

## 1 SAMUEL 23.15 – 24.7: DAVID ON THE RUN

‘Breakfast with the Bible’, Chelmsford Cathedral: 28 June 2015

### DAVID IS ENCOURAGED BY JONATHAN

23.15: **“David was in the Wilderness of Ziph at Horesh when he learned that\* Saul had come out to seek his life”**: The Wilderness of Ziph was a desolate place to the south east of Jerusalem. We don’t know where Horesh actually is: it simply means ‘a wooded height’. But in a sense geography is unimportant. What is important is that David was a wanted man – Saul was after him.

This was a testing time for David. David must have been depressed beyond – when would all these difficulties with Saul come to an end? It was at this point **“Saul’s son Jonathan set out and came to David at Horesh”** (23.15)

You might have thought that Jonathan would have sided with his father. But no, Jonathan supported David – David was his friend. I am a great fan of Jonathan – as is indicated by our choice of the name of Jonathan for our eldest son!

- The friendship went back to when David had killed Goliath. In 1 Sam 18.1, 3 we read: **“The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul”**. Or as GNB puts it: **“Jonathan swore eternal friendship with David**. Jonathan committed himself to David - and the implication is that David in return made the same kind of commitment.
- As a result, 1 Sam 19 we find that when Saul spoke to Jonathan & his servants about killing David, Jonathan spoke up on his behalf – for we read in 19.1 **“Jonathan took great delight in David”**. Some people have suggested that there was something erotic about the friendship. But that is a nonsense. There was nothing sexual about this relationship. The truth is that same sex friendship does not have to be erotic.

It is against this background that at Horesh Jonathan **“strengthened David’s hand through the LORD. \*<sup>17</sup>He said to him, ‘Do not be afraid; for the hand of my father Saul shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be second to you; my father Saul also knows that this is so.’<sup>18</sup>Then the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.”**

I love the expression: **“he strengthened his hand in God”**

NIV: “he helped him find strength in God”

REB: he “gave him fresh courage in God’s name”

GNB: he encouraged him with assurances of God’s protection”.

Mary Evans: “Even the strongest faith sometimes wavers and the value of an understanding friend at those times cannot be underestimated”.

Yet again Jonathan assures David that he is happy to play second fiddle: **“I shall be second to you”**. Jonathan, the heir apparent, shows no jealousy. I am reminded of 1 Cor 13.4: “love is not envious”.

Yet again the two renew their commitment to one another: **“The two of them made a covenant before the Lord”**.

This was the last meeting Jonathan had with David.  
The next time we hear of him, Jonathan was dead.

What a great friend Jonathan was. Friends make all the difference! Thomas a Kempis was wrote: *“God has ordained that we should learn to carry each the burden of another. None is without his failings, none without his burden, none strong enough for his own needs, none wise enough. We take our turns to lift the burden from each other. We take our turns to comfort and console, to help, counsel and to teach.”*

Although this is moving on from the text, I would like to suggest that Jonathan and David modelled not friendship, but also the kind of relationships we should enjoy in the church. Think of the new commandment Jesus gave to his disciples: “to love one another” – even as he loved us

Q: Do you have the equivalent of a Jonathan in your life? Is there a place for covenant relationships in the life of a church like Chelmsford Cathedral?

### **DAVID AGAIN ELUDES SAUL: 23.19-29**

The cat and mouse game continues!

**19 Then some Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, ‘David is hiding among us in the strongholds of Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon. <sup>20</sup>Now, O king, whenever you wish to come down, do so; and our part will be to surrender him into the king’s hand.’ <sup>21</sup>Saul said, ‘May you be blessed by the LORD for showing me compassion! <sup>22</sup>Go and make sure once more; find out exactly where he is, and who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning. <sup>23</sup>Look around and learn all the hiding-places where he lurks, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you; and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.’ <sup>24</sup>So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul.**

**David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. <sup>25</sup>Saul and his men went to search for him. When David was told, he went down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard that, he pursued David into the wilderness of Maon. <sup>26</sup>Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. David was hurrying to get away from Saul, while Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them. <sup>27</sup>Then a messenger came to Saul, saying, ‘Hurry and come; for the Philistines have made a raid on the land.’ <sup>28</sup>So Saul stopped pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. \* <sup>29</sup>\* David then went up from there, and lived in the strongholds of En-gedi.**

Here we have ‘a miracle of timing’. If the Philistines had attacked one day later, David would have been captured and no doubt executed by Saul. The Philistine raid happened just at the right time for David. God’s providence was at work.

Was David aware of God’s providence at the time? Interestingly in the story itself God is not even mentioned. However, we find a very interesting commentary on the incident in the Psalms. Psalm 54 is subtitled: ‘when the Ziphites went and told Saul, ‘David is in hiding among us’. So we read in the second half of Ps 54:

“But surely God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. He will repay my enemies for their evil. In your faithfulness, put an end to them. With a freewill-offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good. For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies” (vv4-7)

Is there a lesson here for us to learn? Do we need to be more conscious of God at work in our lives and thank him accordingly? David Payne commented: “It requires an act of faith to believe that God is overruling in human affairs; and very often his purpose can only be seen in retrospect”.

*Q: How conscious are you of God’s providence at work in your life?*

### DAVID ALLOWS SAUL TO ESCAPE (24.1-7)

**24**When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, ‘David is in the wilderness of En-gedi.’ <sup>2</sup>Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to look for David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. <sup>3</sup>He came to the sheepfolds beside the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself.\* Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. <sup>4</sup>The men of David said to him, ‘Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, “I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.” ’ Then David went and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak. <sup>5</sup>Afterwards David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak. <sup>6</sup>He said to his men, ‘The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to raise my hand against him; for he is the LORD’s anointed.’ <sup>7</sup>So David scolded his men severely and did not permit them to attack Saul. Then Saul got up and left the cave, and went on his way.

From one perspective it is an amusing story: even kings are human have to go to the toilet from time to time!

It is also a puzzling story: what was in David’s mind when he “**cut off a corner of Saul’s cloak**” – and why was he so cross with himself afterwards?

- Was David simply wanting to make Saul ridiculous – fancy coming out of the toilet and discovering that a leg of your trousers was missing?
- More probably David was signaling his intention of taking from Saul his position as king. There is a famous German novel entitled ‘*Clothes make people*’ – and that was certainly true in those days. Saul dressed as a king – and to cut off a piece of his clothing was a clear threat to his position.

Afterwards David was conscience stricken – in spite of all that Saul was doing, he was still “**the Lord’s anointed**”. The implication is that David realized that he should allow God to take the initiative in stripping the kingdom from Saul. He cannot of himself act against Saul.

His anger with himself then appears to be transferred to his men: “**David scolded his men severely**”.

Two thoughts came to me:

1. The need for the right kind of people to be around us. For understandable reasons David's men encouraged David to kill Saul. Indeed, they even backed up their argument with an unknown 'prophecy': 'I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you' (v4). But this was not the advice David needed. Had David followed their advice, there might have been unhelpful long-term consequences – and David might well have never been able to win over Saul's supporters. As it was, it was Saul who fell on his sword after the Philistines killed his three sons (1 Sam 31). We need friends who can see beyond the immediate moment.
2. There are times when we need to trust God - for the fact is that he will see that justice is done. NB Rom 12.19: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'". John Calvin: "We give place to his wrath...only when we wait patiently for the proper time for our deliverance, praying in the meantime that those who now trouble us may repent and become our friends". Yes, there are times when we need to leave the outcome to God.

*Q: How easy do you find it to trust God? Can you think of a situation when you were tempted not to leave matters to God?*