

Title: Does Good Really Triumph Over Evil?
Text: 1 Samuel 24
Theme: Overcoming evil with good
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmtnt: You destroy your enemy by making him your friend

This chapter will take two sermons. The first one (vs. 1-7) is an illustration of the words of Christ. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."* The second one (8-22) is an illustration of the words of Christ. *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*

Read Text:

A couple of weeks ago, Cathi and I went to Alaska to visit our daughter. We spent our time camping and hiking. The hikes we went on were, for the most part, pretty intense. We crossed a suspension bridge over a fast-moving river, hiked a trail freshly traveled by moose and inhabited by mosquitoes that were the size of small birds. On one glacier, we hiked a mountain to the ridgeline several thousand feet in elevation only to encounter winds that were between 70-80 m.p.h. I had to put large rocks in Cathi's jacket pockets so she wouldn't get blown off the mountain. I'm kidding about that, but I seriously had to hold on to her. It was pretty intense. But, why? Why would we do this? The view was worth it. You can't get the reward of the view without enduring the challenge of the hike.

In this section of 1 Samuel, there is a lot of emphasis upon geography and topography. Unless you actually know what the terrain is like, these stories will not mean as much to you as they should. The events in the last half of chapter 23 took place in the wilderness of Ziph and the wilderness of Maon. The end of chapter 23 says that David then went to the strongholds of Engedi which is referred to as the wilderness of Engedi in 24.1. This is a season of David's life where he spends a lot of time in the wilderness. I don't want to skip over that. In fact, I want to press that home for a minute and help you see a pattern that is in Scripture.

Before Moses was called to lead Israel, he spent 40 years in the wilderness. He learned to endure hardship before he was called to lead people through hardship. Before Israel went into the promised land, she went through 40 years of wilderness wandering. Before Christ launched his public ministry, he spent 40 days in the wilderness being tested and tempted and tried. Before Paul was launched into a prominent role in the life of the early church, he spent three years by himself in Arabia, then 11 years faithfully serving his local church in Antioch then his church-planting ministry began. There is not shortcut to success. There is no road around the wilderness of suffering. This is needful for us. Our idea of suffering is giving up dessert for a few days because we can't snap the button on our designer jeans anymore and be able to breathe. God took Moses, Israel, and David through the wilderness and because of that he took Jesus through it as well. If our good God took Moses, Israel, David, Paul and Jesus through the wilderness, we should expect our good God to take us through as well. Before we zero in on the text, I want to point out three things about the wilderness because there is no meaningless suffering.

The Wilderness is a place, a process and a pattern. A few of the places in the OT have been lost to time, but not Engedi. Engedi is an oasis in the midst of a desolate area. It is described as one of the most beautiful places in Israel. It is a little pocket of life in the midst of a dreary and desolate region. The waterfall and pool have been a source of water to the wildlife and travelers in that region for thousands of years. V.2 speaks of the Wildgoats Rocks as a specific location because it was and still is. Wild goats still inhabit that region today, like they did then. The area is called a stronghold because the rocky terrain forms walls and caves that provide protection. This wilderness is an actual place. I point that out because here in the west, we tend to be arrogant and ignorant. You hear people just flippantly throw out the accusation that the Bible is a bunch of made-up stories. Have you ever gone to Israel? These are known locations. The history of the Bible is the history of the land.

But the wilderness is also a process that God takes his children through and in particular his leaders. David is in the wilderness because Saul is seeking his life and wants to kill him. David is learning humility and struggle. The wilderness is spiritual bootcamp that prepares us for the difficulties of life and it is life. We live in a sin-cursed world. Life on this side of Eden and this side of glory is rugged. In order for Moses, David, Paul and Jesus to fully identify with the people they lead, they went through the wilderness. The wilderness is therefore a process that teaches us endurance, perseverance, reliance upon God and empathy.

Last Sunday, I watched a man, whose wife had died a few years ago, greet and embrace a man whose wife died a few months ago. The shared wilderness knit their hearts. This wilderness was hard on David as evidenced in the songs he wrote. But it was also a gift to David because it enabled him to understand his people and would help him be a better king when that day came. If you are going to influence people, you have to understand them. In order to understand them, you have to know their wilderness journey.

But the wilderness is also a pattern. Jesus endured the cross for the glory. Followers of Jesus should expect seasons of wilderness as part of our preparation for glory since we are not home yet. In fact, the wilderness is our opportunity to make much of Jesus. The wilderness helps

Do you remember the accusation that Satan leveled against Job, before God? Job had it made. He had a great family, a great job, a great estate and enjoyed great esteem. He loved God and God had clearly blessed his life. But Satan does not understand love. He accused Job of trusting God only because God gave him stuff. God knew better. So, God permitted Job to go deep into the wilderness where he lost almost everything, except his faith. Job learned something and so did we. There is a trust in God that is rooted in who God is, not just the gifts that God gives. This is the trust that gives us mercy in the wilderness. If you have never suffered then you may wonder if you love God or if you only love God because he gives you things. The wilderness is a gift that we cannot refuse that helps us discover a gift that can never be taken away. This is not our best life now. The wilderness does not last, heaven does. The view is worth the hike.

But there is more to the wilderness than the wilderness. God is with his people in the wilderness. And for David, God provides David with protection in the wilderness even as God tests David. God gives David a perfect opportunity to get even and return evil for evil. This is how his men interpreted this event. Beloved, let's take this to heart. The opportunities that our world sees for us to carry out justice, get even, and stand up for ourselves, are usually opportunities for us to show mercy.

1. **God gives you opportunities to show mercy.** (1-7)

What happened to the battle with the Philistines? We don't know. We are led to believe that Saul was successful. Saul does not realize that the Philistines were God's grace to him, to stop him from pursuing his destructive anger. Sadly, he does not see it that way. But, shortly after Saul deals with them, his spy network alerts him to the fact that David has been spotted in the wilderness of Engedi. Saul then chooses 3,000 (handpicked warriors) to pursue David and finish him off. Engedi is on the border of the Dead Sea. While Engedi itself is an oasis, the region is harsh and it is easy to see why Saul would be tempted to pursue David there because there are plenty of natural barriers that could be used to trap David. What Saul would never imagine is that the trap he thought he would set for David would actually be set for him.

Saul has to go to the bathroom. No one wants to see this. No one wants to see their king in this position and no king wants to be seen in this position. But even kings are human and there are certain functions of the body that remind every person that no matter what they may portend to be, they are, at the end of the day, another human being. Even kings are subject to the laws of nature have to go to the bathroom. Saul seeks some privacy, so he goes into a cave "to relieve himself." The Hebrew literally reads, "cover his feet" which is not only a polite expression, but it emphasizes the fact that when your clothing is wrapped around your ankles, you can't run very well. The Bible does not talk about these sorts of things much, unless, like it is here is an essential part of the story. And in this case, this incredibly arrogant man is disrobing in a cave. The hunter makes himself the prey.

This is unbelievable! The proud and terrifying Saul is nothing more than an exposed and very vulnerable human being humiliating himself before his enemies and doesn't even know it. There are a lot of caves in this area and Saul happens to choose a cavernous one. David's men cannot believe their fortune. This is clearly an opportunity from God. When else would Saul's body guard and armor bearer be away from him than in a moment like this? David and his men were sitting in the innermost part of the cave. Saul's men were patiently waiting outside the cave wondering how David and his men had disappeared into thin air. The drama was intense. No one dared to move. What if someone sneezed? What if something crawled on you? What if something bit you? You are trapped. But Saul is by himself and David's men see this as a God-given opportunity. Here it is David. This is the moment that God is fulfilling his promise to deliver your enemy into your hand. It sounds Darth Vader-ish, doesn't it? "Fulfill your destiny."

You know what? The opportunity was from God. God sovereignly put David and Saul together in that situation, in part to test David and see what was in his heart. What would he do when he

had the opportunity to even the score? Would he listen to his men, or would he lead them? David had an opportunity from God to get even, but the same opportunity to get even was an opportunity to be merciful and show restraint.

1,000 years later, the son of David would be in the wilderness and Satan would show him the kingdoms of the world and would offer to Christ what was rightfully his, but on this condition. Worship me. You can have what you want. You can have what is yours right now. The temptation was real and it was powerful. Adam knew what it was like to listen to those around him instead of doing the right thing. What would David do? He arose. David did not send someone else. He himself stealthily snuck up on Saul. Saul was naked and vulnerable, and David may never have another opportunity like this. Let's hold it right there for a minute.

Yes, David was anointed by Samuel to be king and he was promised that he would be king. But Saul had been anointed by Samuel to be king first. And Saul was still the king. Was it David's job to eliminate Saul? How can David replace Saul without blood on his hands? How can David's house and line replace Saul's house and line without killing Saul's line and eliminating a perpetual threat to David's posterity? But, if you kill the king and his line, what is to stop someone else from killing you and your line? Why wouldn't someone else attempt to do the same thing to his line? Oh, how quickly the very power you wield to topple the one above you is used to topple you. All of that political intrigue and reality is in play. But David is not driven by nor held hostage by all of the politics. David's compass is rooted in a fundamental love, trust and submission to God. David realizes that he cannot kill Saul. He cannot kill the one that God anointed. God is removing Saul from the throne, but he hasn't done it yet and it is not up to David to carry out what God himself would do. I don't know at what point did David determined not to kill Saul. But in a preview of what Christ would do, David chose to do the right thing and clearly the unpopular thing. He refused to kill the one his men called, his enemy.

Just because David was Saul's enemy did not automatically make Saul, David's enemy. Chad pointed out last week that Jonathan was a tremendous gift from God to David. I think that has bearing on this account. Back in chapter 20 Jonathan is coming to grips with the fact that his father is hellbent on killing David and that David has been selected by God to be the next king. Jonathan says this. *"If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."* (vs. 14-15) Instead of taking matters into his own hands, David trusted God. Instead of killing Saul, he used his sword to cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Don't rush past that detail? Can you imagine how sharp David's sword had to be in order to cut off a corner of a robe without being noticed?

Something happened to David. Look at the last part of verse 4. "Then David arose..." We all assume that he is about to kill Saul. But something happens. Instead of killing Saul, he only cuts a corner of his robe off and then David is deeply grieved that he even did that! What happened? What happened to David? Instead of seeing himself as the victim and Saul as his enemy, I think David saw Saul for what he was; A sad, mortal man, who is destroying his own life and needs to be rescued.

David's refusal to kill Saul did sit well with his men. The word translated "persuaded" speaks of an intense situation where David has to demand that his men stand down. They are understandably beside themselves. Here is the chance to finish this once and for all and our leader has failed us, when in reality, he has saved them. Not only has David failed to kill Saul, but now David is devastated by the fact that he just cut a corner of Saul's robe.

Are you stinking kidding me?! This guy has no qualms about killing 85 priests in Nob and would kill you and everyone else if given the opportunity and you are feeling like you sinned because you cut a corner of his robe? I don't get you man. David sees what his men don't. The king's robe is one of his signs of authority. After Saul tore part of Samuel's robe, Samuel told Saul, "*The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours...*" Now, here is David holding a piece of the royal robe that he has cut. David's heart struck him because he realizes the symbolism. He has taken a portion of the robe that does not belong to him yet and that is wrong. The throne is not his to take; it is his to receive only when God ordains it. There are going to be many times in this world when you have good reasons not to respect your leader, but you will never have a good reason not to respect the God who put that leader in that place. Saul's moral authority was all gone, but God had not removed him from the throne and until God did, it was not David's to take, not even a corner of the robe. David is so convinced of this that he stands between his men and Saul and refuses to let them kill Saul. Saul, had no idea that all of this was going on. He rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

Naturally, we want to identify with David in this story. And I think that there are ways in which we should, but, before we do that, we need to consider a few other points in our conclusion.

Am I like Saul? Saul believed that he had been sinned against and was the victim of David. Saul played that victim card so much, that he was blind to how his own lust for power and respect had unleashed murder in his heart.

- Is it possible that you abuse the grace of God as justification for your selfishness and are blind to the predicament your soul is really in?

Am I like David's men? Do you have a list of enemies whom you would or have already, in the name of justice, truth, conviction, standing your ground, cut out of your life? Do you long for vindication that punches the opposition in the teeth and proves that you just aren't going to take it anymore?

Some of you have family members who have cheated you out of an inheritance. That is hard to bear. Some of you have family members who have at a wedding or a funeral done things that really cut deep. There may be a time when the tables are turned. There isn't anything supernatural about getting even. Yup, what goes around comes around. It's the NASCAR rule, you had it coming. The truth is, we are very mortal, very human. Our selfishness is embarrassing and God would be perfectly just to give us what we deserve.

Why is David the man after God's heart? He had the chance to get even, instead he offered mercy. That is what God is like. God would be perfectly fair and just to get even with us and give us what we deserve for our sin. Instead, God sent Christ who died as the payment for our sin. The greatest injustice that ever occurred was the death of Christ. The greatest act of mercy that ever occurred was the death of Christ. Does good really triumph over evil? The cross and the empty tomb prove it to be.

2. **Justice belongs to God.** (8-15)
3. **Grace dismantles thrones.** (16-22)