

As we have been traveling with David for the past several months, we arrive this week to 1Samuel 23. The chapter basically describes three different (but related) ways the LORD provided for David while in the wilderness. If you remember, Samuel anointed David to be king in chapter 16, but David would not become king under 2Samuel 5. Before David became king, the LORD needed to teach David important lessons—lessons we would largely learn as a fugitive.

While it may not be preferred, oftentimes the best occasion to learn is adversity. In fact, Martin Luther said there are three things needed to make a minister, prayer, meditation, and affliction. And perhaps we can say, there are three things needed to make a king, prayer, mediation, and affliction. And so, it's for this reason, there's likely 15 years between the time David is anointed to be king and when David actually becomes king. And this time of affliction, caused David to become a man of prayer and meditation.

And so, it is with every Christian. Though we've been promised a crown, we must first bear a cross, in order to drive us to prayer and meditation. This is fundamentally the lesson we learn from chapter 23. Although afflictions are painful, they are necessary to teach us important lessons, and the Lord will provide for us and protect us through them.

Now, as I have already said, there are basically three ways the LORD provided for David throughout this chapter—special revelation (His word), brotherly fellowship (His people), and sovereign providence (His power).

- I. Special Revelation (vv1-13)
- II. Brotherly Fellowship (v14-18)
- III. Sovereign Providence (vv19-29)
- IV. Lessons

I. Special Revelation (vv1-13)

1. Verses 1-13 contain two incidents wherein David sought guidance from God—the first concerned the Philistines (vv1-5), and the second concerned Saul and the people of Keilah.
2. Put another way, within these 13 verses, David asked the Lord two questions—should he save Keilah, and should he flee Keilah.
3. But before we come to these two questions, let me briefly say a word about this city named Keilah—Keilah was a city in the lowlands of Judah.
4. The name Keilah literally means "fortress" and according to v7, it was "a town that has gates and bars"—it was strongly protected.
5. The reason being—Keilah was located rather close to the Philistine border, and thus, it was heavily protected.
6. From v1 we learn that the Philistines fought against Keilah, and sought to rob them of precious grain (which was necessary for their survival).
7. News of this reached David, and so David, who now has a growing army, is prompted to defend Keilah and fight the Philistines.
8. (1) Should he save Keilah, v2—"Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and attack these Philistines? And the LORD said to David, Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah."
9. David's men express fear and concern about this, and so David asks again, v4—"Then David inquired of the LORD once again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand."
10. And thus, God not only told David to go and defend Keilah, but he also assured him that he would defeat the Philistines.
11. V5—"And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah."
12. Now, here I want to answer this question—In what specific way did David inquire of the LORD concerning Keilah?
13. Well, if you notice, in response to David's question, the LORD gives him specific and direct responses, v2—"And the LORD said to David" v4—"And the LORD answered him and said."

14. Thus, it's very likely, though we are not told this, that God spoke to David through the prophet Gad (who we learned about in 22:5).
15. While David sought direction from God, God likely revealed His answers through His appointed mouth-piece.
16. Now, because David was also a prophet, it's also possible that God revealed His answers to David directly, but for reasons we will see in a minute, I think it's best to assume He spoke to David through Gad.
17. But either way, the important point is this—David didn't presume to know whether he should save the city of Keilah.
18. But he twice "inquired of the LORD"—he sought direction from God's word—he looked to God for guidance.
19. And so, we find in v5 that David and his men went to Keilah, defeated the Philistines, and saved the people of Keilah.
20. (2) Should he flee Keilah—from v6 we are reintroduced to a man we saw at the end of chapter 22—Abiathar the priest.
21. V6—"Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand."
22. If you remember, we learned back in chapter 22, that Saul killed all the priests because of their support of David.
23. Ahimelech the high priest is killed, as well as 85 priests, and only one of his sons, Abiathar, escaped and fled to David.
24. Verse 6 tells us that Abiathar went down "with an ephod in his hand"—an ephod was a garment wore by priests.
25. All of the priests wore ephods and yet there was a special ephod wore by the high priest which was very unique.
26. The ephod of the high priest was connected to a breastplate that contained two stones called the Urim and Thummim.
27. These were a means to discern God's will—they were able to provide direct answers to YES and NO questions.
28. Num.27:21—"He (Joshua) shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation."
29. In other words, Joshua (who served as the military leader or ruler), was to have specific instruction from God through the high priest Eleazar (and the Urim and Thummim).
30. Now apparently, someone had followed Abiathar the priest to Keilah, and went and told Saul where David was hiding.
31. V7—"And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, God has delivered him into my hand for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars."
32. Saul knew that the city (town) of Keilah was a fortified city, and so he figured he would be able to trap David.
33. V8—"Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men"—to trap them in the city.
34. V9—"When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.'"
35. David wanted the ephod because he knew it contained the Urim and Thummim—he desired to inquire of the LORD.
36. V10—"Then David said, 'O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainty heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake.'"
37. David then asks the LORD a two-part question, v11—"Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard?"
38. The LORD answers David through the Urim and Thummim, that YES, Saul will come down, and YES, the people of Keilah will deliver him to Saul.
39. V13—"So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition."

40. In other words, David and his men (now about 600), departed from Keilah and found refuge from place to place.
41. And so, we find that David now has all the ingredients for a new Israel—the king-elect, prophet, and high priest.
42. But before I move on to our second scene (vv14-18), let me briefly point out how David here shadowed our Savior.
43. He is described in v2 as a savior—David went down to save the inhabitants of Keilah from the wicked Philistines.
44. And yet, how do the people of Keilah repay David? Well, they turn on David and desire to give him over to the hands of Saul.
45. Perhaps we can say, David was a rejected Savior! Even though he saved Keilah from destruction, they rejected him.
46. It's likely they were afraid of Saul, as they no doubt heard about what happened to Nob (that Saul destroyed the city).
47. This is exactly what happened to our Savior! He came down to earth to save sinners, and yet He was despised and rejected.

II. Brotherly Fellowship (v14-18)

1. Verses 14-15—"And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand. So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest"
2. Having fled from Keilah, David eventually took refuge in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest (likely the forest of Hereth).
3. V16—"Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God"—how Jonathan found David we are not told.
4. It's likely they somehow kept in contact—it's possible David would on occasion inform Jonathan of his location.
5. Thus, Jonathan came to David to encourage him, even though it involved great risk and sacrifice on Jonathan's part.
6. The text says—"he strengthened David's hand in God"—that is, he helped David to find renewed strength in God.
7. To "strengthen his hand" means to strengthen David himself—to give David renewed strength and encouragement.
8. But notice, this strength or encouragement was "in God"—that is, the strength and encouragement came from God.
9. In short, Jonathan encouraged David to find strength and encouragement in the character of God and in His word.
10. V17—"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. Even my father Saul knows that."
11. In other words, Jonathan encouraged David with God's promise—it was God who promised David he would be king.
12. In short, Jonathan reminds David of God's promise! He points David to the faithful character and word of God.
13. V17—"Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel"—God is faithful.
14. God promised that you would be king and you will! Even though things look very differently, believe His word.
15. V18—"So the two of them made a covenant before—the LORD. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house."
16. That is, David and Jonathan renewed their previous covenant, that Jonathan would help David, and David would remember Jonathan.
17. This is likely the last time David and Jonathan meet, for as we shall see in upcoming chapters, Jonathan will die in battle.

18. These are the final words of Jonathan to David, and brethren, what a wonderful lesson we learn from this account.
19. The last thing Jonathan told David was God's promise—there is little doubt these words echoed in David's ears for years.
20. We simply never know when our words to someone will be our final words to them—let us learn from Jonathan (and make them count).

III. Sovereign Providence (vv19-29)

1. These verses describe David's stay at Ziph—the Ziphites informed Saul that David was hiding in their caves and forests (v19).
2. Therefore, Saul sent them to find the precise location of David, and then he followed them into the region of Ziph (v24).
3. David was informed of Saul's plan, and he and his men fled to the rock, and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon (v25).
4. By "the rock" (v25) is meant a large mountain (v26)—this massive mountain protected David from Saul and his men.
5. David and his men were on one side of the mountain and Saul and his men were on other side of the mountain (v26).
6. Eventually Saul realizes this, and encircled David and his men to take them, but a messenger came to Saul with news of a Philistine invasion (v27).
7. In other words, the Lord providentially brought the Philistines against Israel, so that David would be delivered from Saul.
8. And so, Saul and his men returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines, v28—"so they called that place the Rock of Escape."
9. That is, the rock or mountain served as a tangible reminder of God's providential mercy, in delivering David from Saul.
10. Thus, the rock or mountain was called "the Rock of Escape"—the Rock used by God to enable David to escape his enemies.
11. According to the caption, Psalm 54 is "a contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, Is David not hiding with us?"
12. The Psalm repeatedly extols God for protecting and delivering His beloved people from their fierce and many foes.
13. Ps.54:1-7—"Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth...Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is with those who uphold my life. He will repay my enemies for their evil. Cut them off in Your truth. I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O LORD, for it is good. For He has delivered me out of all trouble."
14. While David was not able to explain how the Lord delivered him, he was able to trust Him and praise Him for it.

IV. Lessons

1. Here I want to summarize this chapter and suggest three broad lessons that every Christian needs to learn and relearn.
2. (1) All Christians need and have guidance—this is an obvious and very important lesson we learn from David.
3. David needed guidance—he needed to know what God would have him to do—he needed to know God's will.
4. Should he defend Keilah? Should he flee Keilah? These were important questions that David needed answered.
5. And God graciously gave him answers! He either directly answered or else He indirectly answered them through Gad (the prophet).
6. But either way, God answered him—thus, we learn that David not only needed guidance but he was given guidance.

7. And dear brethren, we too desperately need guidance as we too find ourselves in the wilderness of this world (similar to David).
8. And guess what? We too have the promise of guidance just as David did! God never leaves His people without His word.
9. Now, this doesn't mean that His people always listen to that word, just as David didn't inquire of God in chapter 21.
10. But here is in chapter 23 inquiring of God—asking God what he should do—asking God where he should go.
11. Now, before I go any further let me address the elephant in the room—yes, David had unique and specific guidance.
12. As God's elect-king, David had his own prophet and high priest, who had direct and special revelation from God.
13. None of us have our own private prophet and high priest, who can give us personalized directions on what to do.
14. But we all do have the Holy Scriptures, that serve as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path—we have the writings of the prophets and apostles.
15. Now, it's not my purpose here to address all the particulars with regards to the way God provides guidance through His word.
16. That is too broad of a subject to address in this sermon, but I do want to give a few thoughts about seeking guidance as illustrated in David.
17. (a) We must humble ourselves—this is exactly what David—to inquire of God implies an acknowledgment of need.
18. In fact, at the heart of prayer is humility—prayer is an expression of need—we are crying out to God for help.
19. This can be illustrated in a man that's lost—let's say he's driving his family to some to a park but loses his way.
20. The first thing he needs to do is humble himself and admit the fact that he's lost—this isn't always easy to do.
21. And this is also true of Christians—they must humble themselves before God as those who don't know where to go.
22. Brethren, if you think about it, we don't know anything—what are we supposed to do, when, why, and for how long?
23. Put another way—Christians must never trust themselves, they must never lean upon their own wisdom and understanding.
24. Prov.3:5-6—"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."
25. (b) We must inquire of God—that is, we must ask God to show us, in and through His word, what we are to do.
26. Now, at this point, let me clarify—David had access through special means, to have specific answers to specific questions.
27. For example—should he fight against the Philistines or should he leave Keilah? To these questions he received specific answers.
28. And so, at this point I can anticipate this objection—we are unlike David in that we have neither a prophet or priest.
29. And in one sense you are right, but in another sense, you are wrong—every Christian has both a prophet and priest in Christ.
30. Christ is still our great Prophet who guides and directs His beloved people, in and through the Holy Scriptures.
31. And so just as David inquired of the LORD so we must inquire of the LORD—we must ask Him for direction.
32. Now, the difference between us and David is obvious—the LORD now speaks in and through His holy word.

33. And so, I want to suggest Christ leads and directs His people through His word, in at least three distinct ways.
34. (i) Clear commands—that is, sometimes, dare I say oftentimes, the answer to our question is clearly revealed in Scripture.
35. For example, let's say someone was wondering whether they should divorce their wife because they're no longer happy.
36. Well the LORD has clearly made known His will in this matter—you can read it right in Matthew 19:9—"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."
37. Thus, every Christian can know God's revealed will for their lives, as they read that will within the Holy Bible.
38. (ii) Broad principles—by this mean, oftentimes the LORD answers our specific questions with broad principles.
39. For example, perhaps you're wondering which job to take, which person to marry, or what house or car to buy.
40. Nowhere in the Bible does it expressly answer any of these questions—nowhere does the LORD say—"Work here, marry her, buy this house and car."
41. But it does give broad principles with regards to each of these, and these principles must be prayerfully considered.
42. For example, think of a job—how do we know what job God desires us to have? Well, ask yourselves certain questions.
43. Does this job pay enough to support my family? Does it honor God? Does it allow me to worship God on the Lord's Day?
44. If the job meets your needs, and if it doesn't dishonor God, and if it allows you to gather on the Lord's Day then you are free to work there.
45. Thus, you must study the relevant principles found in Scripture that have direct relation to your specific question.
46. In relation to this, we must ask God for wisdom, which is the ability to rightly apply the broad principles of Scripture.
47. We must prayerfully meditate upon those passages of Scripture, pleading with God that He would give us light.
48. (iii) Wise counsel—by this I mean, there's often the need of a second voice, especially one that's wise and experienced.
49. And yet, every wise counsellor will point you back to the clear commands and broad principles of Holy Scripture.
50. And thus, in each of these three ways of leading, the Holy Spirit always uses the perfect and sufficient word of God.
51. And yet, here's what often happens—instead of looking to Scripture, people rely upon feelings and impressions.
52. Do you know what the Scripture calls this? It calls it "leaning upon your own understanding"—trusting yourself.
53. When someone tells me, "I believe God is leading me to do this or that," I always ask them, "From what Scripture?"
54. If the Holy Spirit is leading you to do something, He will use the clear commands and broad principles of Scripture.
55. And thus, we must inquire of the LORD! We must ask Him to make His word plain and clear to us! We must ask for light upon the word!
56. (c) We must obey God—this is again illustrated in David—no sooner did God answer him, did he then obey God.
57. Brethren, oftentimes the question isn't, "What is God's will for me?" But instead, "Will I obey God's will for me?"
58. (2) All Christians need and have friendships—this is another way the Lord provides for us while in the wilderness.

59. David was rejected by the people of Keilah and the Ziphites, and was hated and pursued by Saul and his servants.
60. This chapter is actually rather discouraging—David's the object of hatred and rejection—he doesn't seem to get a break.
61. And yet, in the midst of all this hatred and rejection, God sends to David a friend, to strengthen his hand in God.
62. The men of Keilah were seeking to deliver David into Saul's hand (v11), and the Ziphites promised to deliver him into Saul's hand (v20).
63. And right in the middle of these two verses, we read that Jonathan delivered David's hand into the hand of God.
64. (a) Pray for them—this of course is basic—we must pray that God would encourage those we've covenanted with.
65. Who is this you might ask? Well, if we are members of this church we have entered into covenant with the other members.
66. Just as Jonathan promised to be with David, to stay at his side, so we've promised to remain next to each other.
67. (b) Be present with them—by this I mean, sometimes you don't need to say anything, but just be present with them.
68. When I first became a pastor, I felt pressured, in times of grief and sorrow, to know exactly what to say to people.
69. But I soon realized that oftentimes I didn't need to say anything but simply be present—this alone brought comfort.
70. Brethren, I don't know how far Jonathan had to travel to get to David, but I assure you, it was not an easy journey.
71. This was an evident act of sacrificial love! Jonathan knew David was in distress! He had to be with his friend!
72. Let me illustrate this—some years ago my family went through a rather serious trial—and my wife was talking to one of you on the phone (and all you told her was – 'I'm on my way').
73. A few weeks ago, one of you called me at about 4 in the morning, and in essence said, "I need you"—and what did I say—"I'm on my way."
74. (c) Remind them God's promise—this is obviously important—it's God's word and not ours that gives strength.
75. What can bring comfort, strength, and joy to the hearts of trouble saints, but the sweet promises of Holy Scripture.
76. This is what our brethren need from us—they need to be reminded of God's unchanging character and promises.
77. And brethren, you don't have to be a great theologian, all you have to do is remind them of God and His word.
78. Take their hand, as it were, and put into the hand of God—point them to God's love and power in Jesus Christ.
79. (3) All Christians need and have protection—by this I mean, God's sovereign and mysterious care and protection.
80. There's no reason to believe that David was ever aware how close Saul came to him in the wilderness of Ziph.
81. He knew that God delivered him from his enemies, but exactly how God delivered him remained a great mystery.
82. Dear brethren, we simply have no idea how often God has delivered us from our enemies as He delivered David.
83. Our lives are filled with "Rocks of Escape"—but you know what? There's really only One great Rock of Escape.
84. How have we escaped the wrath of God? "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee; let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power."