

# David: A Man After God's Own Heart

## Lesson 5: Vengeance Belongs to the Lord: Sparing Saul -- 1 Samuel 24

Sometimes the hardest test is not the giant in the valley but the open door in the cave. David had been running from Saul for a long time, sleeping in the wilderness, watching three thousand of Saul's best soldiers comb the rocks of En-gedi for him. And then, in one of those moments that feels almost too convenient to be real, Saul walked alone into the very cave where David and his men were hiding in the shadows. The king laid down his spear, so to speak, and made himself completely vulnerable, never dreaming that the man he had hunted for years was a sword's length away in the dark.

You can hear David's men whispering. This is it. This is the day. Did not the LORD promise to give your enemy into your hand? Look, He has delivered him right to you. It would have been so easy, and it would have felt so justified. One quiet thrust and the running would be over, the danger gone, the throne clear. Every instinct of self-preservation and every wound of those long years cried out for it. David crept forward in the darkness, knife in hand, and the whole story held its breath.

And then David did something that confounds us. He cut off a corner of Saul's robe instead of his head, and even that small act of disrespect troubled his conscience. "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed," he said, and he held his men back from violence. He let Saul walk out of the cave alive. Then David followed him out, called after the man who wanted him dead, bowed to the ground, and held up the piece of robe as proof: I could have killed you and I did not. May the LORD judge between us, but my hand will not be against you. Vengeance was right there for the taking, and David handed it back to God.

This is one of the great lessons of David's life, and one of the hardest for us to live. Almost all of us are carrying someone who has wronged us, a Saul of our own, someone who has hurt us, betrayed us, or hunted our reputation. And sooner or later the cave moment comes, the moment when we could get even, when the door is open and it would feel so justified. What we do in that moment reveals whether we really believe that God is the judge, that vengeance belongs to Him, and that we can entrust our case to His hands. David shows us another way than the knife in the dark.

**Group Discussion:** David had what looked like a God-given opportunity to end years of suffering with one justified act of violence, and his own men urged him to take it, yet he refused. Why do you think it is so much harder to trust God with justice when we have the power to take matters into our own hands? What makes the temptation to repay a wrong ourselves so strong?

**Personal Reflection:** Think about a "Saul" in your own life, someone who has genuinely wronged you. When you imagine an opportunity to get even, to expose them, to repay the hurt, what

stirs in you? Are you holding onto your right to settle the score, or have you truly entrusted that person and that wrong to God?

*Read 1 Samuel 24*

## **Study Questions**

1. When David's men urged him to kill the vulnerable Saul, David refused, saying, "The LORD forbid that I should... put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed" (24:6). What does David's restraint teach us about the fear of God, about respecting what God has set in place, and about why he would not take a life that God had not given him to take?
2. David held back his hand even when striking would have felt completely justified. Where in your life right now do you have the power to repay a wrong, get even, or settle a score, and feel justified in doing so? What would it look like to deliberately hold back your hand and leave that to God?
3. Coming out of the cave, David appealed to God as judge: "May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you" (24:12). What does it mean that vengeance belongs to God and not to us, and why is leaving justice in God's hands an act of faith rather than weakness?
4. It is one thing to say we leave justice to God and another to actually release our grip on a wrong done to us. Is there a wrong you are still privately rehearsing, still wanting to repay or see punished? What would it look like this week to genuinely hand that case over to God as the righteous judge?
5. Even after only cutting Saul's robe, "David's heart struck him" (24:5); his conscience was tender about even a small act against the king. What does this sensitive conscience reveal about David's heart toward God, and what does it teach us about the value of a conscience that is grieved by even small wrongs?
6. David felt the sting of conscience over something most of us would consider trivial. Has your own conscience grown dull in any area, so that sins you once felt keenly now barely register? Where might God be calling you to recover a tender conscience that takes even "small" sins seriously?
7. David not only spared Saul but spoke to him with honor, calling him "my lord the king" and "my father," and appealing to him with humility rather than hatred (24:8–11). What does it teach us that David refused to let years of mistreatment turn him into a bitter or hateful man, and how is this different from merely suppressing anger?
8. Long mistreatment can slowly harden us into bitter, suspicious, or hateful people, often without our noticing. Has being wronged or mistreated begun to change who you are, making you harder or more cynical? How might God want to guard your heart so that what others have done to you does not turn you into someone you do not want to be?
9. David spared the LORD's anointed and refused to seize the throne by his own hand, waiting for God to give the kingdom in God's own time and way. This restraint points beyond David to Jesus, the true Anointed One, who "when he was reviled... did not revile in return" but

“continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23) and refused to grasp at deliverance from the cross. How does David’s refusal to take vengeance foreshadow Christ, and how does Christ’s example, entrusting Himself to the Father who judges justly, empower us to do the same?

10. Look back across the whole chapter, the open cave, the held hand, the appeal to God as judge. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through David’s refusal to take vengeance. What is the single truth about leaving justice to God that you most need to carry into your own “Saul” situation this week?

### **Now or Later**

Reflect on these passages: Romans 12:17–21, “never avenge yourselves... ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’,” overcoming evil with good; 1 Peter 2:21–23, Christ entrusting Himself to the One who judges justly; Matthew 5:43–48, loving enemies and praying for persecutors; Proverbs 20:22, “do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you”; 1 Samuel 26, the second time David spared Saul’s life rather than strike the LORD’s anointed