

“Providence or Temptation”
1 Samuel 24
(Preached at Trinity, January 14, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Saul's pursuit of David was relentless and David could find no rest. In the final verses of Chapter 23 Saul received information from the Ziphites of David's location. Saul received the information and organized his army to move in on David's position. **1 Samuel 23:25 NAU** - "When Saul and his men went to seek *him*, they told David, and he came down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard *it*, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon."
2. But when all was lost for David and Saul was assured of his victory, suddenly a messenger comes running with news that the Philistines had attacked. Saul had no choice but to withdraw and defend his nation that was coming under attack.
3. As we enter **Chapter 24** we find Saul has returned from fighting the Philistines. We are not told how long he was gone but it is implied the campaign was a success. Success is no sure indication of God's favor. Saul continues his pursuit of David in defiance of God's will. Saul failed to contemplate that it was God's hand protecting David, even using the Philistine army to accomplish His purpose.
4. God governs everything upon this earth. Nothing happens that He has not determined. Providence is the term used to describe God working out everything He has decreed from all eternity. Nothing is left to chance. Every detail of life is happening by God's direct, governing hand – by His providence.
LBC – “God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence . . .”
5. Most of the time, God's Providence seems to work unnoticed—just the daily direction of His creation. But, at times, God's providential acts cause us to stand in amazement as we witness Him directing the affairs of men in unexpected ways.
6. By an act of Providence, Saul entered a cave to “relieve himself,” the very cave where David and his men were hiding. God humiliated Saul before his enemy. It was dark, and Saul was unaware that David and his men were there, hiding in the shadows. But David and his men knew Saul had entered the cave. David had the opportunity to end the pursuit of his enemy once and for all.
1 Samuel 24:4 NAU - "The men of David said to him, "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'"
7. This was a sudden, and unexpected opportunity being presented to David. Surely, this was God's Divine Providence paving the way for David to kill Saul. God had opened an unexpected door. Everything seemed perfect. Not only did this seem like Divine approval, God's Providential gift, but everything else seemed to affirm it.

- A. First, David had the approval of his men—six hundred voices of approval. And they were telling David, "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'"
 - B. Second, it seemed the reasonable course of action. It would solve David's immediate problems. He and his men and their families would finally have rest from the relentless pursuit of Saul. They would enjoy the comfort of peace.
 - C. Third, there was the prospect of receiving the crown promised by God. After all, David was God's anointed. Would not David have relished the thought of trading the damp cave for the royal palace?
8. David had a keen sense of God's Divine direction over his life. He understood that nothing happened apart from God's hand of Providence.
- a. We saw this when David left his parents in Moab.
1 Samuel 22:3 NAU - "And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come *and stay with you until I know what God will do for me.*"
 - b. Now it would seem that God has delivered David's enemy into his hand. This was not an act of blind fate but of the sovereign hand of Providence.
1 Samuel 24:10 NAU - "Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave . . ."
9. And yet, even with all this David demonstrated restraint.
Tonight, I want us to consider the subject of Providence as it relates to knowing God's direction in your life. Are circumstances an adequate indicator of God's direction in your life? I title tonight's sermon, "Providence or Temptation." Should we see God's Providence as proof of God's Divine approval upon our decision or is it merely our flesh seeking approval for what we've already determined to do?
- I. The Bible doesn't teach us to determine our course based only upon our current situation
- A. We have countless windows of opportunities set before us each day
 - 1. How are we to interpret the circumstances and opportunities set before us? Is every opportunity a sign of God's approval upon our action?
 - 2. Circumstances might be taken to mean anything
God's providence can make it appear that He is blessing the wicked and cursing the righteous.
Psalms 73:12 NAU - "Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased *in wealth.*"
 - a. Saul returned after apparently defeating the Philistines. Was this proof of God's Divine pleasure upon Saul's life? During the American Civil War both the North and the South claimed God was on their side.
 - b. David was experiencing the most fiery trial of his life. Was this indication of God's curse upon David's life?
 - 3. We often hear people expressing confidence that God's Providence is an indicator of His Divine approval upon their decision.
 - a. "God opened the door for us to buy a new car."
That so called "door" might be anything from the dealer having the model they were looking for to finding the car on sale.

- b. “I didn’t know if this was the right decision, but God just opened all the doors.”
In other words, they interpreted their *ability* to do something as evidence that God’s approval was upon it.
- c. Sometimes we just hear expressions like, “The Lord led me to do this or that.”
Meaning: Because all of the details went smoothly God's hand must surely have been in it.
4. Christians must be very careful about looking at God’s acts of Providence as clear signs for a particular course of action.
Everything seemed right for David to kill King Saul. How else could David explain Saul entering that particular cave to relieve himself? Even David’s men saw this as the mark of God’s approval.
1 Samuel 24:4 NAU - "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'"
- B. God’s providence is not always designed to give us hints how we should direct our future.
1. Circumstances might be taken to mean anything
I once heard an illustration of a lightning strike upon the steeple of a church. The members saw it as a clear sign from God. But they each had a different idea of what the sign meant.
 - That proves it. God is telling us it’s time to relocate our church
 - God is telling us we were frivolous in buying that new steeple.
 - God is telling us we need more insurance
 - God is warning us of sin in the church
 2. A man receives an opportunity to relocate with a promotion and increase in pay. Is this to be seen as Providential proof that it is the right thing to do? It *may* be the right decision, but it demands more than just the opportunity.
 3. There is an important maxim we must remember. Just because we *can* do something doesn’t mean we should.
- C. Is it Providence or temptation?
1. People always do what they *want* to do. They always pursue the desires of their heart.
 2. If our heart is set on a course of action we can find countless ways to justify it. One way is twisting God’s Divine Providence as a sign of His Divine approval of our action.
- II. So how are we to know?
- A. How did David know that he must not kill Saul?
1 Samuel 24:10 NAU - "I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed."
1. David was directed by the Word of God
Exodus 22:28 NAU – “You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people.”

- a. David was a lover of God's Word
Psalm 119:97 NAU - "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day."
Psalm 119:165 NAU - "Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble."
 - b. David directed his life according to the Word of God—and so must we.
Psalm 119:133 NAU - "Establish my footsteps in Your word, And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me."
Psalm 119:169 NAU - "Give me understanding according to Your word."
2. God has given us His Word to evaluate our course of action. While God sometimes sends us His Providence to restrain us, rebuke us, teach us patience and so forth, our steps must be ordered by His Word.
 3. Notice the text tells us David's conscience bothered him.
1 Samuel 24:5 - "It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's *robe*."
 - a. How is our conscience rightly informed?
 - b. When our conscience is improperly informed it can excuse our actions and approve even of those things that are sinful. Our conscience can become quite defiled.
Titus 1:15 NAU - "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled."
 - c. The conscience must not merely be a subjective feeling. It must be directed by the Word of God.
 4. Our lives must be permeated by the Word of God. We must be constant students of Scripture. Only then will our steps be rightly directed.
 - a. If your desire is contrary to God's Word you must flee from it no matter how painful; no matter how difficult; no matter how much your heart is set upon it.
 - b. If your circumstances seem to confirm your decision you must evaluate it according to the Word of God.
It may seem to be God's directing hand, but He will never direct you contrary to His revealed Word.
 5. Even if your situation is not directly contrary to the Word of God you must carefully examine your heart. Is this decision based upon a selfish self-will or a sincere desire to have God direct your life?
- B. You must trust your life into the hand of God
1. David had fallen into a low point, trusting in his wits and deceptions more than trusting in God. But he was now turning back to a righteous trust in God. Time alone with God in the cave of Adullam had begun to restore His confidence in God.
Psalm 57:1-2 NAU - "For the choir director; *set to Al-tashheth*. A Mikhtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave. Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, For my soul takes refuge in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge Until destruction passes by. ² I will cry to God Most High, To God who accomplishes *all things* for me."

2. Those who trust their lives into the sovereign direction of God will not be disappointed.

Proverbs 3:5-6 KJV - "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ⁶ In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

- C. The context speaks loudly regarding when we've been wronged.

1. David was being unjustly persecuted by Saul. Was he not justified in retaliation?

2. How do we respond when we feel we've been wronged. We want vindication. We feel we are justified in retaliation. And when the opportunity comes we may feel like it is an opportunity sent from God. But God's Word will not affirm it

Romans 12:19-21 NAS - "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Leviticus 19:18 NAS - "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."

3. **John Murray** gives us insight: "The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands. It is faith to commit ourselves to God, to cast all our care upon him and to vest all our interests in him. In the wrongdoing of which we are the victims, the way of faith is to recognize that God is judge and to leave the execution of vengeance and retribution to him" ¹

David Tsumura writes – "David did not allow himself to disobey God's commandment by interpreting this occasion as God-given opportunity to commit murder. Also, David controlled the situation properly as leader and managed his men not to *rise against his lord* Saul." ²

John Woodhouse – "David understood that the kingdom, which would certainly be his one day, was not for him to take by his own power. The kingdom had been given to Saul by God (in this sense he is the Lord's anointed), and it was up to God to take it from him, in his own time and in his own way." ³

¹ Murray, John, (*The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, One Volume Edition. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 2:141–42).

² David Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 568.

³ Woodhouse, John. *1 Samuel, Looking for a Leader*, Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008, Pages 178-179

Conclusion:

1. God's Word must be our authority. It must be our direction.
2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."
2. Regardless of how your circumstance may seem to affirm your decision, it must never be in conflict with God's Word.