

"TAKING THE HIGH ROAD"

1 Samuel 24:1-22

How many of you have ever wanted to get revenge for something that someone did to you? Which of these sentiments is closest to your value system?

I don't get mad, I get even

Revenge is best served cold

The Best revenge is a life well lived

This chapter is all about a man who took the high road in life and one who took the low road. As you might guess, David took the high road, and King Saul took the low road.

1 Samuel 24:1–2... Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines.

In the previous chapter, God miraculously delivered David by drawing Saul away to fight the Philistines. When Saul was finished with the Philistines, he went back to pursuing David. His intelligence network informed him . . .

Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi

This area is near the Dead Sea. It's known for its numerous caves and for freshwater springs and waterfalls along with vegetation. This was a great place for David and his men to hide out.

Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel

How serious was Saul in his drive to kill David? This gives us an indication. Keep in mind that David's pieced together army totaled about 600 men. Saul's army was made up of 3000 crack soldiers. They were the best of the best!

And went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats

The wild goats mentioned here were called Ibex. They are a type of small, nimble goats that are still in this area to this very day.

1 Samuel 24:3... He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave.

He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave

This indicates that this was a large cave, big enough to shelter a flock of sheep. David and his 600 men could hide in this cave. That's how big it was.

Saul went in to relieve himself

Since the Bible is a real book, dealing with real people living real lives, we shouldn't be surprised to see this description of Saul's *bathroom break*. He went into the cave *alone*. His soldiers and bodyguards were outside of the cave waiting for him. Something as basic and personal as this was timed and arranged by the sovereign God!

Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave

What are the chances? Saul had the urge at the exact moment he passed by the same cave where David was hiding. This was no coincidence, but was arranged by God to test David, to train David, and to display David's godly heart.

1 Samuel 24:4–7... 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.' ” Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul’s robe secretly. 5 It came about afterward that David’s conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul’s robe. 6 So he said to his men, “Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD’s anointed.” 7 David persuaded his men with *these* words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on *his* way.

(4) 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.’ ”

David’s men believed this was a gift from God—a chance to end this nightmare once and for all. They knew it was no coincidence that Saul came alone into that cave at that moment, and they were right about that. However, their understanding of the “*what of God’s will*” was off by a mile. God did not arrange this for David to kill Saul. He arranged it for David to win the ultimate victory—*victory over his own flesh*.

*Let’s be careful about taking counsel from people. Just because there’s a lot of them all saying the same thing doesn’t mean they’re right.

(4) Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul’s robe secretly.

David’s men were excited. Their lives as fugitives were about to end. Soon they would be installed in key leadership positions alongside the new king of Israel. Instead of thrusting the sword into King Saul’s chest, David secretly cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. How could he possibly pull this off without being detected? Several options exist:

- Saul could have placed his robe in one part of the cave while he took care of business in another part.
- Maybe the sound of the waterfall provided the cover David needed.

■ **It could have been another one of God's miracles.**

David was determined that when he sat on the throne of Israel it would be because God's fingerprints were all over this transition, not his own. He wanted the clean conscience that comes from knowing it was God's will.

Even though Saul made David's life completely miserable, David kept taking this injustice to the LORD, and he received the cleansing from the hurt and the bitterness and the anger that only the LORD can provide.

(5) It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe.

David only cut off the corner of Saul's robe. Why? Because the robe was a symbol of Saul's royal authority, and David felt bad that he had done *anything* against Saul's God-anointed authority.

David had a sensitive conscience. Saul had a seared conscience. What kind of conscience do you have?

(6) So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed."

God anointed Saul to be the king of Israel. He was in a position of authority, and it was *God's* job to take care of Saul, not David's.

(7) David persuaded his men with *these* words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on *his* way.

David kept himself from taking vengeance upon Saul. He also restrained his men. These men must have noticed the integrity of David's heart and how he desired to please the Lord in this matter.

In verse 3 we're told that Saul went into the cave, and in verse 7, he came out of the cave, so that he was unaware of all that took place in the intervening verses. He was totally unaware of the fact that he was so

vulnerable. The sword that cut the corner of his robe could easily have taken his life.

1 Samuel 24:8–15... Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. 9 David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'? 10 "Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but *my eye* had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' 11 "Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. 12 "May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. 13 "As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. 14 "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? 15 "The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

(8-9) David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'?"

David took a big chance here. He could have remained in hiding. However, he exposed himself because he saw the opportunity to reveal his heart towards Saul.

David's posture demonstrated his respect for King Saul and his authority. Furthermore, David's bold action displayed his profound trust in the promise of the Lord.

(10) "Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but *my eye* had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.'

David recognized that Saul was the LORD's anointed and he refused to kill him. He did humbly confront Saul with his sin, hoping Saul would change his heart.

It is entirely wrong for people to use the idea of touch not the Lord's anointed to insulate a leader from accountability!

(11) "Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it."

The corner of Saul's robe was proof positive that David had the opportunity to kill Saul. But he chose not to seize that opportunity. This was a message from God to King Saul. In essence God confirmed what Samuel had spoken to Saul when he disobeyed the Lord in the matter of the Amalekites.

1 Samuel 15:27–28... As Samuel turned to go, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. **28** So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.

Saul *must* have been reminded of this incident, and God's message to him was loud and clear!

(12) "May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you."

This is a very hard lesson for us to learn. When someone treats us badly, we naturally want to return the favor. If someone is mean to us, we want to be mean back to them. If someone yells at us, we want to yell at them. If

someone cheats us, we want to cheat them. If someone steals from us, we want to steal from them.

Many issues would be settled with minimal damage if we would only refuse to take matters into our own hands. We must trust the Lord! God's judgment is *God's* business. We put ourselves in a bad place when we make ourselves instruments of God's judgment.

Romans 12:17–21... Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. **18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. **19** 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 ON HIS HEAD." **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

(13-14) "As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea?"

David used this proverb to make a point. "*Saul, if I was really as wicked as your advisors say I am, if I really was out to kill you, I would have killed you in the cave. My heart harbors no wickedness toward you.*"

(15) "The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

David trusted God to handle this glaring injustice!

1 Samuel 24:16–21... When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. **17** He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. **18** "You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. **19** "For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore

reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. 20 "Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. 21 "So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household."

(16) When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept.

Saul was obsessed with the delusion that David was out to get him. David's refusal to kill Saul when he had the chance proved beyond a shadow of doubt that this was false. David's obedience to God and his respect for Saul's authority made all the difference in softening Saul's heart.

(17-19) He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. "You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. "For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day."

This was a dramatic change of heart in Saul even though it was only temporary.

(20-22) "Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. "So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Saul simply wanted the same kind of promise from David that he had made to Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:13-16. In that day, when one king replaced another it was customary for the new royal house to kill all the potential rulers from the old royal house. Saul knew that one day, David and his

descendants would rule over Israel, and he wants David to promise that he and his descendants will not kill or mistreat the descendants of Saul. David made that promise to Saul (**2 Samuel 21:1-14**).

Many times, a person repents and claims to recognize their sinful ways just like Saul did. But the validity of repentance and a changed heart isn't demonstrated by the emotion or sincerity of a moment. It is demonstrated by a changed life!

PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY

- **Respect the position of authority even if you don't respect the person.**
- **God's will is not always determined by the voice of the majority.**
- **Trust the Lord to handle injustice. Don't take matters in your own hands.**