

The Reward of the Righteous and Faithful

I Samuel 26-27

KV 26:23-24 “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed. As surely as I valued your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble.”

How many are familiar with the term “backsliding?” At one point or another in our lives, we’ve all experienced backsliding. For example, we might become very motivated and inspired after a conference to do something different about our lives, but after a few weeks it was as if we were never inspired at all. We might make it a goal to stop a certain behavior, but fail at it – like trying to read the Bible every day, or depending on God when work gets rough, or treating our neighbors with more love ... and then a few weeks later we neglect our daily bread devotionals, we give in to frustration and anger in our jobs, or hold contempt towards our neighbors. How do we maintain righteousness, how do we maintain an attitude of faith, hope and love? We are all sinners, and without God, this is impossible. But there is hope, this hope comes from God. The answer is in his one and only son, Jesus Christ, our salvation, our hope, and our reward for righteousness and faithfulness. Without God, even the best of men, like King David, can fall to temptation. So first, we’ll look at the Repeat of Saul’s sin. Next, we’ll see the Reward of Righteousness and Faith – which is deliverance, and salvation from sin. And lastly, we will look at the Relapse of David into sin, to remind us of how frail we are.

Part I: The Repeat of Saul’s Sin

Look at v.1-2 “The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, ‘Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?’ So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search there for David.” First we see a repeat of the Ziphite’s sin. Two weeks ago, these were the same people who betrayed the location of David to Saul, and here they are again. David had done nothing to them, and yet they desire to cause him trouble. In that same passage 2 weeks ago, we learned about how Saul was moved by David’s mercy over his life, even saying to David, “You are more righteous than I ... I know that you will surely be king (I Sam 24:17,20).” And then Saul returned home. If it weren’t for the Ziphites, Saul would not have known where David was, and I wonder if he would have even bothered to search for David – but it was something about this meeting which stirred him up again.

Somehow his old rivalry was awakened, his old jealousy, his old envy, his old hatred of David returned. It could have been something the Ziphites had said, or he may have been holding on to his grudge against David, either way, the visit from the Ziphites reignited his fire. He gathered for himself 3,000 men of Israel to search for David. These were not any ordinary men, but men specially picked by Saul – they had to be his best fighters. Saul might not have known anything about David’s army, how large it was, but he knew David was a valiant warrior – so to gather up this many people showed that Saul was once again serious about destroying his enemy. David could not believe the news himself, and sent out scouts to confirm the news, and they verified that it was true.

I've heard personally that when smokers quit, especially at the beginning, they can tell you the number of days they haven't smoked, but they'll also tell you how hard it is for them to resist a cigarette. When they see someone smoking, or even if they smell second-hand smoke, their desire to smoke is re-awakened. That's how our lives are when they're in patterns of sin. I used to enjoy smoking hookah, and even justified doing it. I thought – if God made it, why not? But I ignored the fact that it could cause mouth and lung cancer, and that smoking a lot made me sick. There were times I tried to stop, but I could never go for a whole month without visiting the hookah shop at least once. It came along with the lifestyle I was living – travelling, going to dance clubs – these were the Ziphites that tempted me. We know that God was not with Saul – so God did not restrain or remove the temptation from Saul. We have to realize we cannot fight against sin and temptation by our own strength: it is God who has the power to restrain and remove sin and temptation. Remember what David wrote in Psalm 54:4-5, when the Ziphites had gone to Saul, “Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me. Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them.” Like David, we need to recognize that in times of trial and temptation, God is our help.

Part II: The Reward of Righteousness and Faithfulness

Look at v.5 “Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him.” Imagine this scene: here was an army of 3,000 men, that's about 3 times the size of our Christmas Worship Services, all camped around in a circle, and at the center of that circle was Saul, the leader of the army. What David was about to propose next seems ridiculous, but he asked without hesitation Ahimelech and Abishai, who was his nephew: “Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?” It's like asking, “Who wants to walk into the center of a bear trap, or, who wants to walk through a den of hungry lions?”

Let's read v.7, “So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.” It was there, next to Saul, Abishai's eyes lit up. He said to David, “Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice.” This is similar to what David's men said in the first encounter with Saul, that God had delivered Saul into David's hands. So not just once, but twice, God gave Saul into David's hands – this was confirmed both by his men and Abishai, but what did David do?

David said to Abishai, “Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?” Perhaps David had learned, and experienced firsthand from the last chapter how the Lord avenged him for Nabal's wrongdoing. God avenged David and struck Nabal for his evil actions. Now here, David had made it into the deepest and most secure part of the enemy's army, and he knew it was by the help of God. He then could trust God to do what is right, rather than trying to take matters into his own hands, or even letting someone else do the dirty work for him. He knew, somehow, God would avenge him – whether Saul would die from natural causes, or that he would perish in battle, but he himself would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. He respected God's choice and God's will.

Here we see the contrast between Saul and David, where when faced against his temptation, Saul gave in, but David, with temptation literally right under his nose, was able to restrain himself and trust in the Lord. Almost always, we choose to do something our way, rather than submitting to God's way. David had the chance to put his enemy away, and Abishai saw the opportunity so clearly, but David knew that this was not the Lord's will. I'm learning that as a husband, I need to show grace and mercy to my wife. The Bible tells me to love my wife. It's tempting to think, I'm the man of the house, and I can do what I want, but if my wife is tired, then I should stop playing with my phone or surfing the internet, but go to bed. I should do the dishes sometime. I should do something small to let her know I love her. But I should not do these things grudgingly, but mercifully, surrendering my own selfish desires and obeying God's word. The key is surrender, not sacrifice, mercy, not sacrifice, and we should have that attitude. We surrender to God's will over ours, because his way is always good and right.

So now, here are David and Abishai, and I can just imagine, if it were anyone else, looking out in the midst of 3,000 armed soldiers..."How do we get out now?" What did they do, and how did they get out? Look at v.12 "So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the Lord had put them into a deep sleep." The only way they could have got out, was because the Lord helped them. It was amazing, and incredible to me at first, how they made it in and out of such a fortified and large camp, but here we see plainly, it was the Lord that put everyone to sleep. And not just any sleep...a deep sleep. The same sleep Adam was put in before taking out his rib. That's knockout sleep.

Also notice what David takes: Saul's spear and water jug. The spear represented the authority and power of the king, the water jug, the life, the sustenance for the wilderness. To David, perhaps these were ordinary objects to prove that he was near to Saul, but symbolically, we see that God had given the authority and life of Saul into David's hands. So then, notice what happens next: David goes a great distance away from the army, and calls out to Abner son of Ner. It has to be clear, that God helped David get through the camp. The sound of footsteps next to Abner's ear did not stir him, but a faint little call from several yards away woke him up.

David proceeded to scold him, saying, "You're a man aren't you ... Why didn't you guard the king? ... What you have done is not good ... you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the Lord's anointed." Why would he do this? Surely David must have known that it was not Abner's fault that the Lord had put everyone into a deep, supernatural sleep – but this was to confirm that God was with David, and that there was nothing they can do against God. Abner was speechless, and no one else in the army said a word.

Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is that your voice, David my son?" There is a false respect and humility here, in Saul calling David his son. We learned in the last verse of the last chapter that Saul had given his daughter, who was David's wife, to Paltiel, son of Laish. Outwardly, it seemed Saul tried to show some care or concern, but it was hypocritical and two-faced, like if you talk about someone behind their back, and turn around and suddenly say, "Hello, friend." In contrast, David's heart is pure and humble, and he pleads his innocence with Saul. Let's look at verse 18: "And he added, 'Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty

of?” He still addresses Saul as lord, and he still humbles himself to the Lord’s anointed. God chose Saul to be king, and as long as he is alive, David will be servant to him. This was proven when he did not kill Saul when he had the chance. So he asks, “What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of?” Again – Saul cannot answer back, neither can Abner, no one has an answer, because David is not guilty of anything.

David continues in v.19: “Now let my lord the king listen to his servant’s words. If the Lord has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the Lord! They have now driven me from my share in the Lord’s inheritance and have said, ‘Go, serve other gods.’” The Lord has incited Saul before, remember when an evil spirit used to come to Saul, and David would play the harp to appease him (1 Sam 16)? In 2 Sam 16, a man named Shimei, who was from Saul’s clan, came out to curse David. Abishai wanted to cut off his head, but David said, “Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today. (2 Sam 16:11-12)” Sometimes the Lord may discipline us, he may be teaching us to depend on him, or to repent, or to look to him, and sometimes the refining of our character comes from trials and tribulation, but we can learn from David that if it is from the Lord, in the end we will be repaid with good.

On the other hand, if Saul’s anger was started from men, David called a curse on them – because they have forced David to leave Israel, to live in a foreign land, to be outside of the Lord’s inheritance. There he had to live with other people who had other gods, and he would be tempted to worship them too. In effect, those who incited Saul against David caused a child of God to go and serve other gods. I’m reminded of Jesus who said in Mark 9:42, “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” It is a serious sin, when by our bad deeds, we cause other believers to sin.

Finally, in verse 20, David tells Saul that he is looking for a flea, as one hunts a partridge in the mountains. People go through great efforts to get rid of little bugs like fleas. When people have lice, they have to shampoo their whole head or cut all their hair to get rid of them – it’s a tremendous effort for such a little bug, and that’s what David was trying to convey to Saul. He was spending so much time and resources to get rid of a tiny little evasive creature. Saul then responds in v.21, he says, “I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly.” As we know, from the last time, Saul’s words might sound good, but they can be empty. David could not simply just trust Saul immediately – it needed to prove itself over time. There is a saying, it takes months to build a relationship, and only minutes to ruin it. With us, the sign of repentance proves itself over time, as the years pass on, we look back, and there is a difference between the life we once lived, and the life we live today.

So then, keeping his distance, David said, “Here is the king’s spear, let one of your young men come over and get it.” The spear was returned to Saul, symbolizing, at least for the time being, Saul is still the king. Let’s read v.23-24 together: “The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed. As surely as I valued your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble.” David

here, declares a promise of the Lord. The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. As proof, Saul was delivered into David's hands, but David was righteous to spare his life. David did not ask for any reward from Saul, but prayed that everything he received – he would receive from the Lord. Just as he valued Saul's life, he prayed God would value his life and deliver him from all trouble.

As we know today, God kept his promise to David. David spoke constantly about deliverance, even in this chapter, v.24 – he prays to be delivered. Deliverance is mentioned frequently in the Psalms that he wrote. God delivered him from Goliath. He delivered him from Saul once, and today, he delivered him from Saul again. And ultimately, he delivered David from all trouble forever through Jesus Christ, the son of God, the son of David. Like Saul, we are slaves to sin – we were born into sin, and condemned for our sin: but through Jesus Christ, who became sin to be punished to death for sin, for us, we received deliverance from sin, freed from its grip and tyranny. Our reward is eternal life – he saved us.

It is through Christ, and his death, that we receive a righteousness from God, credited to our account based on what Jesus has done. The work has already been done, by God. The price has already been paid, by God. Let us not live like God had not finished his work. Let us not live like God did not already pay the price. Instead, let us repent of our unbelief, and thank God for what he has done. Let us repent, and praise God for what he has done. Then, we will receive righteousness. Then, he will increase our faithfulness, and as David said – the Lord rewards everyone for righteousness and faithfulness. This reward is deliverance from all trouble – eternal life in heaven, and in this life, freedom from the power of sin, in the next life, freedom from the existence of sin.

Now let's look at v.25: "Then Saul said to David, 'May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph.'" So David went on his way, and Saul returned home."

Part III: David's Relapse into Sin

Look again at your bibles, to ch.27 v.1 "But David thought to himself, 'One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand.'" Not very long after declaring the promise of God's reward to the faithful, David fell into the fear of being destroyed by Saul, and indicates a doubt in the promise of God. Despite being anointed by Samuel, delivered from Saul twice, despite hearing Jonathan testify that he would be king, Saul testifying he would be king, and Abigail saying the Lord will make a lasting dynasty for him, he felt that if he were to remain in Israel, Saul would destroy him. Granted, David was under a lot of pressure. He still could not trust Saul. Look at v.4 "When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him." For some reason, the Bible puts these two thoughts together, and it seems like cause and effect. David fled to Gath, in Philistine territory, so he was no longer a threat or challenge to Saul's throne, and Saul stopped searching. You might conclude then, if David was probably still in Israel, Saul might have tried to come again.

David also had his wives with him, and his 600 men had their families with them too, and as a good shepherd he would have felt responsible for everyone's safety. And from v.19 in the last chapter, he felt that men have driven him out of Israel, into the land of foreign gods. But in all this we don't see any indication that David inquired of the Lord. He did not consult the priest Abiathar or the ephod, but came to his own judgment: that the best thing he could do is escape to the land of the Philistines, who were Israel's enemies, and also enemies of God. Ultimately, his sin was that he turned and depended on his own abilities and skill instead of on the Lord.

Sometimes this seems to happen to us, doesn't it. We think we've conquered a sin, we feel spiritually high, but the next day, or the next few days, we commit the same sin we thought we had overcome. It is not uncommon for us to relapse into sin, to backslide – but we should not give up here, we should not become fatalistic about this. The inclusion of David's relapse into sin is not meant for us to justify, defend or imitate, but for us to learn what not to do. The Bible does not show favoritism towards its heroes, but gives us the truth – both good and bad. From these incidents we can learn the frailty or weakness of man, and the power of sin, which serve to magnify the necessity and importance of this fact: that Jesus Christ alone is our savior and deliverer.

First we see that despite David's sin, God's plans continued to be accomplished. The first request of David was to live away from the royal city, in a country town. This was a humble request. Knowing what happened when he lived with Saul, he may have done this to prevent a rivalry to develop between two powers, and he was the one to step down and move away. And when he asked for a place to go, he was not choosy – he was willing to go to any place. Perhaps inspired by God, Achish gave him Ziklag, a city which was allotted to the Israelite tribe of Simeon (Josh 19:5), but at the time under Philistine control. This move restored the city back to their rightful owners, the Israelites, though no longer under Simeon, but under the Israelite tribe of Judah.

Also we see that David went out to raid the Geshurites, Girzites and Amalekites, from ancient times these people were enemies of God. In Deut 25:17-19, we get a history into the Amalekites: when the Israelites were escaping Egypt, tired and weary, they came to kill those who were tired and lagging behind. When the Israelites finally settled, God decreed that they “shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deut 25:29)” So even when David settled away from home, he did not remain idle.

Second, because of his sin, David was forced to live a double-life, and maintain a practice of lies and deception. He created a false sense of security for Achish, lying to him and telling him he was out to attack his own Israelite brothers. Achish believed him and put his complete trust in David, thinking that now, David could never return home. From the outside, it looks like David is successful at living by his own skills, but inwardly, we can see that he will corrode if it lasts too long.

Sin is not sustainable, and eventually, it will burst and be revealed. If Achish ever found out what a terror David could be, he could wipe out David, his family and all those with him. Achish could ask him to do something against his conscience, like fight against his own brothers. He had to live in a constant state of fear and lies. It is through this, we learn that we cannot justify or condone David's sin, or his lying. If we, professing Christians, live by our own strength, our own will, without God, we will find that we are living a double life that we cannot maintain.

So what shall we do? Should we become fatalistic because even the best of men fall into sin? Absolutely not! Should we run away, off into a foreign land or some remote location to be away from sin? Again, we must not! Instead, we must lift our eyes to Jesus every time we are tempted, every time we are bitten by the snake or caught up in the storm. That's how we can break out of the cycle of sin, and break out of the cycle of backsliding. And so what do I mean when I say turn to Jesus? I cannot prescribe that if you pray for 1 hour every day, or memorize 25 verses, or have 5 one-to-one bible study sessions that you will be saved. These things are not the cause of salvation, but the after-effects of salvation. I cannot prescribe any rituals or superficial advances in spirituality that will deliver you, it's not about becoming self-righteous like the Pharisees were, but what I can say is this. When I say turn to Jesus, I mean that you enter into a relationship with him, and go deeper and deeper into your relationship to him. Words like devotion, communion, and unity with the Spirit come to mind. Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." When in a storm or temptation, bring the eyes of your mind to the Lord.

In closing, there is one more issue I would like to address, that is relevant for today. This is a sin that, when I was in college, most college students took lightly. This is a sin that is one of the hardest to overcome, this is one of those sins that people repeat and constantly relapse into – and that is the sin of indulging in pornography. It was a sin I repeated and relapsed into for many years until I put my life in the Lord's hands, and have not indulged in it once since then, not even once since after I was married. But the temptation is strong, the "Ziphites" are relentless. In all forms of media – internet, TV, radio, magazines, the temptation is persistent. On the sidebar of the Facebook ads, on the Youtube video previews, sometimes in search engine results, in Superbowl commercials and movies – the enemy is always trying to entice us to be drawn into our lusts. Know that pornography is a great evil before the Lord, and it has destroyed countless families and minds.

So how can we break out of such a pattern, if we are caught up in it? Notice in 27:1 where David's sin began: "But David *thought* to himself." The battle field of sin is in our minds and our hearts, and that's where the Lord needs to be positioned. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." They call the word of the God the sword of the Lord, and with the Lord, our sins can be overcome. Be faithful to the Lord in heart and mind, cultivate a relationship with him, and he will reward you. Today we saw a repeat of Saul's sin, and the relapse into David's sin, but it is the reward of the Lord for the righteous and faithful that can help us break out of our patterns of sin and backsliding. To be righteous and faithful is to develop, deepen and grow your relationship with the Lord, just as you would with your spouse, or your friends. God has done the work, he has paid the price, and only by faith can we receive the reward, which is deliverance and salvation in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.