

# THE LIFE OF SAUL MERCIFULLY SPARED BY DAVID: LESSONS ON HONOURING GOD'S ANOINTED

## 1 SAMUEL 24:01–22

### *Introduction*

Repaying or doing good for evil is not a simple thing to do. For example, how can we love our enemies — those who abuse, assault or commit some act of violence against us, perhaps even attempting to kill us?

Think for a moment: If someone ridicules, mocks or curses us — what does it mean to do good to that person? If a person steals from us, causes financial difficulty or destroys our property — what does it mean to do good to him or her?

To do good for evil does not mean to give license to wickedness nor to indulge evil.

To do good would mean to correct and discipline the wicked or evil person. Correction and discipline are good, helpful and beneficial for the person who lives a life of sinful behaviour. But when we seek to correct and discipline the wicked, we do it with a spirit of care and compassion, not out of a spirit gripped by vindictiveness and revenge. We correct and discipline the wicked and evil of this earth by executing the compassionate, righteous laws of God. These laws are spelled out in God's Holy Word.

David was gripped by the compassionate, righteous laws of God. For this reason, when the opportunity came to take revenge upon his enemy, King Saul, he acted instead in compassion, not in vengeance and retaliation. David rendered good for evil. This is the subject of this captivating passage of Scripture: *The Life of Saul Mercifully Spared by David: Lessons on Honouring God's Anointed*, 1 Samuel 24:1-22.

- I. David's respect for the office of king: a lesson on the need to honour God's *anointed leader* (vv. 1-7).
- II. David's humility and his loyalty to King Saul: a lesson on the need for humility and loyalty (vv. 8-15).
- III. Saul's remorse and confession that David would be king: a lesson on repaying good for evil (vv. 16-22).

### **I. *1 Samuel 24:01–07 David's Respect for the Office of King: Honouring God's Anointed Leader***

There was David's respect for the office of king, a strong lesson on the need to honour God's anointed leader. Remember, Saul had been right on the verge of capturing David when he received an urgent message that the Philistines had attacked Israel. As a result, he was forced to give up his pursuit, forced to return and defend the nation against the Philistine invaders. After turning back the Philistine aggression, he returned home to Gibeah and reinstated his spy network to find out where David was hiding. Note what happened:

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1. David's hideout was soon discovered by the spies who passed on the information to Saul. David was hiding out in the Wilderness or Desert of En Gedi, which was an oasis with plenty of fresh water and fruitful vineyards. En Gedi was located east of Hebron close by the Dead Sea.

As soon as Saul received this information from his spies, he mobilized a *special force* of 3,000 soldiers who set out in search of David. They marched to the inaccessible Rocks of the Wild Goats where they began their search. As evening approached, they came to a very fertile area where a number of sheep pens had been built and decided to make camp there. As the cloak of darkness began to set in, Saul walked out from the camp looking for a place to relieve himself and noticed off in the distance a large cave to which he headed.

2. Unknown to Saul, David and his men were hiding far back in the very same cave (v. 4).
3. So remarkable was the coincidence that David's men suggested this was of God (v. 4). God had placed David's enemy into his hands: he should therefore seize the moment and kill Saul.
4. But note what David did: quietly tiptoeing, he crept up and cut off only a corner of Saul's robe (v. 4). Obviously Saul had taken off his robe and laid it aside some distance away, which enabled David to creep up unnoticed.
5. Afterward, however, David was stricken in conscience for what he had done (vv. 5-7). And note, he shared the fact with his men. He stated that he had been disrespectful to his master, their ruler and the LORD's anointed. Since Saul was the LORD's anointed, the men's counsel to kill him could not be carried out. To kill the LORD's anointed would be an act of outright rebellion against the LORD, for the LORD commanded His people not to curse their rulers (Exo 22:28). In fact, the hand of God's judgment had fallen in the past when God's people rebelled against their leaders (Num 12:2-15; 16:1-35). (Robert D. Bergen. *1, 2 Samuel*, p. 239).

With this rebuke, David was able to stop his men from killing Saul. As a result, Saul left the cave and returned to his men at the campsite.

**Thought 1.** Civil leaders and religious leaders are to be respected. We are to honour our leaders, not curse or ridicule them, certainly not assault or kill them. Even when a leader is wrong, we are to show respect and honour for the position the person holds. If the leader is wrong, acting in some wicked or evil way, we should do everything in our power to correct the leader. But in correcting, God demands that we still show respect and honour for the leader. If we retaliate in some unkind, lawless or violent way, we stoop to the level of the wicked and corrupt leader. Such disrespectful, dishonouring and lawless behaviour makes us no better than the immoral and unjust leader. God's Holy Word is clear and straightforward: we must honour both our civil and religious leaders.

(1) We must honour our civil leaders.

*Mat 22:21* "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

*Acts 23:5* Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

*Rom 13:1* Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

*Titus 3:1* Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.

*1 Pet 2:13-14* Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

*1 Pet 2:17* Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.

*Exo 22:28* Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.

*Prov 11:11* Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed.

*Prov 14:34* Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

*Prov 16:12* Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness.

*Eccl 8:2* Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God.

(2) We must honour our religious leaders.

*Phil 2:29* Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him.

*1 Th 5:12-13* Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

*1 Tim 5:17* The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

*Heb 13:7* Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

## II. *1 Samuel 24:08–15 David's Humility and His Loyalty to King Saul*

There was David's humility and his loyalty to King Saul. As soon as Saul had left the cave and walked a short distance, but still within earshot, David walked out to the edge of the cave and called out to the king. Standing some distance apart, the two men confronted one another and each in his turn spoke, with David speaking first. The speech of each man is

the longest recorded in First Samuel, with David speaking 114 Hebrew words and Saul speaking 67 Hebrew words. (Robert D. Bergen. *1, 2 Samuel*, p. 239). Note David's speech:

1. David showed the utmost humility toward Saul by addressing him as king and bowing to the earth (v. 8). Note that David actually addressed Saul as "my master" (6); "the LORD's anointed" (6, 10); "my LORD" (8, 10); "the king" (8, 14); and "my father" (11). David was making every effort to convince Saul of his respect and honour.

2. David presented a strong case for reconciliation between himself and Saul (vv. 9-11). He declared that the charges of treason being launched by others were absolutely false. The proof was fivefold:

=> First, Saul had just been in the very cave where David was, delivered there by the LORD.

=> Second, some of David's own men had urged him to kill Saul, but he had refused.

=> Third, David had refused because Saul was God's anointed, and David both acknowledged and honoured the fact.

=> Fourth, Saul was, in fact, David's father-in-law.

=> Fifth, Saul's robe had just been cut by David, yet David had refused to kill him.

With the proof and evidence presented, David pronounced the verdict: he was innocent (v. 11). Then he cried out for Saul to understand and recognize that he was not guilty of wrongdoing and rebellion against the throne. He had not wronged Saul, and yet Saul was hunting him down like a wild animal to kill him. The evidence was irrefutable, and Saul needed to acknowledge the fact.

3. David attempted to convince Saul of the injustice being done by his pursuing him and seeking to kill him (vv. 12-15). Doing all he could to strike and melt the heart of Saul, David shouted out six points:

a. David warned Saul of God's judgment (v. 12). The LORD was going to judge between him and Saul, and David cried out to the LORD to avenge the wrongs that had been done to him. But he assured Saul that his own hand would never retaliate nor seek revenge against the king.

b. David then quoted an ancient proverb that teaches an obvious fact: only a wicked person would do evil against another person (v. 13).

c. David assured Saul that he was not wicked; he would never harm him (v. 13).

d. David asked a series of questions that clearly showed he was not a personal threat to Saul (v. 14). In fact, he was nothing more than a dead or lifeless dog or a small flea before Saul. He was totally insignificant and posed no threat whatsoever to Saul.

e. Closing his appeal to the king, David then called upon the LORD to decide who was right and to judge and punish the guilty party (v. 15).

f. Finally, with a thundering voice, David called out for the LORD to vindicate and deliver him from the hand of Saul (v. 15).

**Thought 1.** David sets a dynamic example for us of humility and loyalty. Just imagine what was happening. With raging anger and hostility, Saul was fiercely pursuing David, seeking to kill him. But out of respect for God's Holy Word — which states that rulers are to be honoured — David humbled himself before King Saul. He humbled himself and declared his loyalty. Saul was wrong, wicked and evil, and he had even been driven insane by his sinful behaviour. Nevertheless, he was the ruler over God's people. For this reason, David humbled himself and declared his loyalty to King Saul. What a dynamic example for us. God's Holy Word commands us to live lives of humility and to give our loyalty to the leaders who rule over us.

(1) We are to live lives of humility.

**Luke 22:26** *“But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”*

**Rom 12:3** *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

**Phil 2:3-5** *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

**John 4:10** *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

**1 Pet 5:5-6** *Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*

**Micah 6:8** *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

(2) We are to honour and be loyal to those who rule over us.

**Rom 13:1** *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*

**1 Cor. 16:16** *To submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labours at it.*

**Phil 2:29** *Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him.*

**1 Th 5:12-13** *Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.*

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*Exo 22:28* Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.

### **III. 1 Samuel 24:16–22 *Saul's Remorse and Confession That David Would Be King***

There was Saul's remorse and confession that David truly would be king someday. This is a striking lesson on repaying good for evil. After David had finished speaking, Saul called back, "Is that really you, my son David?" Note that Saul addressed David as "my son." Having just called out the question, Saul visibly wept aloud. But this outburst of tears was only an emotional reaction to a convicted heart, for Saul never repented or had a true change of heart. Picture the scene as Saul addressed David at that moment:

1. First, Saul confessed that David was more righteous than he (vv. 17-19). Clearing David of all guilt, he shouted out that David had repaid him good for evil. Saul was the one who had been doing evil to David while David was doing good to him. Moreover, David had shown mercy to him by not killing him when he had the chance in the cave. Note that Saul acknowledged that the LORD had delivered him into the hands of David but that David had deliberately chosen to spare his life. This defied common sense and human nature, which seeks to retaliate against one's enemy. Then because of David's repaying Saul good for evil, the king pronounced a blessing upon David. He asked the LORD to reward him for the kindness he had shown to the king that day.
2. Amazingly, Saul confessed God's royal plans for David, that David would someday be king and would establish or reunite the kingdom of Israel that Saul himself had torn apart (vv. 20; 15:28; 16:12). In this confession, he confirmed what his very own son had earlier predicted for David (23:17).
3. Tragically, even in the midst of confessing his evil against David, Saul's utter selfishness came out and was exposed. This is seen in the two requests he made (vv. 21-22). Note that his major concern was to preserve his name and the lives of his descendants to make sure that his name was always preserved and honoured. He requested that David swear to two things:
  - => that David not kill off his descendants
  - => that David not wipe out his family's name

Saul was probably unaware that his own son Jonathan had made a similar covenant with David (20:14-17, 42). Then without any hesitation whatsoever, David made the very same covenant with Saul. He swore that he would do what he could to preserve the descendants of Saul and the name of the family. Sometime later David would keep his word, fulfilling the covenant he had just confirmed with Saul: he would save the life of Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, and actually bring him into the royal palace (2 Sam 9:1-13; 19:29; 21:7).

4. Having agreed to the covenant, Saul and David ended their encounter. Saul returned home, but David and his men returned to their stronghold in En Gedi (v. 22).

**Thought 1.** Nothing is anymore difficult than doing good for evil. Time and again God's Holy Word teaches that we are to love our enemies. We are not to seek revenge, retaliating against those who have wronged us. As difficult as it may be, we are to be kind to those who ridicule, mock or even curse us. Even if a person abuses, assaults or attempts to kill us, we must not be consumed with the spirit of vengeance and seek to retaliate. But of course we must attempt to get away and seek the help of others. A wicked abuser or persecutor must be corrected, must never be indulged nor given the license to commit his evil. But in our correcting this evil behaviour, our corrective action is to be carried out in a spirit of regret and compassion, not of revenge and retaliation. We are always to render "good for evil," keeping in mind that the good is correction and discipline, not license and indulgence. God's Holy Word declares that we are to render good for evil.

**Mat 5:44** *"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*

**Luke 6:27** *"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."*

**Luke 6:35** *"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked."*

**Rom 12:20** *On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

**1 Th 5:15** *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*

**Exo 23:5** *If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.*

**Prov 25:21** *If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. ■*