

Message #57

I Samuel 23:13-18

Any athlete knows that to be really good at any sport, you need competition and opposition. It is one thing to live a delusional life that pretends something, it is quite another to actually be something.

Years ago, we traveled with my mom and dad to New York and on the way back we stopped in Ann Arbor and drove by the “Big House” where the Michigan Wolverines play football. We noticed that a gate was open so we decided to go into the stadium. There didn’t seem to be anyone there so we decided to go down on the field. It was really something. We actually ran a few yards and just took in the scenery.

Now we could have run around the stadium pretending we were really part of the team, but to actually be part of the team you would need to have opposition. That would be what would determine how skilled we really were. Had that happened, we would never have been on that field.

God knows we need opposition to prune us and purify us. If we want a life that is faithful to God, warfare is a very important part of our development. Opposition is a good teacher. We learn things about God we would never learn or see when we face opposition. For example, one of the things we learn is that God cares for us and provides for us and opposition lets us see that.

This specific passage in I Samuel is what prompted David to write Psalm 54. In that Psalm, David is forced to cry out to God for His deliverance. In this Psalm, David learns that God is his helper and sustainer. David learned that God would deliver him and would destroy his enemies.

What we learn from this Psalm is this:

A FAITHFUL BELIEVER WHO FINDS HIMSELF SURROUNDED BY HOSTILE PEOPLE AND CIRCUMSTANCES NEEDS TO CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HIS HELP AND WHEN HE DOES, HE WILL SEE GOD SOVEREIGNLY HELP HIM AND DELIVER HIM.

It took horrible circumstances to teach David this important lesson. David would not have learned this lesson without terrible warfare and opposition. David was learning that God was protecting him no matter who the enemy or how powerful the enemy or how manipulative the enemy. No enemy could overtake David because God was on David’s side.

This is a very important story in the life of David and as we analyze this portion of it, there are four main narrative parts to it:

NARRATIVE PART #1 – David and his men go wherever they can go. **23:13a**

David and his men were not looking for more fights. If you were David, or if you were travelling with David, who was a man after God's own heart, you did not initially have much security or stability.

By this time, there were about 600 men with David and they left Keilah after they had defeated the Philistines and after they secured the city, they went any place they could go, where they could survive. Obviously they were not getting direct revelatory messages from God telling them exactly where to go. They were somewhat on the run.

Even though it was tough going and not popular, these 600 men remained very faithful to David no matter what he faced. They were with him. They stood with him and fought for him (27:2; 30:9; II Sam. 15:18).

Now this group does not initially look too successful. They look like a bunch of vagabond beggars looking for any handout they could get. This group is right with God and they are on the run. They are not flourishing or thriving. They look anything like a group who is being blessed by God.

But in all reality, they are right where God wanted them to be. This group was forming a bond and they were learning amazing lessons that would make them strong, united and undefeatable.

When you are where God wants you to be, you will find yourself at times feeling like a loser. You may look around you and see people not right with God, who appear to be more talented and more successful. Stay steady. Stay close to God and watch what He will do. God is with you and He will always honor those who are faithful to Him.

NARRATIVE PART #2 – Saul and his men temporarily stop pursuing David. **23:13b**

This is a fascinating piece of information. Once Saul learned that David was no longer in Keilah, he gave up his pursuit, temporarily. People who are not right with God are often fickle and emotional. In fact, they are often quitters. They don't stick to things and they don't see things through. They are emotional wrecks and disasters. They are up and down. They are undependable, unsteady and not stable.

Remember Saul had announced that God had delivered David into his hand (23:7). Obviously Saul has invented this in his own mind because not only did he not capture David, he stopped tracking him.

If they really believed they were doing the will of God and that God has given David to you, why would you stop your pursuit? Here is an interesting observation to make. **People, who are out of fellowship with God and who are more in tune with the demonic, abandon assignments and responsibilities. They talk a good game, but they don't follow through.**

Saul and his men are not close to God. They are not being led of God. We may be certain that the pause in tracking David is not due to the fact they have had some spiritual revival; it is due to their own unsteadiness.

NARRATIVE PART #3 – David and his men stay in the wilderness of Ziph. **23:14-15**

Verse 14 says that “David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds.” We understand this to mean that David was taking advantage of the main wilderness areas that would enable him and his men to hide and rest.

This would include all of the natural fortresses that the wilderness provides. There are high mountain areas that give you a good vantage point; there are woods that are good for hiding and caves that are good for cover.

This wilderness area is located a few miles south east of Hebron. It is a desolate, barren area located between the hill country and the Dead Sea. It is an area filled with many ravines and caves and it is rugged tough country.

There are four facts that we learn here:

Fact #1 - David was not living in some plush environment. **23:14a**

David and his men are right with God and look where they are living or hiding. They are not living in plush mansions, they are not living in elite subdivisions; they are living in a barren wilderness.

When you are right with God, sometimes you will find yourself in a wilderness type of environment. Just because one is not sitting flush, does not mean he/she is not right with God. In fact, it may signal that one is right with God.

Fact #2 - Saul was looking for David every day. **23:14b**

One commentator observed that a true servant of God, who is right with God, is the object of Satanic hatred and opposition every day.

For David, every day was a new challenge to survive. Saul and his forces had one specific goal and that was to find and destroy David. When David walked through any shadowy area, to him it truly was walking in the “shadow of death.”

When you are where God wants you to be, expect daily warfare and be on guard every day. Satan and his forces are out to stop you and devour you. But know this; if you stay faithful to God, these types of circumstances are being used to fit you for greater levels and forms of service. In the end, David will be lifted high.

Fact #3 - God in His sovereignty did not let Saul get his hands on David. **23:14b**

Do not miss this key point. God was sovereignly watching out for David. Satanic people are out to destroy godly people, but they will never be able to destroy a godly, faithful servant of God because God will not let them.

We need to remember this. No matter what we face, God is looking out for us.

Fact #4 - God allowed David to learn of Saul's intent. **23:15**

Now why would God let David find out about this? There are at least two reasons:

(Reason #1) - So David could strategize to keep himself hidden.

In warfare, God does expect us to think and plan and strategize.

(Reason #2) - So David could learn that God was protecting him.

David would have a sense that God was permitting him to know things when he needed to know them so David could learn that God was protecting him.

NARRATIVE PART #4 – Jonathan makes one final encouraging visit to David. **23:16-18**

God knew David needed this encouragement so He sent Jonathan to David. Notice carefully that **verse 16** begins with a conjunction “and.” This connects us to **verse 15**. As soon as David learned that Saul was out to destroy him, God sent Jonathan to David to encourage him.

More than likely, Jonathan was the last person David ever expected to see. Saul's own son showed up to encourage David. Notice carefully that he went to “encourage him in God.”

This encouragement was coming from God. In fact, this is a revelatory encouragement. God must have revealed things to Jonathan because otherwise he would have had no way of knowing them.

God knew David needed this and at just the right time, God did this. This is one of the most encouraging visits that God ever orchestrated. God reveals six encouragements to David:

Encouragement #1 - Do not be afraid. **23:17a**

David is a tough man, but he obviously lived with some fear. If you ask some military hero whether or not they were afraid, those who are honest will say yes, they were.

Encouragement #2 - Saul will not find you. **23:17b**

This does not mean that Saul would not learn of David's location, but what this means is that Saul would never be able to find David and kill David. David would always be kept one step ahead of Saul.

Encouragement #3 - You will be the next king of Israel. **23:17c**

Even though it did not appear to be going too well for David at this point, Jonathan told David you will be the next King of Israel. God was going to make David the next King of Israel. It is so interesting that here is David out hiding in a wilderness and he is being told he is the king. The King should be living in a palace, not some remote wilderness.

Encouragement #4 - I will be right beside you. **23:17d**

Jonathan wanted David to know that he would stay right by David's side. He was going to be a real asset to David in his reign. Had Jonathan not been killed, he would have been David's right hand man.

Encouragement #5 - Saul knows every bit of this. **23:17e**

This is amazing. Jonathan tells David that his father knows every bit of this.

This is important. **People who do things against those who are right with God actually deep down inside know the truth.** They will not stop their evil activity, but they know the truth.

Saul knows that he will not overtake David and that David will be the next king, but that does not stop him from trying to destroy David, even when he knows he will not be able to do it.

Encouragement #6 - Jonathan and David made a covenant. **23:18**

We may recall that Jonathan had made a covenant with David, and here they both make a covenant with each other.

They promised to be loyal to each other and to protect each other.

God knew David needed this and that is why he sent Jonathan.

When you find yourself in a really lonely and dry place, don't be surprised if the person God sends to encourage you is the last person you would have ever picked.

What David was learning is that warfare and opposition was teaching him God cared and that God was protecting him.

PRACTICAL LESSONS:

- 1. If you are faithful, you will face opposition.**
- 2. Remember opposition is used by God to develop us and teach us that God is caring for us.**
- 3. No matter what God's people face, God is protecting His people and preventing things from destroying them.**
- 4. God will send us encouragement when we truly need it.**