

8. Will the Kingdom Ever Come?

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Date: 11 September 2011

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn to our Bibles now for our first reading this evening. We're back in 1 Samuel. First book of Samuel, that's page 249 if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

And again, we have a long reading, two chapters this evening, we'll do it in two parts. And reading this first time, chapter 26. Well, once again, we have this extraordinary experience of Saul's life being in the hands of David and being spared.

Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon? So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with 3,000 chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.

And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had come.

Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay with Abner, the son of Ner, the commander of his army.

[1 : 21] Saul was lying within the encampment while the army was encamped around him. Then David said to Himalach, the Hittite, and to Jerob's brother, Abishai, the son of Zeruah, Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?

And Abishai said, I will go down with you. So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul, sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head. And Abner and the army lay round him. Then said Abishai to David, God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please, let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.

But David said to Abishai, do not destroy him. For who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? David said, as the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish.

The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that's at his head and the jar of water and let's go. So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head and he went away.

[2 : 46] No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them. Then David went over to the other side and stood afar off on the top of the hill with a great space between them.

David called out to the army and to Abner, the son of Ner, saying, Will you not answer, Abner? And Abner answered, Who are you who calls to the king? David said to Abner, Are you not a man who is like you in Israel?

Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you've done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord the Lord's anointed.

Now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head. Saul recognized David's voice and said, Is this your voice, my son David?

David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king. And he said, Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands?

[3 : 56] Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it's the lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering. But if it's men, may they be cursed before the lord.

For they have driven me out this day, that I should have no share in the heritage of the lord, saying, Go serve other gods. Therefore let not my blood fall to the earth, away from the presence of the

lord.

For the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea, like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains. Then Saul said, I've sinned. Return, my son David.

For I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I've acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake. David answered and said, Here's the spear, O king.

Let one of the young men come over and take it. The lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness. For the lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the lord's anointed.

[5 : 03] Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.

Then Saul said to David, Blessed be you, my son David. You will do many things and succeed in them. So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Amen. Now if you turn to your Bibles again, we are on the second part of our reading, which is chapter 27.

And we're going to read 27 and then on to 28.2. That's on page 249, after the episode that we read earlier on.

1 Samuel 27, verse 1. Then David said in his heart, Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul.

[6 : 11] There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand.

So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish, the son of Mal, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him. Then David said to Achish, If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns that I may dwell there.

For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you? So that day, Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore, Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day.

And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months. Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Gerzites, and the Amalekites.

[7 : 28] For these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as sure to the land of Egypt. And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish.

But Achish asked, When have you made a raid today? David would say, Against the Negev of Judah, or against the Negev of the Jeremilites, or against the Negev of the Kenites.

And David would leave neither man nor woman alive, to bring news to Gath, thinking, lest they should tell about us and say, So David has done.

Such was his custom all the while he lived in the countryside of the Philistines. And Achish trusted David, thinking, He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel.

Therefore he shall always be my servant. And then two verses in chapter 28. In those days, the Philistines gathered their forces for war to fight against Israel.

[8 : 35] And Achish said to David, Understand that you and your men are to go with me in the army. David said to Achish, Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.

And Achish said to David, Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. And may he bless it to us. Now, if you keep your Bibles open at these pages, we'll have a moment of prayer together.

Let's pray. God, our Father, as we turn from the praising of your name to the preaching of your word, we ask that that same word will indeed shine light into our hearts.

We ask that, like the two on the road to Emmaus, our hearts may burn, our eyes may be opened, and that you will reveal to us the living word, Christ Jesus himself, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Surely, one of the most frustrating things in life is to finish something, as you imagine, and then have to start to do it all over again.

[9 : 49] Many years ago, I thought I made a magnificent job putting together a B&Q; gate leaf table, and when I examined my handiwork proudly, I discovered I'd fitted a leaf on the wrong way.

So I had to start and do it all over again. You're driving down the motorway, and instead of going off at the junction you're supposed to go off, you go off at another one.

You have to turn around and do it again. And so it is throughout life, isn't it? Besetting sins, which we thought we had conquered. Difficulties, which we thought were behind us.

Even difficult people will keep on cropping up all over and over again. And this is, as I say, one of the most frustrating and one of the most depressing experiences in life.

And that's why I believe we have these two stories here. Those of you who were here a few weeks ago will remember in an earlier story, which seems almost identical, David is, spares Saul's life when Saul is in his hands, and immediately afterwards, David then goes to the Philistines, and also the people of Ziph tried to betray him into Saul's hands.

[11 : 08] The same miserable experience over and over again. Some commentators who must live all the time in libraries, reading books, say this is unrealistic.

It's not unrealistic at all. In my life, and I imagine the life of everyone here, frustrating circumstances occur over and over again. David is still on the run.

David is still far away from the promise of God being fulfilled. And I want to suggest the point of this story is found in chapter 27, verse 1.

Then David said in his heart, notice in his heart, David, the whole of David, his whole being, his whole personality, was sick at heart.

David said in his heart, I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. The sense of weariness and frustration. The promise of chapter 16 remained as far away from fulfillment as ever.

[12 : 11] David is utterly frustrated. And that's why I've given tonight's sermon the title, Will the Kingdom Ever Come? Is it ever going to get any better?

Are things going to improve? Or am I going to be harried and hunted through the wilderness? As he says, like a partridge on the mountains. One who hunts a partridge on the mountains.

Chapter 26, verse 20. Now, looking back on this in a later psalm, a version of which we sang this evening, David is to say in Psalm 31, verse 15, My times, he says to the Lord, are in your hand.

My times are not in Saul's hand, they're in your hand. And it's in the tension point between these. One day, I will perish at the hand of Saul. That's one part of the reality.

The other part of the reality is my times are in your hand. It seems to me there are two streams running through this tale here, which mark the path of David to the throne and indeed mark the path of all God's people from earth to heaven.

[13 : 19] And the first stream is the unending, the unceasing hostility of the enemy. That's the first reality in this story. That's been a reality since the very call of David.

The enemy, and I'm going to use the word singular here, and I'm not meaning Saul here, I'm meaning the greater power behind Saul, the devil himself, has been ceaseless in his hostility.

David's greater son was to travel the way of the cross before he came to the kingdom, and so here, the Lord's anointed as dangers and trials as he travels to the throne.

What's that to do with you and me? We are not David. You've heard that phrase over and over again because it's true. We are not David. Nevertheless, we have David's God, and if you want to find the end of David's story, you need to look to the book of Revelation and to chapter 7.

These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation, who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. When we looked at Revelation some months ago, I suggested that it was not an elite group, not a group who had been particularly distinguished, but all God's people who had traveled the way of the cross, all God's blood-bought people whom God had brought eventually through the enemy, through the dangers, through the difficulties.

[14 : 52] The enemy and the other enemies will hound us to the very gates of heaven throughout this life, unending and implacable hostility.

And let's look at some of the ways in which this hostility comes. First of all, the treachery of the Ziphites. Verse 26, the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeath saying, is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hecula, which is on the east of Jeshimon?

We've met this group of people before, a bunch of sycophants, a bunch of yes-men, a bunch of people determined to ingratiate themselves with the establishment.

They gave David so much grief. And surely it's people like that who are referred to in his Psalms. My enemies plot against me, he writes.

They surround me on every side. David must have felt indeed he wasn't paranoid. They were actually out to get him. And that was absolutely true.

[15:55] And there are Ziphites in all our lives, aren't there? The letdowns, the broken promises, the coldness of former friends, the lack of the sense of empathy, the sense of being surrounded by people who, though not actually out to get you, are certainly not out to help you.

That is part of the, that's part of the experience of living. That's part of the progress of the kingdom. Our Lord Jesus Christ said that we will enter the kingdom by many trials, by many tribulations.

So there is this, this cold, treacherous, and underhand dealing of the Ziphites. There's also brute power. And this is referred, and this, of course, is Saul.

Verse, chapter 26, verse 3. Saul came encamped on the hill of Hecala, and he had 3,000 chosen men with him.

It's very interesting, one of the little details in this story. Saul's spear is, in many ways, at the very heart of this story. Now, at an earlier stage, back in chapter 22, verse 6, we read that Saul sat on the hill with his spear in his hand.

[17:12] He didn't need a spear in his hand. This is just showing, look, I'm the boss. I can crush you. I can destroy you. I can get rid of you. That's what the spear represents.

And this is, so often, the experience of God's people. The persecution, the brute power that's brought to bear against them.

Note, this is known more by our brothers and sisters in other countries than in this country. The enemy is very, very effective. Satan is the kind of enemy who doesn't just use one tactic.

You may remember in the book of Revelation, chapter 13, Satan, the devil, summons two beasts, one out of the sea, which is the persecuting power of the state, represented here by Saul embodied in his spear.

And he also summons out of the earth the beast that looks like a lamb but speaks with his master's voice, the beast of propaganda, the beast of insinuation and lies.

[18:16] David experienced both, didn't he? The brute power of the state and the insinuation and lies. And surely the third element is the lack of progress.

The thing I mentioned at the beginning. Verse 25, Saul said to David, Blessed be you, my son David. You'll do many things and will succeed in them. So David went his way and Saul returned to his place.

Almost an exact repeat to the end of chapter 24. Then Saul went home and David and his men went to the stronghold.

Saul is still ensconced in his palace. Saul is still in power and David is still in the desert. That's why David is refusing to trust him.

David spares Saul's life and obviously we'll come back to that but the point I'm trying to make here is that David is not going to trust Saul. Saul has proved himself to be a man who is a stranger to the truth.

[19:20] He's proved himself to be a man who cannot be trusted. He's proved himself to be a man who will persecute and harrise David as long as he can. And surely that is why David in 27 verse 1 says falls into deep despair.

I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. It's easy to be superior when you read a verse like this and many of the commentators are.

It's always very easy to sit in comfort and dismiss someone else's lack of faith. But the experience of David seemed to mock the promises of God.

Where are the promises? Where is the sign that we are making any progress? Because we're back here at square one aren't we? Back exactly where we were at the end of chapter 24.

No progress made at all. And that's the first thing in David's life that's the first thing in our lives the unending hostility of the enemy. There will never come a time in this world when the enemy and his henchmen do not oppose us.

[20:34] That's why Paul tells us to take up the whole armor of God and fight against the principalities and powers of darkness. Human enemies may get fed up as Saul does in chapter 27 but the devil himself will be relentless.

Now if that were the whole story it would be black indeed. We need to take that into account because that is realistic. That is true. That is what happens. I want to talk now about the other stream that flows through the story and that is the unending faithfulness of God.

Parallel to the unending hostility of the enemy is the unending faithfulness of God. All the time Saul is ruthlessly hounding David.

God is at work behind the scenes. God will set his king on his holy hill of Zion. God will fulfill the promise. God will make sure that the anointing that Samuel gave him long before this is actually going to be translated into the reality of the reign of David.

And that same God has pledged himself to bring all his children to glory. That same God has promised by promises that he cannot and will not break.

[21 : 54] That not one single one of God's children will not make it to glory. So let's look then at the unending faithfulness of God. We looked at ways in which the hostility of the enemy is shown.

Let's look at ways in which the faithfulness of God is shown. And first of all there is the ineffectiveness of David's enemies. And this is especially seen in chapter 26 in the utter uselessness of Abner who we discover in 14 verse 50 is Saul's uncle.

As Ralph Davis says, Abner, you're a lousy body guard. And that is, I can't reproduce the accent, you need to get Phil Copeland to do that for you. But Abner is totally useless as a body guard.

He falls down at the first attempt. But notice, it's not just the uselessness of Abner. Behind the uselessness of Abner there is something else.

Verse 12, So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because the deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.

[23 : 10] Notice the repetition in that verse. Now that's not vain repetition and padding, because the author can't think of something to say. You see, what the author is saying is emphasizing that for all this paraphernalia, all this tremendous display of weaponry and tactics and so on.

What are they? They're asleep, asleep, asleep. In case you didn't get it the first time, they're asleep, and they are totally incapable of doing anything because this isn't just tiredness, this is a deep sleep from the Lord.

How ineffective the human protection is, because in verses 13 to 16, this is shown in David's conversation with Abner, particularly verse 16, now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head, the spear representing his power and the jar of water, his resources to sustain him in the cave and in the desert.

The very things that Saul had brought out to destroy David with and to sustain himself, these are the very things that are shown to be utterly useless.

He trusted in his own strength, because remember, we're not primarily looking at David, we're primarily looking at the Lord and the big story, the way he works with the big figures, with Moses, with David, with Peter, with Paul, with John, is the way he deals with all those who have come into the kingdom by the death and resurrection of David's greater son.

[24 : 45] That's the point. It's not it's not that if we will experience God's unending faithfulness by going out to pursue Saul and finding Abner is useless. That's not the point.

The point is that is the way God works. God brings to nothing the pretensions of his enemies. So often in scripture you see that. Remember Daniel's three friends in the blazing furnace.

How does God deal with that? He doesn't deal with it by sending a thunderbolt from heaven to strike down Nebuchadnezzar. He deals with that by appearing in the flames with his servant and simply marginalizing Nebuchadnezzar's power.

So often this is what happens. What happened when Peter were in prison against Peter was the whole establishment, the whole pomp, circumstance, power and panoply of the establishment.

And what was ranged against that? The praying church. And yet that prayer was mightier than Herod and mightier than hell. God protects his servants.

[25 : 49] Not one of them is missing and he often does it through the ineffectiveness of the enemies. Second way in which God's faithfulness is shown is in the restraint shown by David.

Do you know, this is the second case where David has had Saul in his power and the second time he hasn't killed him. Those of you who were here last week will remember that he nearly killed Nabal the churl the boor but was estranged from doing this.

He had learned from this. He had learned that he must not take the kingdom into his own hands. And he realized that the Lord has many ways of carrying out his purposes because when Abishai and Ahimelech urged him to kill, he says, verse 10, David says, as the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, his day will come to die, he will go down into battle or perish.

The Lord has many resources. He's not, the Lord does not depend on David to carry this out. Now once again, David's men are bitterly, bitterly disappointed.

But the spear and the water jar show God's providence and Saul's powerlessness. You see, Saul has learned nothing. David may have learned a lot, Saul has learned nothing.

[27 : 13] Saul is adept, as we've seen before, language of piety. Then Saul said, verse 21, I have sinned. Return my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day.

Behold, I have acted foolishly and made a great mistake. Now that's exactly what he had said in so many words in the previous incident. How is he going to trust someone like that?

David did not kill Saul, but nor did he trust him. That's why David goes to his way and Saul returns to his own place. David is not going to walk into the lion's den.

The language of piety is so easy and it comes glibly to Saul. Notice what David says, verse 22, here is the spear, O king, let one of the young men come over and take it.

Notice David is going to keep his distance from Saul. the Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness for the Lord gave you into my hand today and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed.

[28 : 21] David will not take into his own hands what God has promised him. So, these are the first two things about God's faithfulness.

Now, what are we going to make of this curious chapter 27 and into 28? I'm going to suggest that the faithfulness of God is shown by the way he overrules events when he seems to be most absent.

The way he overrules events when he seems to be most absent. Now, this is a strange episode in 27 to 28 too. Notice there's no comment by the author on any of the things that happen.

There is no mention of God. And the question we've got to ask is this, is David right or wrong in what happens here? Is verse 1 suggesting his lack of faith?

I don't think for a moment this is suggesting David's total lack of faith, lapsing from strong faith into equally strong unbelief. this is showing David in a situation where his faith is under severe strain.

[29 : 40] It's a common dilemma here. Is this a sensible action of David's or is it running away?

And I'm not going to give you a definite answer because the chapter doesn't give us a definite answer.

But it's so like so many circumstances in our lives. David once again goes down to Gath to the Philistine king Achish. And David is so successful at serving the king that the king must have thought all his Christmases had come at once.

I want to say two things about these episodes in 27-28. First thing to notice is that David destroys God's enemies. Now we can say of course he lied to Achish.

Achish sent him against the people of God. He refused to do it. what he did do and it seems to me that verse 8 is a very important verse. Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Gerzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as sure to the land of Egypt.

That is inviting us to go back to the story of the Exodus and the journey through the desert. It's inviting us to remember the Lord through Moses had said you've got to get rid of these people.

[30 : 55] These people will corrupt you, they'll pervert you, they'll turn you away from me and turn you to other gods. So David is dealing with those whom earlier generations had failed to deal with and thus protected his own people.

That's the first point. Now in case you think I'm trying to whitewash David. Let me make this other point. David is not the hero of this story.

God is the hero. If David were the hero of this story, this would be a story about works, wouldn't it?

This would be a story about moralizing. This would be a story about whether we imitate the good in David and don't imitate the bad.

This is a story about grace. ultimately it is not God's flawed servant who is going to bring in the kingdom.

It's the Lord himself. David is a sinner. David will be part and a glorious part of that kingdom. Read the book of Revelation. There is the throne of David and the Lord Jesus Christ describes himself the root and the offspring of David.

[32 : 06] But ultimately the wonder is that God uses material, flawed material to bring in his kingdom. And that seems to me the way we need to read stories like this.

If you're simply reading it as a story, was David good or was David bad, you can find many things to criticize. You can say, well, he was deceitful, he cheated, he ran away.

That may all be true. I wonder if there is anyone here who has not done any of these things, deceitful, cheated, and ran away. Isn't that so often the story of our life?

And if the story of our life were such that the kingdom depended on us, that would be disaster. If the kingdom depended on me, it would never come, and if it did, it wouldn't last five minutes.

The story is about God. So as we finish, let me say this. These two streams will flow together, the stream of the enemy's unceasing hostility, and the theme of God's unceasing faithfulness.

[33 : 14] They will flow together until we reach the Father's house. But on arrival there, there will no longer be these two streams, there will only be one, the unending love and faithfulness of God, which continue to all eternity.

And meanwhile, what do we have meanwhile then? What do we have to keep us going when we are in the desert and in Gath? And so on. We have his faithful and unbreakable covenant promises, don't we?

The promises to David refer to his special place in salvation history. I have set my king on my holy hill of Zion and unto the way that foreshadows the reign of his greatest son.

But we have similar covenant promises. As Paul faces in Romans 8, the unceasing hostility of the enemy, the implacable hatred of the adversary.

What is it he says? If God is for us, who can be against us? The God of the faithful word, the God of the covenant, and that God is our God.

[34 : 23] Amen. Let's pray. God our Father, we know that we are flawed servants, and only through your grace, only through your faithfulness, can we live our lives and eventually come to glory.

And so we pray now, Father, that you will lead us in the days to come, that you will protect us, protect us against the enemies, including our own follies and sinfulness, with the assurance that you will bring every one of us who love you to glory.

We praise you for this. Amen. Amen.