

SEPT 29, 2024

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1 Samuel 23 BIBLE STUDY

This chapter in 1 Samuel simply continues the epic struggle between David and Saul. Saul is clearly more unhinged than ever as we saw him paranoid and ordering the slaughter of an entire city of priests and its occupants. David on the other hand is gathering his own followers, has the support of the prophets, and has shown his character by taking responsibility for the slaughter of the priests and guaranteed that Abiathar, the one priest who escaped, would not come to harm under his protection. David has fled, and as he flees he once again shows his character. In the city of Keilah the Philistines are attacking. David demonstrates his faithfulness by inquiring of God as to if he should intervene and is told that he should.

His men have misgivings. If they tick off the Philistines and lose, Judah may be next. They want to know for sure that this is a God thing and not a David thing.

David asks again.

Some might consider this a lack of faith. "If God says go then you go!". Yet all of us have heard things wrong. All of us have mistaken messages. When lives are on the line in such a significant way wisdom dictates double checking. This isn't lack of faith, it is humility and a genuine desire to follow God's plans. When David checks in again, once again he is given the go ahead. He and his men step in and drive away the Philistines. Keilah is saved.

Saul finds out where David is, and the layout of the city makes him think getting David will be like shooting fish in a barrel. When David finds out about Saul's plot to get him he asks for the ephod to be brought forth. This ephod is a priestly symbol to rally around. They are asking God's intervention and aid in whatever is to come. It's a symbol of hope and faith.

Today we have to be careful about this. In the Old Testament clearly these items held power and sway. Today we are in a different spiritual environment. We don't need objects to channel God's influence or power. Even David didn't need such things when he faced Goliath. His faith was enough. Objects don't replace authentic faith and understanding God.

Today we have necklaces that have tiny pendants with the "entire Bible etched on them". They are being pitched as some extravagant statement of faith and means of having God near at all times. They are nothing. God's presence and our knowledge of God isn't about a trinket. It is about God's promise to be with us and about a faith that is rooted in knowing God's Word, not just wearing it around our neck.

Life lived in faith will always win out over the phoniness of symbols and cliches not backed up by action.

David inquires again of the Lord. Is Saul coming? Yes. Will the people of Keilah, whom he has just saved, rat him out and turn him over to Saul? Yes.

In a grand display of character, rather than being upset at this report and taking frustration out on the people of Keilah he again chooses to spare them by running off. Saul likely wouldn't have been so gracious. He'd just slaughtered an entire town of priests. David on the other hand has protected these people. Why would he do them harm now? No, he will move on and leave them in peace, allowing his acts of protection to be what remains.

When David flees to Ziph a few things come to light. For me the most significant is that Jonathan hasn't forgotten David. We are told that Jonathan helps David find strength in God. It's only one verse but that verse is telling. David the brave, David the faithful, David the King needs help bolstering his faith. He's human like all of us. Thankfully he has someone like Jonathan to encourage him to push on and seek God.

Saul's son is showing his own faith by pursuing his friend, and making sure his friend's faith stays strong. The vows he and David have made to one another matter. Jonathan reiterates his

understanding that David, not his father, is the true king, and that he will be by his side as his second. This simple interaction is a wonderful example of two men of faith seeing each other, standing united, and following God with some sense of honor.

Unfortunately the Ziphites are a bit less kind. They go to Saul spilling the information on David's whereabouts. They sell David out. Why we don't know. Perhaps it's self protection? Perhaps it's just self interest? We don't know. The people of Keilah we might understand. If they weren't willing to turn David over they would be cut down as Saul came after David. It was clear self preservation. This is different.

We also get a window into Saul here. Notice that in the previous chapters he was paranoid and accusing those close to him of betrayal and siding with his enemy. It was a whine fest. "They don't like me". This sentiment to the place that even when an innocent priest made his case that he'd done nothing wrong Saul's response was immediate, rash, and lethal.

Here Saul loves them. "The LORD bless you because of your concern for me." Not for their faithfulness. Because they like him enough to help him. This is where Saul's spirit resides. His allegiance and appreciation have nothing to do with God or integrity. It's all about whether or not people side with him.

As Saul closes in on David the scene to me is comical. They are on opposite sides of a mountain with one chasing and the other fleeing. It's almost cartoonish. Clearly God has no desire to allow David to be captured much less killed.

Then fate intervenes.

The Philistines attack and Saul is called away to do battle with them. I find this a strange coincidence. The Philistines attacked Keilah, David intervened, and the result was David placed in further jeopardy. Here the Philistines attack and it actually spares and benefits David because it draws Saul away from him.

Strange circumstances. Same people doing the same thing, attacking. In one instance David is imperiled and the other he is spared and given some breathing room. We never fully know what the end run of any experience will be. What we see from David at least here is that trusting God to lead us through can bring us to some sense of safety no matter what.

This brings us to a final note about Saul. He's become wildly erratic, paranoid, and even homicidal. But in this moment we see something good. Remember in the beginning that when he was chosen as king his primary role was to protect Israel. This is what draws him away from his personal vendetta. He's bent on killing David but when he hears the Philistines are attacking he drops his pursuit and goes to defend Israel.

It's a good reminder that even the worst examples of what we think humanity should look like can have moments of redemption. No one is all bad. Even Saul, lost in fits of passion, hate, jealousy, and rage was able to bounce back to do his job. He remembered his calling.

If you feel like you've fallen away and forgot your calling. Saul is evidence that you can find it again. Then cling to it and let God be the guide to a new life filled out by embracing a calling that will change you and change the world.