

1 Samuel 23:6-25:1  
A Contrast of Character

Introduction

1. A short time ago we learned that God had rejected Saul as king due to his disobedience
2. At that time, God promised to anoint a new king, a man after His own heart
3. We have come to know this man to be David
4. So what made Saul and David so different?
5. They both **claimed** to know the LORD, but there were some obvious differences, and ways in which they differed

A. One way in which Saul and David differed was in how they viewed their relationship with God (23:6-18)

1. Let's look at Saul (READ 23:6-8):
  - a. The first thing that I am struck by in our passage today is that Saul actually thought God was on his side and has done him a favor:
    - 1) He is pursuing David and trying to kill him—that's nothing new
    - 2) David is in Keilah after having rescued the city from the Philistines
    - 3) When Saul learns of David's whereabouts, listen to what he says (7): **"When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars."**
  - b. This is remarkable to me because of three very distinct events in Saul's life that should have convinced him that the opposite was true: God was not on his side:
    - 1) God had rejected him—and told him so (113:13-14; 16:1)
    - 2) The Holy Spirit had departed from him (16:14; 18:12)
    - 3) The Lord stopped talking to/answering him (14:37)
  - c. All the evidence pointed to the fact that Saul was not in God's good graces and did not have his favor—yet he was convinced that God was on his side and never seemed to question it!
2. Now, let's look at David (READ 9-14):
  - a. When David learned that Saul was on his way to Keilah, he did what we see him do so often: he sought counsel from the Lord:
    - 1) He did this at Nob (22:10, 15)
    - 2) He did it before rescuing Keilah (23:2)
    - 3) And it's something we see him do throughout his life—if my count is right we see David inquire of the Lord at least 8 times in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel (1SA 23:1-3, 4-5, 10-14; 30:8-9; 2SA 2:1-2; 5:17-21, 22-25; 21:1)
  - b. Just as Saul's words above were rather striking because of their arrogance and misplaced confidence, David's words here are just as striking for a very different reason:
    - 1) This was the man who had just wiped out a powerful Philistine army and delivered the city of Keilah

- 2) He was also the man who as a youth fearlessly took on the powerful, seasoned warrior and Philistine giant, Goliath, and killed him single-handedly
  - 3) David was Israel's greatest military hero—and he wasn't even their king yet!
  - 4) Surely he must have known that God was on his side and deliver him from Saul, right???
  - 5) Why inquire of the Lord, then? Why didn't David just gather his army and start running toward Saul like he did Goliath?
  - 6) The reason is that David refused to make a move without knowing he had divine approval—that's what make David's words here so remarkable
  - 7) This desire for God's approval before acting is also revealed in the way David refers to himself—did you notice that he refers to himself three times as "Your servant"?
3. I think if we were to summarize the difference in the way Saul and David viewed their relationship with God it would be this:
- a. Saul just presumed he had God's favor:
    - 1) He had all the evidence he needed to know that God was NOT pleased with him and was NOT on his side
    - 2) Yet, he presumed that He was, so much so that he boasted about it
    - 3) In Saul's mind, God was there merely to help him destroy his enemies (including David), accomplish his will, reach his goals
  - b. In contrast, David refused to presume he had God's favor:
    - 1) He had all the evidence in the world that God was on his side--Yet, he didn't presume it
    - 2) He didn't automatically assume that whatever he did would please the LORD
    - 3) Instead, he constantly consulted with the LORD and sought His direction and will
  - c. We see this in the world, and even in the Church today, don't we?
    - 1) Some believe God is on their side despite their outright disobedience
    - 2) Others think they are ok with God simply because they are religious, go to church or call themselves Christians, yet they have no personal relationship with Jesus
    - 3) Jesus warned his listeners about this in Matthew 7:21-23 (READ)
    - 4) But what about those who are generally saved—is there a lesson in this for us?
      - a) Are we ever more like Saul than David, presuming God is pleased with us simply because we are Christians, even though there may be things in our life that dishonor or displease Him?
      - b) Sadly, this is how some Christians live—and many of the New Testament epistles were written to address and admonish this
      - c) Or, are we more like David—people who refuse to presume anything, but instead seek out the LORD's counsel—through prayer and time in the Word?

B. A second way in which Saul and David differed was in the disposition of their hearts (23:15-24:15)

1. By disposition of the heart I am referring to the character of the inner person, what drives him to do what he does
2. After fleeing Keliath, David made his way to the wilderness of Ziph where Jonathan came out to greet him (23:15-18)
3. The Ziphites travel to Gibeath and offer to surrender David to Saul (19-23)
4. It's here that we get the first glimpses into the disposition of Saul's heart (24-29):
  - a. He was a man who did whatever he wanted:

- 1) Notice how the Ziphites approach him (20): **“Now then, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to do so”** (ESV: **“according to all your heart’s desire...”**)
  - 2) They knew something about Saul—he did whatever he wanted so they appealed to that instinct
  - 3) They saw an opportunity to get on his good side—by helping him get **“all the desire of your soul”**
- b. Saul also had a **“me”** complex:
- 1) Look at how he responded to the Ziphites (21): **“And Saul said, ‘May you be blessed of the LORD, for you have had compassion on me.’”**
    - a) According to TWOT, the root of the word translated as compassion here connotes doing something to remove an impending difficulty
    - b) What this reveals is that Saul saw himself as being oppressed, burdened and the Ziphites offer to surrender David was an act of compassion to free him from this tremendous injustice
  - 2) This response is ironic on multiple fronts:
    - a) First, it was a burden of his own making—he was obsessed with chasing down and killing an innocent man who had shown him nothing but loyalty, and probably the least potential threat to him
    - b) Second, he suggested that the LORD would bless the Ziphites for their disloyalty to David, God’s anointed
- c. Finally, he was a man who pursued his own agenda over God’s agenda (24-29):
- 1) Saul’s primary role as king was to defend Israel from their enemies, the Philistines (1 Samuel 9:16): **“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me.”**
  - 2) But, in his pursuit of David, he left Israel undefended (27-28)
5. Now let’s look at David again (24:1-15)
- a. David refused to raise a hand against Saul because he saw it as an offense against God (1-7)
  - b. David respected Saul because of his God given position (8)
  - c. He refused to listen to the wisdom of the world (9-10)
  - d. He recognized the LORD was his judge (11-15)
6. So Saul and David differed by what possessed and controlled their hearts:
- a. Saul was driven by whatever he wanted, was focused on himself and pursued his own agenda over God’s
  - b. In contrast, David saw everything through the lens of how it impacted his relationship to the LORD

C. A third way in which Saul and David differed was in how they responded to confrontation (24:16-22)

1. Saul’s confession when confronted by David seemed genuine at first, but it was short lived
  - a. Proverbs 26:11: **“Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly”** describes Saul to a T

- b. Saul's confession seems genuine:
    - 1) He calls David his "son" (16a)
    - 2) He "wept" (16b)
    - 3) He recognizes David's "righteous" behavior and admits his own "wicked" behavior (17)
    - 4) He seemed to recognize God's judgment and David's mercy (18-19)
    - 5) He accepted that David would be king (20)
    - 6) He asked David to be merciful to his descendants (21)
  - c. But, his confession was short lived, and like a dog to its vomit and a fool to his folly, we see Saul return to his wicked ways and try to kill David just one chapter later (26:1)
2. What about David?
- a. His conscience bothered him for cutting off the bottom of Saul's robe (24:5)— and he didn't even need someone to confront him about that
  - b. We saw genuine remorse when David took the blame for the deaths of the priests of Nob, even though he wasn't directly responsible (22:22)
  - c. If we borrow from a future text, when David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed in an attempt to cover up his sin, he expresses genuine remorse and repentance when confronted by Nathan—so much so that God did not take his life as the Law demanded.
3. So, we see a third way in which Saul and David differ:
- a. Does Saul seem more like that friend that keeps sinning, say's how sorry he is, but then just keeps doing it?
  - b. David, on the other hand, while not perfect or sinless expressed genuine remorse over his mistakes and sins

Conclusion
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1. I think in our passage today we find a reflection of the Church
2. On the one hand, it's made up of Christians who are more like Saul:
  - a. Those who assume simply because they said the sinner's prayer, call themselves Christians, or go to church, read and pray, that everything is cool with Jesus—never really considering that maybe, just maybe things aren't all that cool, maybe there are issues, sins, etc.
  - b. They do whatever they want or in their heart
  - c. Life is really about them
  - d. Living life only thinking about their own agenda, without much thought about God's
  - e. And, when they are confronted for their sin, they brush it off with a pseudo confession but then never follow it with real repentance
3. But, on the other hand it's also made up of Christians who are more like David:
  - a. Rather than presume God is just a-okay with everything they do, they find themselves examining their lives, asking for God's guidance and direction through the Word and prayer
  - b. They have a heart to pursue God's agenda, not just their own
  - c. They measure their actions by what pleases God
  - d. And, when they sin, they offer heart-felt remorse, sincere confessions and genuine repentance

4. The question is which one are we