

5/21/23 - 1 Sam. 23 - "Seeing the Hand of God"

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Date: 21 May 2023

Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. I'm going to read today's verses from 1 Samuel chapter 23. Now they told David, Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Kila and are robbing the threshing floors. Therefore David inquired of the Lord, Shall I go and attack these Philistines?

And the Lord said to David, Go and attack the Philistines and save Kila. But David's men said to him, Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more than if we go to Kila against the armies of the Philistines? Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, Arise, go down to Kila, for I will give the Philistines into your hand. And David and his men went to Kila and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Kila. When Abithar, the son of Amalekek, had fled to David, to Kila, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. Now it was told to Saul that David had come to Kila. And Saul said, God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering in a town that has gates and bars. And Saul summoned all the people to war to go down to Kila to besiege David and his men. David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abithar, the priest, bring the ephod here. Then David said, O Lord, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Kila to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Kila surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down as your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please tell your servant. And the Lord said, he will come down. Then David said, Will the men of Kila surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?

And the Lord said, They will surrender you. Then David and his men, who were about 600, arose and departed from Kila. And they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Kila, he gave up the expedition. And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh and strengthened his hand in God.

And he said to him, Do not fear, for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul, my father, also knows this. And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds of Horesh, on the hill of Hekila, which is south of Jeshimon? Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desires to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand. And Saul said, May you be blessed by the Lord, for you have had compassion on me. Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for he has told me that he is very cunning. See, therefore, and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with the sure information.

Now I will go to you, and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah. And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness at Moan, in the Arabah, in the south of Jeshimon. And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock, and lived in the wilderness of Maan. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maan. Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David, and his men to capture him, a messenger came to Saul, saying, hurry and come, for the Philistines have made raid against the land. So Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines. Therefore, that place was called the Rock of Escape. And David went up from there, and lived in the strongholds of the Jedi.

[5 : 04] That is God's Word. It's great to be gathered again. Welcome to Steel Valley Church. It is a remarkable time in our service, in our corporate gathering, where we do come to God's Word and allow God to speak to us today. And this is a wonderful message, and God does have a Word for us today. And we will hear that message. I want us to think that about seeing the hand of God in this passage. Specifically, seeing the hand of God being very difficult to see clearly at various times in life. I believe that it is very difficult to see the hand of God at various times in our life. I mean, that the essence of faith, what makes faith, is because it means that we don't always have tangible evidence. We don't always have these cases where we have empirical evidence or scientific proof of what we know to be true. And it makes faith very, very challenging, especially when we're looking for the hand of God at work. For some, we live our lives by the clever Burger King slogan, have it your way. And if we are honest, many of us conduct our lives actually living out that slogan.

That's a tough reality to accept. As if our hand is supreme in working out through our lives.

And whether we mess up or screw up, God will work out the details. He's sovereign. And our hand is supreme. But you want to know something true, church? God's hand is always working. Always working. And if our hand serves in any role, it is under the complete guidance and the direction of our sovereign Lord's hand.

And just as this passage entails today, life gets messy. This is a messy passage. And I believe the narrator of this passage in 1 Samuel is forcing us to see the sovereign hand of God.

guiding not only salvation. This is the tricky part, but also guiding suffering. And for that, we have a sermon titled, Seeing the Hand of God. And we're going to break this passage up into three different sections. There's one main point, but I want to pray before we dive in. Let's pray.

[8 : 12] Father, we come to you today acknowledging your sovereignty over all things in this life. And as we come under your authoritative word, we sovereignly are by no means equipped to ever have say over what things mean. We look upon your word to speak to us in a sovereign way so that we, in our, quote, sovereignty that we think we have, we can submit that to you. May we all submit our hearts and our minds and our lives to you this morning on account of the authority of your word. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. The first section, like I said, we're going to break it up into three sections. And they're going to sort of capture the theme within what we're trying to see going on. And so the first section is seeing the saving hand of God. Seeing the saving hand of God.

Amen. And verse 1, it takes us sort of back in time. We were little time travelers as an audience reading through this because Abiathar doesn't get to David like he did last week in the passage until verse 6. So we're taken into this scene that took place a little bit earlier. Whenever that happened, we don't know. But this scene takes us back before Abiathar has come.

As the Philistines are doing what they do best in Kilah, they are ravaging the city of God, and they are causing trouble and oppression. And the contrast that I want you to see is if indeed these scenes are playing out, this scene is playing out a little bit earlier. We know that earlier, Saul received some news from Doeg that Ahimelech has betrayed you. And his response was picking up his sword and yielding judgment and execution. But if this scene is playing out, I would imagine that the narrator is kind of making us wonder if maybe at the same exact time you saw these two kings, Saul and David, one chosen by God, one chosen by man, responding in a separate way of receiving news.

David receives news from God that Kilah was being attacked. How does he respond? He doesn't pick up his sword. He responds in prayer. You see, prayer is often vitally essential in the lives of God's people and so often disregarded in the name of efficiency, in the name of urgency.

[11 : 21] David's decision-making process did not inquire of the Lord on the way to Kilah. He wasn't like, well, you know, just to save time, we'll inquire of the Lord as we pack up our bags, but they're suffering right now as we speak. We got to get going and moving. We'll pray on the way. It'll be an efficient prayer. No. David stops and prays before he picks up his sword, unlike Saul. It was not just an option. It was essential in his life. Why is it that even I make prayer an option at times?

Me? It's a dangerous game to play, and better we all be reminded of the essential role that it plays for us in our lives today. David inquired not only once in verse 2, but twice in verse 4.

And this should stand out as odd considering the urgency of the situation that was near to David. Saul is chasing him. There's no time to sit around and pray. Not only that, over in Kilah, there's people suffering. What are you doing, David? And David's men seem to have some reservation in verse 3 for the whole matter. I mean, they basically tell David, we're already in this dangerous situation. We're about to die from a madman who just executed 85 priests of God, and you want to add more to our plate and go deal with Kilah. How about in the name of sovereignty, let God work that out. We'll protect ourselves. Wouldn't that seem reckless, being an already dangerous situation, to add on another dangerous situation?

Don't you think that might be reckless in our eyes? But God's response that second time, after David gets a second opinion, just in case here, you see, God seems a little bit more emphatic with his wording. He says, I am giving the Philistines into your hand.

You see the hand of God. This is quite a command from the Lord, which would double a dangerous situation. And if we want to be honest, church, if we were there, we would probably be questioning David as well.

[14 : 02] Are you sure, David? You want to, our plate is pretty full. You want to add more to our plate and deal with their problem? We got our problems, and you want more problems.

If this is true, and you do agree with me, I got to ask you a question. Who gave us the right to dictate what is too much for us to handle? There's a relationship between God's commands and God's promises. If you fail to see the promises of God, His commands seem burdensome.

If you are able to see God's promises in clear view, His commands are a delight. And so, God's commands may, in fact, seem at times very burdensome, very difficult, and quite honestly, terrifying. Some countries, you want to ask how it's like to be a Christian in their nation? They'll say it's pretty scary every single day. However, the only reason His commands ever have the power to be overwhelming in our lives is because His promises have then become underwhelming. We forget the promises of God, and therefore His commands seem burdensome.

In other words, if God's commands cause us to take more on than we believe that we can handle as human beings, good. It's God's commands. Because it was never up to us to dictate what we can and cannot handle.

God knows. Too much for your plate? Well, God will give you a little plate. He'll upgrade your little little dessert tray plate, little six-inch round, and give you a 12-inch. You pray for a bigger plate for the strength to endure. Through the sovereign effort of God working through David's men, He was able to bring relief to Kyla and renewed faith and apprehension to His wandering men around. If it was too much to take on, it indeed was not. And God worked mightily. His hand worked mightily. Church, don't ever believe for a second that God will not give you more than you can handle. He will. Because our capacity is never dictated upon our own strength, but upon His. Those who live in comfort of their own dictated capacities are most prone to God are most prone to being unfaithful to God. And that's the trouble that we find ourselves in constantly. And for that, we must be in check even this morning and pray first before we pick up the sword. The second section that we see playing out is the strengthening hand of God.

[17 : 07] I want you to see not only the, how did I phrase it, the saving hand of God, because God will give as a gift into our hands when He desires. He will not only do that, He'll strengthen. And in verse 6, we're taken back into the present time. Our time traveling is done. We're brought back into the present. Abiathar was fleeing. He met up with David. And Saul was made aware in verse 7 and 8 of where David's location is.

And in verse 9, David once again inquires of the Lord. And this time, he has an ephod in his hand. And I don't believe that it's prescribing us little prayer helpers, you know, to hold and things like that. I believe that the author is basically making it, making the desperation of a situation that's critical, critical, known to us. He was clinging to the ephod, a symbolic representation that a priest had in his possession, inquiring of the Lord with that ephod. Can you see him so desperate in his situation?

He's inquiring of the Lord. Will Saul come? Will Saul come? And yes, the Lord says, Saul is going to come. Some bad news. And not only that, more bad news. The people that he just burdened himself more to save are going to turn around and thank him by betrayal.

Kyla will sell him out to Saul. How about that for a thank you? But what a great reminder that what the world might perceive as a waste of energy and a waste of time is worth it when it's done in obedience to God. When you do things unto God, it doesn't matter what you're doing with your time as long as it's in obedience to God. Sometimes we've run the food pantry and maybe five people might show up. Never a waste of time because we're being obedient to God. Do you understand that?

That's a great reminder. And David escapes in verse 13. He escapes once again and runs for the hills, betrayed by the ones he came to save. Nowhere to lay his head. He has fearful followers around that are questioning every step of the way. But David was committed to the safety of his people and the defeat of God's enemies and most of all, doing the will of the Lord. Don't you see what's occurring here regarding the hand of God? David has been destined to encounter a season where not only is God overwhelming him with duty? In verse 1 to verse 5, it's not just overwhelming David and his men, but he's also leading David down a path of being betrayed.

[20 : 28] God is leading him down a path of instability. He's leading David down a path of fear. In other words, God sovereignly saw fit to make David suffer.

I imagine that Jesus probably knew this story of David better than all of us combined. And it should not be a surprise why Luke in Luke 24 writes that, thus it is written that the Christ must suffer. In other words, God's salvation flowed on the river of suffering. Jesus Christ had nowhere to lay his head. His followers were fearful all the step of the way, even till the point of his capture. Jesus was betrayed by the ones that he came to save, was he not? But Jesus Christ was committed to the salvation of his people.

In that, God brings meaning in suffering. And this is good news to a Christian. It's good news to a non-Christian. Because this is an opportunity to live, whether a mountaintop or a valley low, in complete meaning and understanding. Trusting something outside of your circumstance. So that if you're not in Christ, you can stop trusting yourself and your own labor and your own philosophy that makes sense in your mind and helps you sleep at night. There is nothing that will help you sleep better at night than knowing that Christ has paid it all and to all to him you owe.

That is what the gospel does to us. We see that. What a glorious Savior we have in Jesus Christ, the Son of David. And not only then does sovereignty give hardship to people in Kyla, but God sovereignly allows his people to endure suffering with betrayal.

All that to say, life is not going to be roses. A nice little picture-perfect cinemark movie of living happily ever after. No. I think the Christian realm of cinema needs to come come out with a tale where it doesn't end up well in the end. At least in this life.

[23 : 16] But I think that point pushes us forward to see the good news. Because if God allows his people, David specifically, to suffer and his salvation is brought upon the river of suffering, we see something that God does with his hand here at this moment in verse 15. God will sovereignly strengthen his people to carry out his mission and his will. God will come in and give you the strength you need in times of suffering.

In verse 15 and 16, we find David in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And it's interesting that Saul can never find David, but God allowed Jonathan to be guided right to his location. Isn't that fancy?

That's been my phrase lately. I'm going to keep rolling with it. Fancy. But unbeknownst to David, this meeting with Jonathan would be the last meeting he ever has with Jonathan on planet Earth.

How is David strengthened? Through the words of Jonathan? What does he do in this passage?

Look, Jonathan reoriented his mind off David's peril onto God's promise. Do you see that?

[24 : 57] Do not fear, for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul, my father, also knows this.

David was strengthened by a reorientation of his situation. In other words, David had a hard time seeing the promise of God unfolding in suffering. He had a problem seeing God's hand.

And we may struggle in the same instance, too. Why does God allow seasons of hardship, of being overwhelmed in life? We don't like it. It doesn't help us at all. It definitely doesn't help my blood pressure when God overwhelms us, right? Am I the only one? Or seasons of suffering, of just accomplishing things only to find people betraying you off of your own acts of love and service towards them and helping other people, and they just turn around and betray you.

But struggling with such realities is guaranteed when we forget the fact that God is ultimately working out His promises by this way of trial. We see His hands.

You see, God is not calling Himself to spoiled people. He's calling Himself to humbled people. God doesn't call spoiled people who get everything that they want or declare.

[26 : 36] God is calling humble people who will submit themselves under the mighty hand of God in salvation or even suffering. How many of us have a fleshly desire to live out the Burger King version of faith, of hold the pickles, hold the lettuce, have it your way? Trademark.

Just so I don't get a copyright strike. Church, to have it our way is to live lies void of God. To have it our way. This is the biggest lie of the prosperity gospel of declaring and receiving to sowing and reaping. It's the biggest lie of it because at the root of the prosperity gospel is the cry of our fleshly hearts and our fleshly desires to have things our way. And God's way is never comfortable. But strangely enough, His way will bring us comfort even if it's tumultuous. That's the good news. The third section, as we kind of wrap things up, seeing the protective hand of God.

Not only the saving hand of God, not only the strengthening hand of God, but now the protective hand of God. It gets a little bit tense in the narrative. I love the play out of these scenes, at least in the image in my mind.

In verse 19, there's another round of betrayal for David. We meet the Ziphites. They now sell David out. And their intelligence, I would imagine they had some sort of mole in their midst.

Their intelligence was quite specific. They didn't only just know a general location. Well, David's over in that area. They knew the actual hill that David was on.

[28 : 40] And not only that, they knew which side of the hill David and his men were on. Pretty specific intelligence there. And in verse 21, Saul has finally, finally found somebody who cares about poor Saul.

Poor paranoid Saul. He praises the Ziphites. My men are useless. You have served your king well. Right? And just to be sure, there's always that moment of doubt with Saul.

He sends some men ahead just to verify the information. Just to be curt and be sure. And in a quick movement in the scene, this chase for David. His exact location on this hill is on.

Saul's thousands versus David's hundreds. And they approach this hill on opposing sides of this mountain, planning their attack. Good military strategy is doing a flank left and a flank right.

I don't know anything, but I played Call of Duty once in my life, and that seemed to work. But you flank on the left side and the right side and encounter, encapsulate the enemy on the one side of the hill.

[29 : 51] And we see the tension drawing in as we're waiting for the axe to fall. This is it. David has nowhere to run. And in this building tension, as we're waiting in verse 27, a message for the king, sire.

Every good Christian drama needs to have British accents, right? A message for the king, sire. It's like that axe is just about to fall. And then perfect timing.

Saul's pursuit of David has created an entire nation to be kingless. His selfish pursuit of David has left this nation completely vulnerable to the Philistines' attack.

And if you're a Philistine, you know you're going to capture that moment. You're never going to let that moment pass you by, right? But you want to understand the protective hand of God.

And this is where it gets a little challenging. Listen. Because to understand God's sovereignty, is telling God's people over in an unprotected nation that they are suffering on behalf of the salvation of God's king.

[31 : 14] It's telling those who could be getting slaughtered and massacred, who are just getting ravaged for their produce and food from the Philistines, telling them that their suffering is all on behalf of getting Saul away from David.

Now that's sovereignty. And that's something hard to grapple with. I did find it surprising that Saul actually considered leaving at this moment.

It's the one moment that he's been waiting for. He's salivating over this moment to trap David. But nonetheless, the narrator does instruct us and inform us. He did.

He left. And this escape was so great by God's sovereign hand of protection that they named this location as the Rock of Escape.

David then found refuge in another stronghold. Church, up until this point, I want to connect all of this.

[32 : 26] Because throughout this passage, as we're seeing the hand of God, as the sermon title indicates, there's a lot of hand mentioning in this passage.

Eight times within this entire passage. In verse 4, God to David, arise, go down to Kilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hands. In verse 6, Abiathar's ephod.

Symbolically, Abiathar had come with the ephod in his hands. Saul's misconception that God has given David into his hands.

In verse 11, David to God, will the men of Kilah surrender me into Saul's hands? The narrator gives a little bit of a hint and we'll expound on that in a moment.

Verse 14, Saul sought David daily, but God didn't give him into his hands. Verse 16, Jonathan to David strengthened, David was strengthened, or strengthened his hand, Jonathan strengthened David's hand in God.

[33 : 34] Verse 17, do not fear for the hand of Saul shall not find you. And verse 20, Ziphites to Saul, our part shall be to surrender David into the king's hand.

And this is where I want us to really see when we're seeing the hand of God. Because whose hand was in control of the entire narrative?

Regardless of the escape, regardless of the salvation, regardless of the suffering, regardless of the details, God's hand was in control of it all.

You see, God's hand is often undetectable at times, especially in suffering. However, the narrative is focusing us to see His hand that reigns sovereign even when the hands of man seem to hold all the power.

David's future would not be determined what He could clearly see, but what He clearly knew. And that made all the difference.

[34 : 48] You see, evil will not overcome those who are within the grasp of God. And the Bible tells us that no one will snatch the church from God's hand.

And for that, we rejoice. I want to close to see this narrative of deliverance in the sovereign hand of God working out in various circumstances and seasons because it's a profound anticipation of how God works salvation through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ helped His disciples see what they couldn't see, helped them to know what they couldn't see. In Matthew 17, Jesus instructed the disciples, the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill Him.

And the disciples responded in great distress. God's promises, whether it being salvation or suffering, are guided by His hand.

And anything given to us by God is what? a gift. A gift.

[36 : 11] So, the control within our grasp can only do so much. The power of the enemy ruining our lives can only do so much.

The help and the comfort from our friends can only do so much. But what can do much is to rest and remain confidently under the hand of God.

And guess what? God will keep us. I found an article and a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson which explains it wonderfully.

It says, quote, the wise man in the storm prays to God not for safety from danger but for deliverance from fear.

it is the storm within which endangers him not the storm around. It's not the storm around it's the storm within that endangers us.

[37 : 18] So, in closing, be overwhelmed church for the service that he demands of us. Be strengthened for the service that he demands of us and trust while carrying out that service as he demands because the phrase is certainly true.

We are his church. Do you see his hand upon us today? Let's pray. one.