten thousands.

To me, they have ascribed thousands. And what more can he have but the kingdom? It's all blundering against the truth. That's what's been promised him. Saul is determined to snatch it from him.

So, God protects consistently. How does he protect? Now, he protects, of course, in the same way that he provides. First of all, he uses humans, because both Jonathan and Michal here are the humans he provides, not just to be with David, not just to be friends, to be soulmates of David, but to protect him.

[ 22 : 27 ] And look at 19 verses 4 and 5. Jonathan spoke well of David to his father and said, let not the king sin against his servant David. Notice the word Jonathan used.

Use the word sin. And of course, it is a sin. Sin of murder. And it's worse than the sin of murder here. This is trying to destroy the Lord's anointed, as we'll see later on, David, in spite of Saul's unworthiness, David refuses to take Saul's life, however much Saul wants to take his.

Verse 5, he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine. The Lord worked a great salvation for all Israel. This is the reminder of the great victory over Goliath.

And the reminder, that wasn't just a flash in the pan. God's protection there is consistent protection. Now God consistently protects us, protects us from dangers that we don't know.

That doesn't mean, of course, that when we come into a crisis, God will automatically take us out of it, but it means that he will be with us in it, and that in the end, when the whole story is written, we will see his consistent protection.

[ 23 : 39 ] And then later on, in chapter 19, the protection of God doesn't mean we shouldn't use means. Michal lets him down from the window of their house, and he escapes.

Rather as much later, Paul is to be lowered in a basket from the walls of Damascus. It's not faith in God if there is a means of escape, but we don't take it.

Peter was rescued from prison in Acts chapter 12 because of the prayers of the church. God sent an angel. Now if Peter had just hung around at the prison gates, he would have been rearrested. Obviously, when God protects, God provides a means of escape. Then we need to take it. There's this kind of super spirituality that refuses to use ordinary means.

God uses ordinary means. And he uses these people he sends into our lives. Psalm 96 verse 11, once again, not one of David's, but appropriate.

[ 24 : 42 ] He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. And sometimes these angels are humans. Just as Elijah in the desert fleeing from Jezebel.

Probably, almost certainly, the angel came to him was actually a human being. Not just that God has his unseen angels, of course, but human beings can be used in that sense as well.

God protects consistently. He uses humans. He also protects in all kinds of circumstances. David is living on a knife edge here. Saul's mad fits.

Imagine you're trying to do your work and somebody's trying to kill you. The continual battle with the Philistines. Three times Saul tries to kill him.

Twice in chapter 18 verse 11, and then in chapter 19 verse 10. And we're reminded in both these cases of who the true enemy is.

[ 25 : 42 ] The true enemy is the powers of darkness. Saul, having turned away from God, had given himself into the hands of his enemy. That's a terrifying thing.

His enemy is a deceiver. The powers of darkness, who, of course, wish to destroy David and wish to prevent the Lord's purpose being fulfilled.

Just centuries later, his greater son is going to be attacked over and over again. Remember the temptation in the wilderness followed by the storm on the lake? If you read that passage carefully, you'll find that's deliberate devilish attack to destroy him.

The power of the winds and the waters symbolizing the power of Satan. And that leads to the disciples' odd realization who Jesus says, who then is this?

Even the winds and the waves obey him. So this is the kind of story we're going to read later in the stories of Elijah and Elisha if we read through the account in Kings.

[ 26 : 45 ] Now, we are not David. That doesn't mean if we are pursued by the equivalent of Saul, we jump out of a window and then write Psalm 59. That's not what I'm saying.

What I'm saying is that God is with us, generously providing, consistently protecting. One of the things we need to thank God more for, I think I've said this before from this bullet, is the ministry of angels.

When did you last thank God for the ministry of angels? Now, I'm not talking about extravagant stories that American televangelists tell and so on.

I'm talking about those times in our lives when God's unseen protection was at work. After all, they are ministering spirits sent out to guard those who are heirs of salvation.

There are fellow workers in the kingdom. And throughout the Bible, we read of rescue from angels. Elijah, and then much later on in the story, the great rescue of Jerusalem itself from the Assyrian armies by the angel of the Lord.

[ 27 : 50 ] I'm not talking about dramatic things like that. I'm talking about those unnoticed gracious ministries of God. God who generously provides, consistently protects.

He knows a darker side to this story. That's my third point. The Lord punishes justly. There's a lot of writing by liberal scholars about Saul who see him as a martyred figure.

They want to rewrite the story. They say this story was written by David's spin doctors in order to blacken Saul and legitimize David. I wonder what had happened to those spin doctors when David tangled with Uriah and Bathsheba.

It just doesn't make sense. The Bible writers are determined to present characters as they are, warts and all. There's no whitewashing. Saul is not a maligned figure blackened by David's spin doctors.

Did David's spin doctors tell about Absalom and his rebellion against David? Of course not. Saul was a man who was given every advantage and he squandered it.

[ 29 : 03 ] That's the tragedy of Saul. Remember Saul had been called and he had thrown it all away. That's the point of these terrible warnings in Hebrews about not to throw away our salvation.

We've got all these two things in tension. We are eternally secure because of what Christ has done, not because of our good works or our faithfulness. At the same time we've got to remember those warnings in Hebrews not to sin away our mercies.

Saul was afraid. Saul was afraid of David. Then in 1829 he was even more afraid of David.

In the message, in the paraphrase, this is translated, stood in fearful awe of David.

Now this is not healthy respect. And it's certainly not the fear of the Lord. We're told the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This is not the fear of the Lord.

[ 30 : 11 ] This is the fear of this individual David in whom he sees what he ought to have been. Saul is eaten up with a corroding hatred, corroding malice that leads to attempts to murder.

Saul is trifling with eternal matters and he's turning his back on the Lord. That is the point. By attacking the Lord's anointed like the kings of the earth. Saul is in many ways the first example of the kings in Psalm 2.

Why do the nations raise the kings set themselves against the Lord and his anointed? And therefore he's very afraid. The fear of the Lord is a fear that leads to godliness.

The fear induced by the devil is a fear that leads to sinfulness. Taking us further and further and further away from God. That brings us to this curious incident at the end of chapter 19.

