10. God's Perfect Timing

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0:00] But we're going to turn now to our scripture reading. We're going to read two chapters this morning, so we'll break that with a hymn in the middle, but if you'd like to turn with me to 1 Samuel chapter 29. 1 Samuel 29, that's page 251, I think, in the Visitor's Bibles.

And we'll read chapter 29 now, and then, after we've sung, we'll read chapter 30. This follows on from the dramatic chapter we read last week with Saul and the medium, the witch at Endor, and the grim news that she gave to Saul of the imminent defeat at the hands of the Philistines.
Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek, and the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, the commander of the Philistines said, What are these Hebrews doing here?
And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years? And since Caesar deserted to me, I find no fault in him to this day.
But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him.
[1:34] He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his Lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here?

Is not this David, of whom they sang to one another in dances? Saul has struck down his thousand, but David his ten thousands. Then Achish called David and said to him, As the Lord lives, you have been honest.
And to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I find nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you.
So go back now and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines. David said to Achish, But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go out and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?
And Achish answered David and said, I know that you are as blameless in my sight, as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, He shall not go with us to the battle.
[2:40] Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning and depart as soon as you have light. So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines.

But the Philistines went up to Jezreel. Well, let's continue reading then 1 Samuel chapter 30, page 251 in the Church Bibles.
Now when David and his men came to Ziklak on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negev and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burnt it with fire, and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great.
They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way. When David and his men came to the city, they found it burnt with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.
Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinom of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.
[3:55] David was greatly distressed. The people spoke of stoning him because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

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David said to Abiathar, the priest, the son of Ahimelech, Bring me the ephod. So Abiathar brought the ephod to David, and David inquired of the Lord, Shall I pursue after this band?
Shall I overtake them? He answered him, Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue. So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook of Bezor, where those who were left behind stayed.
But David pursued. He and four hundred men, two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook of Bezor. They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David, and they gave him bread and he ate.
They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten his spirits, revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.
[5:06] And David said to him, To whom do you belong? And where are you from? He said, I'm a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind before I fell sick three days ago.

We had made a raid against the Negev of the Cherethites of Judah, and against the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag with fire. And David said to him, Will you take me down to this band? And he said, Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band. When he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah.
And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who mounted camels and fled.
David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken.
[6:15] David brought back all. And David also captured all the flocks of the herds. And the people drove the livestock before him and said, This is David's spoil.

Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left by the brook at Pezor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him.
And when David came near to the people, he greeted them. Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children and depart.
But David said, You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us. He has preserved us, and given into our hand the band that came against us. Who would listen to you in this matter?
For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike. And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.
[7:22] When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, Here is a present to you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord. It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negev, in Jatir, in Aroor of Sifmoth, in Estimor, in Rakhal, in the cities of the Jeremelites, in the cities of the Canaanites, in Hormah, in Boreshan, in Attach, in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at 1 Samuel 29 and 30, which is on page 251, and we'll have a moment of prayer before we begin.
Our Father, as we draw near to you, we pray that you will most graciously draw near to us, that you will open your word to our hearts and minds, and that you will open our minds and hearts to your word.
In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. Amen. Now, in this series on David, there's a phrase I've used over and over again, which is, we are not David, but we have David's God.
I think that's hugely important, because if we approach the stories of David, thinking we are David, then we're going to make all kinds of wrong assumptions. We are going to rejoice when David wins a victory, and say, David was good then, we'll be like David.
[9:14] When David gets it wrong, we'll say, we're not going to be like David. The truth of the matter is, and I'm sorry if anyone's offended at this, we do not have the same part in the kingdom of

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God as David did.

We are not the Lord's anointed. We are not pointing to the greater son, the king who is to come. But, the other part of this phrase is equally important.
We have David's God. And what God does for David on a big scale, what he does in these great moments in salvation history, these moments when he is working his purpose out through his flawed but faithful servant, David, these are things which also apply to our experience of God. God doesn't become different. It's the same God who works in our lives. And our subject today particularly is God's perfect timing. God who always gets his time right.
God who always intervenes exactly at the right moment. Now this particular story we've reached, David is still in Philistine land. He's gone there frustrated and terrified that one day Saul, his great enemy, is going to kill him.
[10:30] And so he's now in Philistine land. And worse still, he is allied to the Philistines. And the Philistines have just attacked in great power. So is David going to be caught up in this attack on his people?

So the question here is, how is David going to get out of this jam? That's the point with which the story begins. Now that's the surface story.
And underneath is the story of God's providence. God who moves in a mysterious way. His wonders to perform. And his timely interventions, which happen just when they are needed. Never too early. Never too late. But just at the right moment. So first of all, we are going to look at God's timely providence in chapter 29.
Now chapter 29 is one of those chapters, and those who have been here during the earlier parts of the series will remember, that doesn't appear to have anything spiritual in it at all.
[11:34] It doesn't appear to be a theological story. It doesn't appear to be a gospel story. Hardly mentions God. But if we look at it that way, if we look at the surface story, we'll be doing what the hymn says not to do, which is to scan his work in vain.

So God's timely providence, as God gets David out of this jam, as he gets him back to where he wants him, the first thing he does is uses David's enemies.
Now look at chapter 29. The lords of the Philistines, verse 2, were passing on by hundreds and thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, that's the Philistine king.
And God is going to use David's enemies to get him out of the problem, because the Philistine commanders, who have never liked David, who have always been suspicious of him, say to Achish, we cannot possibly take this man with us.
If we take this man with us, he is going to turn against us, and he is going to destroy us. We are not David, but I'm sure there have been times in many people's lives, when God has actually used people's hostility, to get us out of a difficult situation, and into the one he wants us to be in.
[12:54] In the tangled circumstances of our life, without noise, without fuss, the wonder of God's ways, is that he uses even our enemies, even hostile circumstances, to get us where he wants us.

Look at verse 5, is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, Saul has struck down his thousands, and David's his tens of thousands. Surely we remind again of David's victory over Goliath.
As Saul and others may have forgotten that, but the Philistines certainly haven't. Isn't this the man who killed our champion? A public demonstration, that God is with David.
Years of wilderness, the years of rejection, are coming to an end. David is going to be king, and he will reign. So, God's providence, providence sounds a theological word, and it is, but it's really about how God uses every circumstance in our lives, to bring us to the place he wants us to be.
There's the using his enemies, and then there's the sympathy of the Philistine leader. Verse 6, Then Achish called David and said to him, As the Lord lives, you have been honest, and it seems to me right, that you should march out with me, and march out and in with me, in the campaign, for I have found nothing wrong for you.
[14:20] It's a wonderful little detail about what's happening. As the Lord lives, as Yahweh lives, says Achish. You'll notice, Achish, the Philistine king, doesn't use the name of the Philistine gods, but the name of Israel's God, the name of David's God, who is our God.

Among other things, this shows the influence that David had had on him. Among other things, it shows that David had not forgotten who his God was. Now, if you read 1 Samuel, you'll find the

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Philistine gods turn out to be a fairly useless bunch.
Back in chapters 4 and 5 of this book, the Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant. They put it in their temple, the temple of their god Dagon, and find their gods smashed in pieces.
In chapter 17, Goliath curses David by his gods. Once again, their gods prove to be totally ineffective. This is a hint about how the story is going to go.
As the Lord lives. That is the point of the story. The Lord lives. The Lord reigns. David is going to get out of this jam, because his God is a powerful God.
[15:34] We are not David. But when we are in a jam in our lives, we have David's God, who lives. The living God. Not just the God who exists. Not the made-up godlets of the Philistines and others.

So we have God's timely providence. Just at the right time, he comes into this situation. Now coming on to chapter 30, we have what I would call God's timely strength.
Particularly thinking of verse 6. David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. We'll come to that.
At first sight, David simply has moved from the frying pan into the fire, hasn't he?
He's been rescued from the Philistines, but he's come to this place called Ziklag, found it a smothering ruin, found his wives and children captured.
It's a terrible situation. This is real grief. This is really shocking. The heart just goes out of David. It's the tears of grief and of pain.
[16:39] And David feels, am I never going to get out of this situation? Every time I get up, every time I escape, I'm kicked in the teeth again.

Every time I think things are going right, they just get worse and worse and worse. And if that weren't bad enough, his people turn against him. Verse 6 again, David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul.
So, David, saved from one situation, he simply brought back into another, which is even worse, because here, those he loves, those he cares for, and the loved ones of his men, seem to have gone.
Let's look then, at the strength that God gives. Verse 6, David strengthened himself, in the Lord, his God. Now, what does that mean?
That doesn't mean David sat down, and sang a chorus. That doesn't mean that David thought, this is a kind of quick fix. The hurt is still raw.
[17:53] The people are still out to get him. David was not paranoid. They actually were out to get him. So, here it is, again. Notice, notice what he does.

First of all, he strengthened himself, in the Lord, his God. He turns back, to the, the fact, that the Lord lives.
This is not just, any God. After all, he's surrounded by God, Dagon, and the other Philistine gods.
He strengthened himself, in his God. Remember what he says, the Lord is my shepherd.
Not just any shepherd, the Lord is my shepherd. But also, this phrase, strengthened himself, in the Lord, his God, recalls an earlier phrase, in the, in the story.
Back in chapter 23, verse 16, the very last time, David met, his great friend, Jonathan. Back in 23, verse 16, David saw, that Saul, verse 15, that Saul had come out, to seek his life.
[18:59] David was in the wilderness, and Jonathan, Saul's son, rose, and went, to David, and strengthened, his hand, in God. Now, I think, there's a deliberate echo here.

So, what's happening? How did Jonathan, strengthen, David's hand, in the Lord? And we read, what's it, Jonathan says, do not fear, for the hand, of Saul, my father, shall not find you.
You shall be king, over Israel. The strength, was in the promises, of God. Not just in warm feelings. Not just in, feeling a bit better, about the situation.
David is reminded, of these promises, that the Lord, cannot, and will not, break. This is what it means, to strengthen ourselves, in the Lord, to trust, in the promises, of God.
As the old hymn says, trust and obey, there really is no other way, but to trust, the promises, and to obey, the commands. The Lord, who lives, David's God, who is also, our God.
[20:08] I trust in him. I trust in him, as we sang in that, psalm, a few moments ago. So, David strengthened himself, in the Lord, his God, particularly, as he remembers, the promises, the unbreakable, and unbroken promises, that the Lord, had given him.

Then he looks, for the guidance of God. Verse 7, And David said, to Abiath, the priest, the son of Ahimelech, bring me the ephod. Now, we've come across, the ephod, quite a lot, in the story.

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This was, this was, a pocket, in the high priest's, cloak, where the, where the lots, were carried, which were cast, to discover the mind, of the Lord.
As I said, in Old Testament times, that was a legitimate way, because the Lord, guided, how these lots fell. Verse in Proverbs, the lot falls, where it will, but every decision, is at the hands, of the Lord. Now, I've said before, that doesn't mean, when you have a big decision, to make you, throw a dice, and see where it falls, what it means, is that God, in those days, before his word, was fully given, was able to use, these normal methods, and, and overrule them.
[21:24] Now, come back to the story. How does David, strengthen himself? He strengthens himself, from the Lord, who had promised, you will be king, David, nothing can prevent that.

I have set my king, on the holy hill of Zion, says Sam, too, and, so it is. Now, we are not David, we are not a king, we do not have a byther, or an ephod, but we do have a great high priest, who has gone into heaven, who gives us mercy, and grace, to help, in time of need.
So, how do we strengthen ourselves, in the Lord? We strengthen ourselves, as we remember, the great promises, the promises, never to leave us, or forsake us. The great words, that God is faithful, not sometimes faithful, not on the whole, God is faithful, but, full stop, in all times, in all places, God is faithful.
We don't have the effort, we don't need the effort, we look up, to heaven, to the great high priest, who is there, for us, we trust, and obey. God's timely strength, then, as David strengthens himself, and then God's timely strength, in this apparent coincidence, of meeting the Egyptian, in verses 11 to 15, they find an exhausted Egyptian, who has been abandoned, by the Amalekites.
Now this is another coincidence, in the story, isn't it? Except, that in the Lord's providences, there are no coincidences, at all. God works, out everything, according to the purpose, of his will.
[23:08] As you're in your own life, you can think of, coincidences, little, minor details, that you didn't notice, at the time, but which led, to utterly astonishing, results.

This is a link, in the chain, to tell David, where to go. Once again, there's no obvious, theology here, on the surface, but the gracious, intervention of God, in the unexpected things, the innumerable people, we meet.
Now this, as I say, is all building up, to the time, when David, is crowned king. And all the time, there is, if you like, the surface story, the actual events, of his life, the way things, are going, and underneath it, the deep flowing river, of God's providence, and of God's promises, standing, standing, on the promises, which cannot fail, when the howling, storms of doubt, and fear, assail. That is how we strengthen, ourselves. So, there is, so, first of all then, we have, we have God's, timely providence. We have God's, timely strength.
Then in the rest, of the chapter, 30 verses, 16 to 31, we have God's, timely victory. Now, in some ways, this isn't a very, edifying story, is it?
[24:30] We've got an account, of battle, and then a list, of towns. That's how sometimes, we panic, when we come across, the Old Testament, we say, what on earth, is there in this, for us?

Now, no word of scripture, is irrelevant, or unimportant. So, let's see, what's being said here. Here again, God's providence, and David's character, are coming out.
There were, first of all, David, the great, and generous warrior. David, in verses 16 and 17, struck them down, from twilight, until the evening, of the next day, and not a man, of them, escaped. Remember, David, is a great warrior. Whatever else, he may be, and whatever else, he is, he is a great warrior. But, also look at his, wise diplomacy.
He's a great diplomat. As he comes to, verse 23, then David came to the 200 men, who had been too exhausted, to follow David, who had been left, at the brook Besar.
[25:33] And they came out, to meet David, and to meet the people, who were with him. When David came near, to the people, he greeted them. And all the wicked, and worthless fellows, among the men, who had gone with David, said, because they did not go with us, we will not give them, any of the spoil, that we have recovered, except that each man, may lead away his wife, and children, and depart.

Now, notice David's diplomacy. First of all, in verse 23, he calls them, my brothers. Now, we can be pretty sure, that David knew, that they were wicked, and worthless men.
I don't think, that's just a comment, by the author. I think, that is probably, David's own view of them. But, he is not just a warrior, he's a diplomat. And he calls them, my brothers.

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And then, what we have, is a clash, of two, totally different ways, of looking at the world. Two different world views, if you like. One, is the world view, of works.
Verse, once again, verse 23. We shall not give them, any of the spoil, that we, have recovered. But look at, but look at, look on at verse, that's in verse 22.
[26:45] Look on at verse 23. You shall not do so, my brothers, with what, the Lord, has given us. Notice the one, we have recovered, the other one, the Lord, has given us.

These are two world views, that are as far apart, as night, and day. This one, is works, the spoil, that we have recovered. The other is grace, what the Lord, has given us.
This is a lesson, we really, really need to learn, you know. As Christians, as evangelicals, we are very firm, on salvation, by grace, through faith.
We must never, depart from that. But I fear, that so often, while we believe, in salvation, by grace, we actually believe, in sanctification, by works.
But you see, grace is not just, something for the beginning, of the story. Grace is something, for every day. Grace, has to, grace, has to dominate, our lives, from the beginning, to the end.
[27:55] It's not just, by grace, we enter the kingdom, of God. It's by grace, we live, on earth, in the kingdom, of God. And it's by grace, that we will, that we will, be taken to glory, one day.

What do you have, says Paul, to the Corinthians, that you did not, receive? So you see, in David's, in David's men here, we have a picture, of these two world views.
One is, look what we have done. Look at our achievements. The other is, thankful gratitude, for what the Lord, has done, and what the Lord, has given.
Only, by grace, can we enter, well we know that. Remember the next line, of that hymn, only by grace, can we stand, can we remain, in the kingdom, not by our human endeavor, but by the blood, of the Lamb.
Grace, is what this gospel, is about. Grace, is what this story, is about. That's why I call David, not just the great, but the generous warrior. Remember back, at the beginning, of his story, he, he, he, he, he, didn't claim, the victory, over Goliath, as a victory, of achievement.
[29:11] He says, the Lord, who delivered me, from the paw of the lion, and the paw of the bear, will deliver me, out of the hands, of this Philistine. God's, timely victory, of David, the generous warrior.

And finally, David, the loyal friend here, in verses 26, to 31. Now, this is the kind of passage, you might just rush over, and think, it's not saying all that much.
But it's saying some very important things. Verse 26, when David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil, to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, here is a present for you, from the spoil, of the enemies, of the Lord.
This phrase, the enemies of the Lord, is very important. This is not just a border, skirmish, with the Amalekites, those long dead people. Not just a piece, of ancient history.
This is part, of the great battle, in which David, was involved, in which we are all involved. The battle, that began back, in Genesis 3, when the Lord God, said, the descendant, of the woman, will crush, the head of the serpent.
[30:20] So it is here, as the, forerunner, of the serpent, crusher, destroys, his enemies, they are the Lord's enemies. This is part, of the great battle, pointing to his greater son, to the time, when David, would sit on, on the throne of Israel.

But beyond that, to the day, when his greater son, would sit on the throne, of the universe, and make his enemies, his footstool. The enemies, of the Lord. Not the enemies of David.
Not my enemies. And the other point, these, the list of names, Bethel, Aror, the other places. These are places, that David, had known, in his rejection.
Places, to which he had been generous. Places, which owed him loyalty. Places, which were soon, to become part, of his kingdom. All of, and we'll see this, this evening particularly, David is being prepared, to be king.
David, is not just, a brutal warrior. David, is a sensitive man, a man of generosity, man whose life, is dominated by grace. As he's given these gifts, to these towns, they are becoming now ready, to receive him, when he becomes king.
[31:36] Verse 31, in Hebron, for all the places, where David, and his men, had roamed, it was to be in Hebron, in later chapters, that all the people of Israel, were to come, and crown him king.

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We're not David, but we need to look, in our lives, for God's kindly providence, as the God, who is faithful. We need to strengthen, ourselves in God, the God of timely strength, the God, who has given us, his word.
And we need, to look forward, to the time, of the final victory, when he will put, all his enemies, under his feet. And that is why, although we are not David, we have a great, and wonderful God, whose name we praise, and whose word, we believe in.
Amen. Let's pray. God is faithful, by whom, we were called, into the kingdom, of his son.
Father, how we praise you, for those ancient stories, which are not, ancient history, but the word, not only that you once spoke, but you are speaking, to us now.
[32:50] And we pray, that we may leave here, strengthened, encouraged, and ready to, continue the fight, against the Lord's enemies, looking forward, to the day, when he will place, all his enemies, under his feet.

We ask this, in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.

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