

## *Learning to Serve*

### *1 Samuel 19*

Fresh from the pasture, David still smelled of sheep. He knelt down, and Samuel poured anointing oil over his head. Then the old man whispered in his ear. God had appointed him to rule as Israel's next king.

Then the old prophet went away. Sleeping beneath a shower of stars, David never imagined what awaited him. He had no idea he would endure such bitter opposition. He would be lied to and lied about.

But that was only the beginning. King Saul would lead his army against David. Long years would drag by, and still it would continue.

In the end, David did indeed rule over God's people. And he was not merely a king of Israel. He was the king of Israel. He served his God mightily and marvelously.

Do not be deceived. David did not serve God in spite of the obstacles and opposition he faced. He served God because of them. It was the painful pressure, the tension and terror of angry adversaries that molded David the shepherd into David the king.

Without a doubt, Saul's bitter opposition took David by surprise. He expected his enemies to come from the ranks of unbelievers. But that is seldom the case.

Those who pestered and persecuted Jesus were not prostitutes and publicans, drunkards and derelicts, or even atheists and idolaters. The people who plotted to capture and kill Christ were temple Jews: men who claimed to be committed to the God of their fathers.

In the same way, even in his wildest and wickedest moments, Saul considered himself a servant of God. So it is that David, God's anointed king, was hated, hounded and hunted by another anointed king.

God has the power to overcome any opposition. This passage makes that abundantly clear. But our Savior seldom does that. Some lessons can only be learned in the cauldron of problems and persecution.

They are lessons everyone who would serve God must learn.

## *Rest on Promises*

From the moment he was anointed, David was delighted to be able to serve his God. It did not make any difference to him if he served with a shepherd's staff, a soldier's sword, or a singer's psalm.

David gave his whole heart to everything he did for the Lord he loved. And he was successful.

*David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed. 1 Samuel 18:30*

Soon, everyone sang the praises of the young shepherd. Everyone but Saul!

Years earlier, Samuel told Saul God had rejected him as king. But the big man did not care what the prophet said. He was still determined to hang on the throne and hand the scepter over to his son one day.

Saul was possessed by a spirit of darkness. But he could still see things clearly. And it was obvious to him that David was threat.

The king could not smell of anointing oil on David's hair. But it was plain to see that the Spirit was upon him. The young shepherd absolutely glowed with the presence of God's Spirit.

That made him Saul's enemy. And in the king's mind, there was only one way to deal with adversaries. *Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death.*

*Verse 1*

David was not blind. He knew Saul hated him and wanted to kill him. Nevertheless, he did not run away and hide. He stayed the king's court in spite of Saul's bitter opposition.

Yes, David knew the king wanted him dead. But he also knew God had promised to make him king over all Israel. And like Abraham, he knew God's promises are neither empty nor impotent.

*...he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Romans 4:20-21*

David was convinced God wanted him serve King Saul. So that is just what he did.

Was it dangerous? Of course it was. But David believed God had promised him he would one day be king. Just as we must, David trusted in God's Word. The young shepherd simply rested upon God's promise and trusted his Lord to deliver him from the king's wrath.

That is precisely what God did, too. He started by giving Saul's son, Jonathan, an abiding and overwhelming love for David.

That love was so strong, the young prince did not carry out his father's command to kill his friend. Instead, he warned David of the danger his father plotted against him.

Then Jonathan pleaded with his father on David's behalf. He begged his father to reconsider his command.

*Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial to you. For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by putting David to death without a cause?" Verses 4-5*

In his rage, Saul might have been deaf to everyone else. But he did listen to his son.

*Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul vowed, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death." Verse 7*

So David stayed on at the royal court, serenading Saul with psalms to ease the demonic depression that came over the king. Then war broke out with Philistia once again. So David put down his harp and picked up a sword.

*When there was war again, David went out and fought with the Philistines and defeated them with great slaughter, so that they fled before him. Verse 8*

But once again, Saul was filled with a seething, smoldering rage. With a spear clenched in his hand he brooded and boiled with anger.

David returned from the battle and picked up his harp to serenade Saul once more. On the battlefield, God had protected his servant from the swords and arrows of his enemies. Now in the king's palace, the Lord delivered him from the spear of his own king.

*Now there was an evil spirit from the Lord on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing the harp with his hand. Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night. Verses 9-10*

Do not be deceived. David was not delivered from Saul's malice and murder because the young shepherd was so quick. It was not fortune that saved David, either. It was the great God of Heaven who delivered His servant. Later, the Lord made that abundantly clear.

*Thus says the Lord God of Israel, "It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul." 2 Samuel 12:7*

Do not miss God's message to David. The Lord who delivered David was the same God who anointed him.

He is the pure and powerful God who performs what He promises.

## *Rely on Prayer*

David was not only a member of the king's court. He was also a member of the king's family. Sometime earlier, David had married Saul's second daughter, Michal.

The marriage was Saul's idea. But he did not invited David to marry his daughter out of affection or even appreciation for all the young man's service to him. He gave David his daughter as a curse, not a blessing.

*Saul thought, "I will give her to him that she may become a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." 1 Samuel 18:21*

Saul looked upon his younger daughter with a cynical sneer. His young adversary would find his new wife was a snare not a song.

There was a seed of truth in what Saul saw in his daughter, too. In fact, if there was no God, the king's plot would have worked wonderfully.

After all, even if Michal did not drag David down, the Philistines would. As the king's son-in-law, he would be a prime target for every enemy archer. But there is a God. And He was watching over David. So the plot backfired.

In his rage the king hurled his spear at his minstrel. But the spear missed David. It stuck into the wall behind him, instead. But the king was not discouraged. He watched his young servant scurry away and smiled. He knew where David would go. So Saul dispatched a death squad to watch his son-in-law's house.

*Then Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, in order to put him to death in the morning. Verse 11*

David did not spend that long night in tears and terror. He spent it in praise and prayer with a pen in his hand. The introductory words to Psalm 59 make that clear.

*A Mikhtam of David, when Saul sent men and they watched the house in order to kill him. Psalm 59*

David had tried to serve Saul faithfully. But instead of appreciation, all he had gotten was anger and adversity. Outnumbered and alone, there was nothing David could do but pray. So that is just what he did.

*...save me from men of bloodshed. For behold, they have set an ambush for my life; fierce men launch an attack against me, not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord, for no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me. Arouse Yourself to help me, and see! Psalm 59:2-4*

David did not look upon prayer with a sigh of resignation. Taking his problems to God was not a sad, last resort for the future king. David knew his God was powerful. So he laid his problem before his Lord confidently.

He knew it was God's will to deliver him. After all, the Lord had promised him he would one day be king. And he could not be king if he was dead. So David ended his prayer with faith not fear, with delight not desperation.

*I shall sing of Your strength; Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; for God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness. Psalm 59:16-17*

David learned his lessons well. He not only learned that he could confidently rest upon the infallible truth of God's promises. He also learned there is but one way to respond to dangers or difficulties, troubles or trials, and problems or persecution.

He took his problems to God in prayer. And the Lord heard his cry. He answered David's prayer by turning Saul's clever curse into a blessing.

*Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death." So Michal let David down through a window, and he went out and fled and escaped. Verses 11-12*

Our Lord has chosen to bless us in response to our prayers. And if we are to serve our Savior, we must never for a moment doubt the power that is available to those who call upon God in prayer.

But our prayers must be like David's. We must pray believing God's Word, confident He hears His children when they cry out to Him.

*Rejoice in Praise*

David had fought valiantly and served faithfully. He had stood every test and trial God allowed to come his way.

Now he was on the run. He was weary. And he needed to refresh and refuel his faith. So there was but one place to go.

*Now David fled and escaped and came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth. Verse 18*

David needed the encouragement and counsel that can only come from God. So he did not go home to his family at Bethlehem. He went to Ramah where Samuel still lived.

After anointing David, Samuel had returned to Ramah. It was not really retirement. When he was a boy, there was no one to teach him how to serve God as a prophet. So in his last years, the old man started a training school for fledgling prophets.

There at Ramah was a Naioth: a dormitory or housing village for the young prophets. That is where the old prophet took David.

Since he first left home to deliver provisions to his brothers, David had been alone. Even in the midst of an army and among the crowded court of King Saul, the young shepherd was always alone.

The only spiritual resource and committed companion he had was Jonathan. But that dear friend was far away. And David needed godly counsel and encouragement.

Gloriously, that is just what the young shepherd found at Ramah. He poured out his heart to Samuel, telling the old prophet all about all his loneliness and fears, his questions and doubts.

Samuel smiled. He knew what David needed. So in the company of the young prophets, the old man and the shepherd spent some time doing nothing but praising and worshiping God.

Back at the king's palace, Saul's mindless rage had not eased in the least. He still hungered for his son-in-law's blood.

Soon some of Saul's spies came with the news. They knew where David was, they whispered.

*It was told Saul, saying, "Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah." Then Saul sent messengers to take David, Verses 19-20*

Plans always look best on paper, especially when they leave God completely out of the picture. And Saul's plans did just that.

He sent hit men, a death squad to Ramah to capture and kill David. And from all appearances, it was a good plan. After all, David was protected by nothing but one old man and a handful of prophets.

And none of them were soldiers. They did not even possess any weapons. So David was defenseless. At least, it looked like he was.

*...but when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing and presiding over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul; and they also prophesied. Verse 20*

When the king's killers arrived at Ramah, they found David right where the spies said he was: among Samuel's prophets.

With horses' hooves clapping, armor rattling and both swords and spears sharp and ready, the death squad found Samuel leading David and the young prophets in praise

They sang David's new Psalm of God's protection. They prayed and praised the Lord they loved.

It was at this point that the king's clever plan went awry. Saul's soldiers did not do as their king had commanded. They did as the King of the Universe commanded. They fell down and joined their voices with the prophets.

Those killers never returned to Saul. So the king sent more messengers to capture and kill David.

*When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. So Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. Verse 21*

Those second and third squads never returned, either. They too joined the glorious praise of the God who loved them. Finally, in foolish frustration Saul decided to do the deed himself.

Since his messengers did not return, the king was not sure where David was. But he found an informer at a large well. Then he galloped his horse on to Ramah, his sword ready.

*He proceeded there to Naioth in Ramah; and the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually until he came to Naioth in Ramah. He also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Verses 23-24*

What took place that day had not happened to Saul since he was first anointed king of Israel. He was overcome by the overpowering presence of God. Suddenly, he had no need of armor and weapons of war. So he threw them all down. He did not even need his royal robes.

He spent all day and all night praising and worshiping God. And in the process, he forgot all about killing God's anointed king.

There are wonderful lessons in that remarkable story. First, no one is beyond the reach of God. He can soften any man's heart.

Much more important than that, we must never forget that there is no better way to respond when our eternal enemy, the devil, attacks us than to praise our loving Lord. When we are threatened by despair or depression, temptation or trials, nothing is quite so powerful as simply and sincerely praising and worshiping God.

After all, there is no safer place than in the presence of our God.