

The Life of David

Long Live the King

Study 7 | 1 Samuel 24:1-22

News and Needs

Upcoming Events:

May 20: Ministry Leaders Meeting,
same bat-time, same bat-place,
read Chapter 7 in Fitch

“The Compassion of the King”

1. How do people normally react when they are treated unjustly? What are the many ways, subtle and unsubtle, we can seek retribution? Why do we feel the need to take our justice in our own hands?

Vengeance is the most common reaction when people are wronged or treated unjustly. Vengeance will find a way to release itself in one way or another, often in acts of retribution that involve returning the hurt brought by an offender.

The act of retribution can depend on the offense. If a taxi cab driver did not follow the directions we gave him or if a server did not keep our drinks filled, then we may take away from their tip. If a friend or colleague makes a verbal jab that compromises our dignity, then we may plot for an opportunity to make a verbal jab back at them. If an acquaintance or friend forgot to invite us to a party, then we may purposely forget to invite them to the next social event. Usually we try to make the punishment fit the crime in some respect. If we are slighted by someone, we want to make that person feel slighted. If we feel embarrassed, we want to embarrass; if we feel forgotten by someone, we want them to feel forgotten. Most of us are treated unjustly in ways similar to the examples listed above, but there are some of us who have also been wronged in greater ways like adultery, assault, theft. The desire for retribution may still be the same even though fear of consequences may deter us from taking action. Retribution not only depends on the offense, it also depends on the person. Some of us are more prone to be passive in the way we return a wrong while others are more aggressive in their retribution. In what ways have you been offended? How have you sought to payback the offender?

We feel the need to take justice in our own hands because we know what it felt like to be wronged and we want the offender to feel the same thing in return. Since I was the one offended, I know best how to make the person pay for what he did.

2. How does David treat Saul in this passage? What is his reasoning for his actions? What does he attribute to God, and still hope for from God? How does Saul react to David’s mercy in this passage?

Remember that Saul has been chasing after David to kill him. Saul has offended David by unjustly hunting his life to take it. When Saul comes into the cave where David and his men are hiding out, David has the perfect opportunity to take justice in his own hands and kill Saul. Even David’s men encourage him to take revenge in verse 4 when they remind him what the Lord

said to him, "Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall to do him as it shall seem good to you."

Then, David cut off a corner of Saul's robe and feels immediate remorse for his actions and orders his men to abort their plan to attack Saul (verses 5-7). "Clearly, what David feels is that he has perpetrated a kind of symbolic mutilation of the king by cutting off the corner of his garment . . . with his sword, his instrument for killing his enemies. The cloak has already been linked emblematically with the kingship in the final estrangement between Samuel and Saul, and so David is in symbolic effect 'cutting away' Saul's kingship" (Robert Alter). In the moment of his remorse, David chooses to show Saul mercy rather than take justice in his own hands (verse 6).

After Saul left the cave unscathed, David follows him and calls out to him. When Saul turns around, David throws Saul (and us) off guard. David shows humility and respect for Saul by bowing before him as king and addressing him as "my father". [Take a moment to discuss how this directs our approach to those who have offended us.] David refers to Saul as "the Lord's anointed" and for this reason he will not "put out his hand against him". David deals honestly with Saul declaring his innocence and explaining his decision to spare Saul.

As the episode moves forward the preceding events become clearer. In verse 12, David says, "May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you." David chose not take justice into his own hands against Saul because justice was not his to take; justice belongs to the Lord. David treated Saul with respect as the Lord's anointed because the kingship is not his to determine; the Lord determines kingship of his people.

In this passage, Saul is changed by David's mercy. Saul reflects back the respect shown to him and calls David "my son" before breaking out into tears. Saul declares that David has repaid good for the evil that he showed David and therefore David is more righteous than him. Then, Saul asks for the Lord to reward David and he proclaims that the kingship belongs to David. "David's refusal to harm him (was) a kingly act and not the act of a rebel and usurper" (Robert Alter).

3. What do we need to believe about God in order to follow David's example? About ourselves? About those who harm us? How can we treat our enemies similarly? What would be the power and beauty of a community that treated others in this fashion?

Vengeance is not ours, vengeance is the Lord's. Paul encourages the believers in Rome saying, "Repay no one evil for evil. . . Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is

mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” How do you know when you believe this and when you don’t? What might be some personal indicators that help you grow in awareness of your own tendencies toward vengeance? What reason do we have to believe that God understands how we feel when we are wronged? A good indicator of belief is when we are able to say (and pray) along with David, “May the Lord avenge me against you”.

David believed that his hand should not be against Saul. Why is justice not meant for our hands? Whose hand should be against you for a wrong you have done? We must believe that we do wrong to others and deserve to be shown retribution for our own offenses.

When we hold onto vengeance in our own hands, we can desire to dehumanize those who harm us. Yet, when we turn our vengeance over to God we are able to uphold the respect and dignity of our offenders in the same way that David did with Saul. Despite the nature of the offense, the offender is still made in the image of God and possesses worth and dignity.

Paul continues to encourage the believers in Rome saying, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. . . do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” In 1 Samuel 24, Saul declared that David had overcome evil with good. How can you show good to those who show you evil?

Does our community offer a hand of justice or a hand of mercy? What is the power and beauty of being a community that shows mercy? When we are a community of mercy, we reflect the mercy of God in King Jesus who repaid evil with good!