

God's Longsuffering Depicted

Book of 1 Samuel

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Bible Text: 1 Samuel 24:1-6
Preached On: Wednesday, January 25, 2017

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Let's take our Bibles once again and look at 1 Samuel 24 and I'm going to read from verse 1 to verse 6 and speak with you about "God's Longsuffering Depicted." There is more here than what can look at in one session and so I know that it will seem like we're cutting off this message right at a key point but I want to make sure that the foundation is clearly laid for us and then we'll build on it, LORD willing, the next time. We'll read down to verse 8 although my text will be from 1 to 6.

Now remember that Saul in verse 28 had been turned away from pursuing David to go out against the Philistines and it was the deliverance of the LORD turning him away, even though he had David surrounded, but the enmity was such that even though, again here we see the longsuffering of God with a vessel of wrath because we've already determined Saul was a vessel of wrath, and yet God was prospering him when he went out and fought the Philistines. In fact, that's what the people asked for, God gave them exactly what they asked for, "A king that will defend us against our enemies." They were thinking just in terms of physical protection and so God gave them that. Everything Saul did, God honored and that's why He raised him up. There wasn't a spiritual king in Saul but one who protected them from their enemies and that's what kept them happy. Isn't that what most people are thankful for today? In fact, if they pray or go to their places of worship, that's what they ask for: health, wealth and prosperity. "God, if you just give us those three, we'll be happy." That's all they care for. But for Saul that wasn't enough. This enmity, when I'm talking about being a vessel of wrath, it can go both ways: the wrath of God upon the vessel but the vessel itself being wrathful, full of wrath. And that's what we see in this enmity.

"And it came to pass," in verse 1, "when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Such was his determination and hatred just like in Christ's day, those folks could not rest except that they were pursuing Christ to the death, such was the enmity. That's what we see here.

"Then Saul took three thousand," when it says "chosen men out of all Israel," this was the elite troops. These were the mountaineers; these were the ones that would have been going up into these mountains and ferret out David once for all and not spare him.

It says, "and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats." That was where he was in Engedi. There were these wild goats that lived there but there were also little caves where shepherds would take their sheep and would cause their sheep to dwell in these caves to keep them out of the heat. There were fountains of water in this area so they would feed them and give them water to drink but at the same time amongst the wild goats. It's a reminder to me that no matter where you go in life, where there are sheep there are going to be goats. And where there are goats – stop and think about it now – there may be some sheep. How many times have we walked into a group and thought, "There's not a believer amongst these"? Well, how do you know? It may be that there is one sheep that God has there that He has yet to reveal Himself.

But when it says that Saul "went to seek David," I think of those that sought Christ, not being drawn by grace but out of enmity they sought Him. There are many like that. They'll not come hear this message of grace in Christ. They know what's being preached and yet they will not come because they will not have this Christ reign over them. If they seek Him, it's always with contempt and that may be among some of our best acquaintances, people we work with, maybe in our families. They may not outwardly speak of it but there is a contempt for Christ in their heart.

That's what's represented here by Saul and these three thousand chosen men. The three thousand chosen men were of one mind with him. And here's another lesson, is that falsehood and vessels of wrath often outnumber, there is a greater number on their side. Three thousand versus David and his six hundred which represents Christ and those whom Christ came to save. These six hundred weren't any better than the three thousand chosen men, they probably were worse rascals in many ways than maybe some of these, less disciplined, that's what we read early on, and yet they were drawn to David as their leader. This brought about this reminder: not the righteous, not the righteous but sinners Christ came to save and that I make that point every time we see this, that not one of those six hundred in all the pursuits and battles do I read where any one of them was lost. Why? Because their protection was David, just like any of us. If we're of that number, as I read in Romans 9, of the remnant according to the grace of God, then it's only because God so purposed and that Christ can lose nothing of all that the Father has given Him.

That's what it says there in verse 3, "And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave." It's interesting that he sought David, the shepherd, among the sheepcotes. We just sang that song, I don't know if it struck you, "O Thou in Whose presence my soul takes delight," the desire is to be where, "You feed your sheep." Now, Saul was not seeking there because of wanting to identify with David or the sheep but he knew that as a shepherd, it would be more likely that he would be in one of those caves where shepherds would take their sheep versus out there with the wild goats.

And it says, "Saul went in to cover his feet," this is a term of just to lay down and rest, to relax. There, again, we see God's longsuffering even in that He gives vessels of wrath rest. You know, we often who are the LORD's, are more troubled in spirit many times than people of the world because the Spirit is within us and the flesh fights against the

Spirit. There is a struggle within us as we are weighed down in our own sin and nature and the Spirit brings us to cry unto Christ. There appears to be many times more rest with those of the world where they go and lay down and cover their feet. Just the fact of enjoying a good night's rest although being vessels of wrath, is a sign of God's longsuffering. That's what He did.

"And David and his men remained in the sides of the cave." So here they were in the same cave, providentially brought there.

"And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee." Remember the disciples when they were going through Samaria with our LORD and the Samaritans were mocking him? They wouldn't even give Him a place to rest and they said to the LORD, "Do you want us to call down fire from heaven right now on these?" Do you remember what the LORD said to them? "You don't know what spirit you're of."

Think about the longsuffering of David here as it represents even the longsuffering of our LORD. If it were us and we were writing the play, anytime that there was resistance to Christ the King, He would be zapping them, He would be killing them. But the LORD didn't do that. His reason for coming, He says in John 3:17, was not to judge the world but that the world by Him should be saved. Now it doesn't mean He was out to try to save everybody in the world but it's showing us that His longsuffering even toward the vessels of wrath who would be left to themselves and for whom He did not pray. Remember John 17:9? He said, "I pray not for the world but for those that thou hast given me out of the world." That's the world that through Him should be saved. And the word "world" is the term "ethnic." It means sinners of every tribe, nation and tongue. So all the while these Jews were rejecting Him and turning thumbs down on Him, yet there was a world that He came to save and He would deal with the vessels of wrath later. That's the longsuffering that we read about there in Romans 9.

And it says that, "David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt." This shows what sensitivity the LORD put even in David where this cutting off the skirt of his robe, a part of it, would be as a testimony of how near he was and how David could have easily taken his life and yet even after that, his heart smote him for even having cut off Saul's skirt.

"And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master," notice, "the LORD'S anointed." Remember that whatever position that man is in, it is God that has given them that authority. The powers that be are ordained of God. Even Cyrus, that wicked king whom the LORD raised up to give the decree from the Persians, the Medes and the Persians, that Israel should go back after 70 years of captivity in Babylon and rebuild the temple, he was a pagan king and yet the Scriptures in Isaiah call him the LORD's anointed. There, again, we see a picture of the longsuffering of God. Even as we read a little while ago in Romans 9, Pharaoh, you talk about a wicked king

and dictator, and yet the LORD raised him up to accomplish His purpose as a vessel of wrath. Let's remember that, that promotion is from the LORD. He puts up, He puts down. It's not in men's hands, it's of the LORD.

And David said, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing." Peter speaks of that in following Christ's example. You could be under the worst employer in the world but you show respect and obedience to that employer, not because they're good, but for Christ's sake, because even in that situation the LORD has put you there even for now.

So, "my master, the LORD's anointed, God forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD." In other words, anointed for a time, raised up for a time, appointed for a time. There we see God's sovereignty over all His creatures.

"So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My LORD the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself." There is where we'll pick it up next time.

But what I want us to see in this, what we've read here, is God's longsuffering even toward the vessels of wrath. That's what's depicted here and if you'll come back with me to the portion we read in Romans 9:22, I just want to highlight this one Scripture. That's why we read this early on, that we might be prepared for what we're about to see. But in Romans 9:22 we read here, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make His power known, endured with," there's the word, "longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Longsuffering means that God has already determined the time of the destruction of the vessels of wrath. It might be soon for some, later for others.

The story around Shreveport here is about the attorney, years ago in Wallace Lake, who stood up in his boat in a storm and defied God to send lightning out and to kill him. Well, at that point, for God's purpose, He sent lightning and killed the attorney. That story is true and a number of people that were around at the particular point in time remember the attorney, they remember the man defying God. There are times when God does that and there are other times where, just like the cosmonauts that went up into space and came back and said, "We went up there and looked around, we never saw God." And we look at the Russian space program today, we're actually sending our astronauts up on their rocket ships and you're thinking, "Well, you know, what's God doing prospering them?" It's because we're no better than they are. This nation is no better than any other nation. Just because God has prospered any one nation and not brought that nation down doesn't mean that they aren't vessels of wrath or that we aren't vessels of wrath. This whole notion that somehow if we just pronounce God's name we're going to be okay, it's not true.

God has a time, notice "fitted to destruction." Every time the LORD takes somebody out of this world, I don't care whether they live to be 100 years old and lived a good life,

unless they were objects of mercy and grace, ones for whom Christ has paid their sin debt, then that death is an execution and that is God now ushering them into eternal condemnation at that time. Just because they seemed to run free for a while doesn't mean that it was God's blessing. God blesses men with temporal blessings although they be vessels of wrath.

So that's what we see here, that He might "make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath." I don't want us to have the idea here that the enduring is God somehow just, "I'd like to take them out. Oh no, I'm not going to." No. These are not terms of passion or emotion with God. His determining is according to His will and justice and purpose and it's done in wisdom and God is faithful to Himself. He cannot deny Himself whether it's in taking out a sinner that is the worst rebel and vessel of wrath that you can imagine, or whether it is an object of His grace. He cannot deny Himself. He can't save, He won't save a sinner in another way than what He has purposed and that is through the death of His Son, and bring that one in His time, not ours, in His time to bow to Christ and to own Him as King of kings and LORD of lords.

And the question is asked here: what if? It's like, "So what if God does that? What about it?" It's almost as if they're saying, "You have a problem with that? Because if you do, your problem is not with me, it's with God Himself. Take it up with God." But He's not going to change, not in how He saves or not in how He condemns.

So that's what we see here. Now, coming back to our text in 1 Samuel 24, I'll try to wrap this up for us. We see Saul renewing this pursuit of David, there again, a vessel of wrath is a wrathful vessel, in other words, being a fallen sinner and God purposing to leave that sinner in that fallen state, they are a vessel of wrath. They are at enmity with God and they love to have it so. People that are vessels of wrath, they willingly will raise their fist in God's face and say, "Why hast thou made me thus?" In other words, they'll always find fault with God because of that wrath. They are wrathful creatures.

I believe that's what Paul was writing about in Ephesians there where he says, "we were even as they, children of wrath." It doesn't mean that we were vessels of wrath and now suddenly became vessels of mercy, because we read in Romans 9, that distinction was made from eternity. "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated." But in our nature, we were wrathful children, is what that means. So when we run into people that are angry with God and I run into them all the time, they don't want to talk to you, especially the God that is revealed here in Scripture. You want to get anger coming out of people, start reading Romans 9 to people.

I had a preacher friend one time that was just reading Romans 9 and there was a person there in a meeting that got up angry and ran out and when the preacher had finished, he went out and this man confronted him. He said, "I can't believe your doctrine. Sovereign God, vessels of wrath, vessels of mercy." And the preacher said to him, he said, "Well, all I was doing was reading the Scriptures." And the man said to him, "Yeah, but I didn't like how you were reading it."

They are always going to find fault. If you want to find out the heart of somebody, you don't have to comment a lot, just read the Scriptures. If someone wants to contest it and they've got their dukes up and want to take you out, just say, "Let's sit down and read Ephesians 1 together. Let's just see how God is here." One of two things: the LORD will either bring him to bow because, remember, such were some of you. It took God in His time showing us that we were vessels of mercy and not vessels of wrath and therein came the change when by His Spirit of Grace, He drew to Christ this heart that otherwise was full of wrath and we are brought to bow.

So I'm thankful that is the case, but this enmity that we see here in Saul in 1 Samuel 24 that he would not rest unless he had been able to take David out completely, that's that nature that's within any one of us were God to leave us to ourselves. But secondly, just how God brought Saul into proximity with David and even as we read there that when David called out to him after Saul was leaving this cave and we don't find David approaching unto Saul but David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed himself, in other words, paying him that respect that was due him as a king.

That was a mercy and yet none of that changed Saul and that's where we see that in spite of the mercy, you see, there's a difference between mercy and grace. When you read the Scriptures, the mercies of God are upon all His creatures so that means even reprobates benefit from the mercies of God every day. If you want a shocker, I used this the other day with somebody when they said, "How are you doing?" And I said, "Well, by the mercies of God, I'm doing well because anything this side of hell is a mercy." They looked at me like a deer in a headlight; couldn't comprehend it. But we know that to be so. The fact that God gives men breath to breathe and live on this earth, whose earth is it? It's His earth. And prospers them, but in spite of all those mercies, that will not bring them to repentance because it's only the Grace of God. There's the difference, "by grace ye are saved." All creatures benefit from His mercies. Look it up. But to those that He's purposed to save, these vessels of mercy, He gives grace, that grace that is in the LORD Jesus Christ alone.

So I know people say, "Well, let's just love them to Jesus." You can show all the kindness in the world and we should. You stop and think that whatever kindness God directs us to show toward vessels of wrath, that may be the only kindness they'll ever know. The LORD's people are not vengeful people and certainly should not be conditional. "Well, because you're a rebel, I'm not gonna feed you." Or, "Because you're this way or that, then forget it." I know there are some that call themselves children of grace but they in a heartbeat will cut off people that oppose them. Our LORD wasn't that way. In fact, that's what He said, "If your enemy come and ask you for fire, heap those coals of fire upon their head." And I used to think that that meant, you know, "Yeah. Get 'em! Be kind, you know, kill them with kindness." That's not what it means. Growing up in Africa, fire was important for heating the water in the morning, for cooking the meals, and they didn't have matches around so if your fire went out in the night and you went over to your neighbor and asked them for some of their coals that were still burning, you brought a platter and they had a cloth that they put on their head and that neighbor would heap coals of fire on that platter and they would put it on their head. In other words, the LORD

is saying, "If they come to you, I don't care if they're your worst enemy, don't be stingy." "Here's one coal. I hope you make it, ha ha ha." No, heap it upon their head so when they carry that back they have plenty enough to keep them warm and to feed themselves and take care of themselves.

What if God were conditional with us? David said that, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD." But he said, "If thou, O LORD, should mark iniquity, who could stand?" You think about his kindness to us day in and day out and the only reason He doesn't cast us into hell is because of that death of the LORD Jesus Christ and His righteousness alone.

So there are some lessons here that we see in David and how he treated Saul in kindness which was a mercy. It won't convert them but in that we see a picture of God's longsuffering. And even though David's servants stirred him up to kill Saul, I'm so thankful, I think about Saul of Tarsus, I don't read anywhere where anybody was ever praying for his salvation and when the LORD did His work, they were afraid to even approach him. Such they had written him off, and yet here was a vessel of mercy that God purposed to save. Thank God that He doesn't answer men's prayers because we'd condemn them at the drop of a hat. Yet God always does what He does according to His purpose. If we try to figure out who is and who isn't, we'll fail. That's not our responsibility. What we're called to do is point sinners to Christ and when we encounter them, it's not to shove them away, by God's grace to show them that mercy that the LORD has shown us and I pray He give us that spirit.