

Message #12

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Life of David

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DAVID AND KNOWING AND DOING THE WILL OF GOD

1 SAMUEL 23-24

INTRO

Nevada was the center of national attention last weekend as the Democrats held their first in the West presidential caucus. This week will be Super Tuesday, where a large percentage of the delegates to the national convention will be chosen. Politicians of all stripes are seeking votes by claiming to best represent the will of the people.

In the recent impeachment trial Republicans were claiming that Democrats were subverting the will of the American people by seeking to get rid of the president on false pretenses. Democrats, on the other hand, were arguing that the president was elected in the first place apart from the will of the majority of the American people, in that Hillary Clinton won more of the popular vote.

Our nation has been blessed at times in the past with statesmen who thought and spoke on a higher level. Consider these words from an American leader who was addressing a group of pastors: **“I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and that by religious men, who are equally certain that they represent the divine will. I am sure that either the one or the other class is mistaken in that belief, and perhaps in some respects both. I hope it will not be irreverent for me to say that if it is probable that God would reveal his will to others, on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed he would reveal it directly to me; for, unless I am more deceived in myself than I often am, it is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter. And if I can learn what it is I will do it! These are not, however, the days of miracles, and I suppose it will be granted that I am not to expect a direct revelation. I must study the plain, physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible and learn what appears to be wise and right. The subject is difficult, and good men do not agree.”** (Abraham Lincoln, *God in the White House*, p. 113) If only our leaders today had such concern for knowing and doing the will of God! Any guesses about what statesman uttered those words? Abraham Lincoln.

As Christian people, knowing and doing the will of God should be our concern. In considering this subject, it is helpful to be aware of three aspects to the will of God. (PROJECTOR ON--- ASPECTS... 1. DECRETIVE...) The first is the decretive, or sovereign, will of God. By this aspect we are talking about the will of God which is always certain to come to pass. In Ephesians #1 v. 11 the Apostle Paul says that **“we have been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...”** Everything that happens in this life is according to the divine plan which God has established.

The second aspect of God’s will (ASPECTS... 2. PRECEPTIVE...) is the preceptive will of God. God has given us certain precepts, or rules, or principles, by which we are responsible to live. An example of this is 1 Timothy #2 v. 4. There the Apostle Paul declares that God **“desires** [other translations have wills or wants] **all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”** The precept is that everyone is responsible to believe in Jesus. That is the will of God. But this is not the decretive will of God, because we know from the Bible that not everyone will believe. Another example of the preceptive will of God is the Ten Commandments.

A third aspect (ASPECTS...3. PERMISSIVE...) of the will of God is the permissive will of God. God allows His creatures to do things that are contrary to His preceptive will. But nothing can be apart from His decretive will. An example of this is found in Acts #14 v. 16. Paul and Barnabas are there recorded as saying to the residents of Lystra in Asia Minor, **“In past generations he [God] allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.”** God allowed people to live contrary to His preceptive will. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Our passage today has examples of all three aspects of the will of God. We shall consider what lessons here have application for us in knowing and doing the will of God.

We have seen from our study of the life of David that God has appointed David to replace King Saul. Saul has become jealous as he has realized that David is the one whom God is preparing to replace him. David has had to go on the run as the king has pursued him. David had exhibited only the highest character until this point, but we saw last week that he had given in to fear. As a result, he lied to the priest about his mission, which resulted in the death of Ahimelech and all of his relatives. Furthermore, caving in to fear led David to go over to the Philistine enemies, where he pretended to be insane in order to avoid being killed. We looked at a couple of Psalms which showed that David learned from these missteps and renewed His faith in God. Now his family and 400 other Israelites have joined David when he returned to a hideout in the territory of Judah. We will pick up the story from there.

I.

In vv. 1-14 of 1 Samuel #23, which is found on p. 243 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we learn that GOD REVEALS HIS WILL TO DAVID WHO PURSUES IT. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. GOD REVEALS HIS WILL...) Look at v. 1: **“Now they told David, ‘Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors.’”**

David and his men had been hanging out in the cave complex at Adullam (DAVID 7B MAP), which was just inside the territory of Judah. They then learned that the Israelites in Keilah were being attacked by the Philistines. It was probably harvest time, when grain was being threshed. The crops were being gathered in and stored for the winter. All of their work was being threatened, and there was danger that they would run out of food in the winter. (PROJECTOR OFF)

According to vv. 2-4, **“Therefore David inquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I go and attack these Philistines?’ And the Lord said to David, ‘Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah.’ But David's men said to him, ‘Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?’ Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, ‘Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand.’”**

David overcame his fear last week by a renewed trust in God and His promise to David that he would one day be king. Here his men are fearful about taking on a more powerful opponent. The Philistines are more numerous and have a technological advantage. David asks for reassurance from the Lord. We will find out how he gets that.

Verse 5: **“And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.”** David had recently been trying to cozy up to the Philistine king. Now he is leading an attack against the Philistines. Why do the Philistines have cattle with them? Perhaps they are booty from some of their raids. Perhaps they are part of their food supply.

Verse 6 is parenthetical: **“When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand.”** Abiathar was the priest who survived the massacre at Nob. Exodus #28 describes the ephod that the high priest possessed as a special shirt that contained the Urim and Thummim. (PROJECTOR ON--- EXODUS 28:30) According to v. 30 of Exodus 28, **“And in the**

breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the Lord."

There is no specific description in the Bible of these Urim and Thummim. But the suspicion of many scholars is that these Urim and Thummim were like ancient dice. (DAVID 4B URIM) They were flat stones that were black on one side and white on the other side. When the priest cast the before the Lord, and they both came with the white side up, this was understood that the Lord was saying yes to the question that was posed before Him. If they both came up black, the answer with no. If one was white and the other black, this meant that the Lord was not talking to them. The evil actions of Saul have driven this priest with the Urim and Thummim to David. So David now has access to divine guidance. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Look then at v. 7: **"Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, 'God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.'"** Most walled cities in ancient Israel had only one entrance to control access to the city. The gate was also a weak point in the defense of the city. So it was better defensively just to have one gate. Notice that Saul is misreading the sovereign will of God.

Verses 8-11: **"And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.' Then David said, 'O Lord, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please tell your servant.' And the Lord said, 'He will come down.'"** Notice what these verses tell us about the omniscience of God, His ability to know all things. He not only knows the past, the present, and the future. He also knows the "what ifs." What will happen if we stay here?"

Verses 12 & 13: **"Then David said, 'Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?' And the Lord said, 'They will surrender you.' Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition."**

Now there are six hundred men, not four hundred. Notice the ingratitude of the men of Keilah, who have just been rescued from destruction by the Philistines as a result of the intervention of David. They perhaps remember what happened to the people of Nob, who were wiped out by Saul for having been

perceived as defending David. But God graciously reveals His sovereign will by means of the Urim and Thummim which have come into David's possession. David is guided to escape by following this divine directive.

According to v. 14, **“And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.”** (DAVID 7 B MAP) Ziph was to the south of Hebron.

So we see here different aspects of the will of God at work. God has decreed that David is to be king of Israel. He has revealed this both to David and to Saul. But Saul is fighting against the revealed will of God. God's permissive will allows Saul to fight against Him and against David. But God also thwarts Saul's evil intentions. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Meanwhile, the Lord is revealing His preceptive will to David. He is telling David what he ought to do. He ought to help the people of Keilah. He ought to leave the city when Saul approaches. David is wanting to follow God's will, and God is providing him with direction. Although Saul is the king, he does not have the Urim and Thummim in his possession. He has no genuine prophet helping him. This is because Saul has no interest in following the will of God. What revelation he has been given, he is opposing.

God has revealed to us the most important aspects of His will. They are found in the Bible. If we truly want guidance from Him in the decisions that we face, we do best to make sure that we are following what we have already been given in the Bible.

II.

In vv. 15-18 of #23 we find that JONATHAN ENCOURAGES DAVID IN THE PURSUIT OF GOD'S WILL. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. JONATHAN ENCOURAGES DAVID...) Verse 15 says, **“David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh.”** David perhaps has his own intelligence network.

Then in vv. 16-18: **“And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, ‘Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.’ And the two of**

them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.” The exact nature of this covenant is not described. Perhaps it is simply a renewal of their earlier covenant.

Jonathan here is a great example of Biblical encouragement. We might wonder why Jonathan does not join David and his band of men, but we don't have the full story. Jonathan is taking a risk in just coming to see David. In doing this he is opposing his father's will and acting against the national government.

Notice also the nature of Jonathan's encouragement. Jonathan is dealing with David, who is confronted with understandable fears. People are out to kill him. Jonathan responds by pointing him toward God's revealed will. He assures David that he is going to be king some day. He encourages him to hang in there.

Most of us have fears of some kind. Some of us have more challenging circumstances than others. We have a number of recent widows. We have people dealing with cancer and other health challenges. We have some with financial challenges. Some of us have family difficulties. We need encouragement in these circumstances. We cannot promise that we will all be rich and healthy. But we can encourage one another that God is with us. We can encourage people who are following God's revealed will that they are on the right path. We can remind each other that a glorious heaven is awaiting us. Biblical encouragement is primarily pointing people with fears toward God's revealed will and telling them to keep on the right path and do the right thing.

III.

In vv. 13-29 of #23 we find that GOD THWARTS SAUL WHO OPPOSES THE WILL OF GOD. (III. GOD THWARTS SAUL WHO...) We have already seen this in the earlier part of the chapter where Saul tried to trap David and his forces in Keilah. Saul was not successful. His pursuit continues.

Verse 19 tells us, **“Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon?’”** We are not sure of this exact location. Ziph was on a hill a hundred feet above the surrounding area. Perhaps the Ziphites could see David's men from their city. The Ziphites were fellow members with David of the tribe of Judah. It was disappointing that they would turn David in. Perhaps they feared retribution from Saul if they were found to be concealing information about David. Perhaps they were wanting to gain a favor from the king.

What did David think about this? The Scripture reading from Psalm 54 described this incident. After calling for God's help, David said, beginning in v. 3, **"For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them."** David is entrusting himself to God's care.

Back in our passage, in vv. 20 & 21, the Ziphites are quoted as saying, **"Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand.' And Saul said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, for you have had compassion on me.'"** Religious people can sound holy and act as if they are holy. But Saul and the Ziphites are opposing the will of God.

In vv. 22-24 Saul says, **"Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is very cunning. See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.' And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon."** (DAVID 7B MAP) Maon was to the south of Ziph.

Verses 25-28: **"And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, 'Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land.' So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape."**

It appears that Saul finally has David in his grasp. But then there is a big coincidence, right? An urgent message comes to the king that the Philistines have attacked Israel. God is in charge. His decreative will cannot be thwarted. God is creative in accomplishing His purposes. He uses even the Philistines, the enemies of His people.

Verse 29: **"And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi."** (DAVID 7B MAP) Engedi is on the west shore of the Dead Sea. En, or ein, means "spring." Engedi means "Spring of the Goat." It is a beautiful area. (EN GEDI 1) It offers plenty of fresh water. There is a waterfall. There are

caves in which to hide out. (EN GEDI 2) On the heights above Engedi there are many good lookout places.

When God has determined that something is going to come to pass, it is futile to oppose His will. (PROJECTOR OFF) The opponents of Jesus Christ should have learned that truth. The religious leaders of His day thought that they were in control. They ordered His arrest and had the Romans execute Him on a Roman cross. In actuality this was part of the decreative will of God. For it was necessary for the God-man to die on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. By believing in Him we can have eternal life.

The religious leaders heard stories about Jesus claiming that He could not be kept in the grave. They thought it was possible that the disciples would try to steal His body. So they sealed the tomb and had elite Roman soldiers put there to guard it. But God's will could not be thwarted. Jesus rose from the dead. No one was ever able to produce His body.

IV.

In #24 we find that GOD EXPOSES SAUL WHO OPPOSES THE WILL OF GOD. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. GOD EXPOSES SAUL WHO...) The story continues in vv. 1 & 2: **“When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, ‘Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.’ Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks.”** These chosen men were elite soldiers. This was comparable to sending in an Army Ranger brigade to capture David. David's men were more like a guerilla unit. The exact location of David's forces here is unknown to us.

Verse 3: **“And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself.”** This was a place where shepherds would bring their sheep. There was a large cave system involved. For David and his 600 men were hidden in the recesses of the cave. The Hebrew makes it clear that Saul is going in to have a number two. He is literally being exposed.

Verse 4: **“And the men of David said to him, ‘Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, “Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.”’ Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.”** We have no record of this divine statement to David. It is possible that the men are doing their own interpretation of what they know about God's promise to David that he will be king.

These guys have been trained to be fighters. By virtue of their identification with David and his cause, they are also fugitives from justice. They have been on the run from this king who wants them dead. This appears to be a great opportunity to do in Saul. God wants David to be king. So let's not let this opportunity get away from us. Is this the preceptive will of God? Is this what God wants them to do? They don't have much time to debate the issue. David sneaks up and cuts off a piece of Saul's robe.

According to v. 5, **“And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe.”** David has just had the chance to kill his persecutor, and now he feels guilty about cutting off a piece of the royal robe? David is truly concerned about doing what is right, about following the preceptive will of God. The royal clothes are a symbol of authority. David perceives his deed as an act of rebellion against the lawful authority appointed by God. David could be perceived as trying to tear away the kingdom from King Saul. Saul is still the anointed king, and an attack upon him is an attack upon the Lord who appointed him. Such is the thinking of David.

We read in vv. 6 & 7, **“He said to his men, ‘The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed.’ So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.”** Literally, it says that “David tore apart his men with the words.” This indicates a sharp response from David. He had to strongly and quickly defend his action, or inaction. The will of God was not obvious to these people. They could have argued that it was a matter of self-defense to do in Saul.

David perceives the situation differently. The removal of Saul must be left to the Lord. To kill Saul might foster division among the people of Israel. Killing Saul could support the narrative that Saul had been pushing that David was conspiring against him. It could anger these elite troops and the people of the tribe of Benjamin that their king had been killed in cold blood. Saul was also David's father-in-law and the father of his best friend Jonathan. Was it really the right thing to kill Saul?

People in our world are so often concerned about results. But the way of getting results is important to the Lord. He is concerned about methods. He is concerned about having us humans take on responsibilities that are His, not ours. (ROMANS 12:19) In Romans #12 v. 19 the Apostle Paul writes, **“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.’”**

The story continues in vv. 8-13: **“Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, ‘My lord the king!’ And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. (PROJECTOR OFF) And David said to Saul, ‘Why do you listen to the words of men who say, “Behold, David seeks your harm”? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, “I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.” See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, “Out of the wicked comes wickedness.” But my hand shall not be against you.”** The origin of this proverb is unknown. But this is a Biblical acknowledgment that there is wisdom to be found outside of the Bible.

Verses 14 & 15: **“After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand.”** The Lord is the real source of David's security.

What a testimony David is giving before his 600 men and the 3000 men of Saul's force. David is one day going to be king of most of these people. He is demonstrating his character and the source and object of his trust and security. He is showing that he is a man of restraint and compassion. They have already learned about his bravery and courage and skill in his defeat of Goliath and his military leadership in attacks on the Philistines. This is a man of integrity who will be worth following.

Verses 16-21: **“As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, ‘Is this your voice, my son David?’ And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, ‘You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house.”**

This is a fascinating confession made by Saul in front of his own troops. He is publicly acknowledging David's right to be king. Is Saul truly repentant? If he is, why does he not invite David to come home with him? Why does he not announce a plan by which David will succeed him?

Verse 22: **“And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.”** David has had enough experience with Saul to know that he cannot trust him.

But here God has providentially exposed Saul and his deficiency and evil and opposition to the will of God. God has ways of providentially exposing those who oppose the will of God. I have shared the story about how I was kicked out of the first church of which I was a teaching pastor. There was an older couple who largely controlled the church. They were doing some things which were unbiblical. I privately and quietly talked to them about it. They went behind my back and had secret meetings and came up with some trumped up charges and forced me to resign. For the Sunday after I left they called in a guest speaker who had no knowledge of what was going on. I found out later from friends in the church that he spoke about Joseph being rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery. The speaker stressed the verse in Genesis where Joseph proclaimed that his brothers meant this deed for evil but God meant it for good. I felt a lot better when I heard about that. It appeared to me to be the providential hand of God exposing evil.

Our responsibility as Christians is to know and do the will of God. If we are serious about that, we need to give attention to studying the Bible. The most important things that we need to know about God's will are found right here. As we go through life, there are many situations we encounter where the Bible has no direct and specific guidance. We have a certain freedom of action as Christians. But also as we cultivate a relationship with God, we get a sense of how He wants us to act.

Most of us here have been married. Over time, as we cultivate a relationship with our mates, we get to know what their wishes and wants and desires are. So it is with our relationship with God. Then it becomes our responsibility to do something about it.

A wise French archbishop by the name of Francois Fenelon once encouraged his parishioners, **“Put aside your self-interest and simply let God's will unfold around you. Everything he does for you is for your good. Worship him without having to know and see everything. Continue doing the good things that you do... Be careful that all your extra energy does not lead you into trouble and, above all, live in the present moment and God will give you all the grace you need. God's glory and his purpose are the**

end of all things. You will find happiness and salvation there but not as an end in itself. It is all for God.” (Glimpses, Christian History Institute, #108)