

1 Samuel 23: No Good Deed Goes Unrewarded

Well, as we look at our passage this morning, I think we're going to see some very practical realities as believers that we need to keep in mind. I titled this sermon "No Good Deed Goes Unrewarded" really sort of as a tongue in cheek title to address the cynicism that can creep into our lives. The true phrase is "no good deed goes what?" Unpunished. And, in our pessimism, that's often how we think of things. "I'm not a pessimist, I'm a realist." You know the surest sign of a pessimist? It's someone who calls themselves a realist.

When I lived in KY I worked for a company and that phrase was used all the time because it seemed like every time we went above and beyond the call of duty to help a customer our efforts backfired and things were actually worse than had we just did the bare minimum. We'd try to rush an order through only for it to be messed up by the fabricators. We'd arrange to meet a customer early so they could get the job installed only to have them not show up for an hour while we paid 3 guys to sit in the truck on the clock.

Well that attitude can creep into our lives as we follow Jesus as well. If you serve enough, try to help others enough, try encourage people enough it's easy to feel like all your efforts are wasted. You try to teach your kids, try to love your husband, try to talk about Jesus with an acquaintance, and it often feels for not. That's a common feeling. "Why do I even try?!" "It'd be better if I just never hung out with anyone at all."

It's so common I know many people who have given up on church and even being around other Christians because they've lived out "no good deed goes unpunished." I want to encourage you this morning, that if that's where you're at to keep going. Keep pursuing the Lord to the best of your ability.

And know that this is not something only you feel. This is the thing the people of God have wrestled with for thousands of years. The apostle Paul had to encourage the early church with words like these:

Gal. 6:9-10: And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

You ever grow weary in doing good? Apparently the Galatians had. What keeps you going? Knowing that we don't do good for temporal rewards - for temporal benefit. We do good because there is an eternal reward that we will reap if we do not give up. If you give up, there's no reaping.

Many of you guys love gardens - flower gardens or vegetable gardens. Imagine if you planted a garden, worked it, tended it, watered it. But in the middle of the summer you gave up. Gave up watering it, gave up weeding the ground, gave up pruning. You also give up the expectation of a harvest at the end of the summer, don't you? Paul says that's how it is in the Kingdom of God.

Paul actually said the same thing to the Thessalonians:

2 These 3:13-15: As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

It's not that a person forfeits their salvation because they give up doing good. Paul says they are not our enemy, they are our brother. But they need to be admonished to keep going in order to reap the reward.

I'll be honest, I think there are a lot of people who really want to love Jesus and follow Jesus who do just sort of give up in life. They've been beat down one too many times.

Jesus does not promise us a life of ease. **John 16:33:** "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Our hope is not that life is easy, but that Jesus has conquered.

My hope is that we will be encouraged to persevere and endure based on our text this morning.

I do want to make one observation here before we jump in so we don't have to deal with it over and over and that's that David was a prophet of God and had a special relationship with God where God talked directly to David. Throughout this chapter, and throughout David's life, God just seems to talk to David. We don't know if that's audible, through a dream, through the ministry of Abiathar the high priest or some other means. On just a simple reading it seems like it was simply audible between God and David. It wasn't just intuition or a feeling. The Bible presents it as straightforward communication.

We don't have that kind of straightforward access to God. Does God guide us and lead and impress things on our heart in a supernatural way? Of course! Sometimes in ways that are so obvious they are scary. But as God's prophet, David enjoyed a unique line of communication we don't. But nonetheless the principles we'll see throughout this chapter remain.

Okay, given the fact that we are called to serve and minister to others, and it will often be difficult, what can we learn from David's life?

1) We are often commanded to serve those who will betray us later. **Read 1-5**

So we are stuck with 2 truths here. First, we know how this whole chapter is going to go down: the Lord for sure wants David to save Keilah - God tells him twice to do so. Second, we know that Keilah would have handed David and his men over to Saul had they stayed. So what we're left with is that God has commanded David to serve people who would later betray him.

What do we know about the city of Keilah? Keilah was a fortified city sort of out in the middle of nowhere in southern Israel. It was fairly close to the Philistines who lived along the Mediterranean Sea. Also, if you recall, the Philistines were becoming very bold in their attack on the Israelites. They had captured Bethlehem, just a couple miles south of Jerusalem and had locked down the whole valley. Later in the chapter David is saved from Saul because Saul leaves to go fight off the Philistines. But there's this constant looming threat of attack.

And in the midst of that David gets word that Keilah is fighting off the Philistines. They are raiding the threshing floors. It's harvest time when people bring the grain in and beat the heads of grain off of the chaff. And what the Philistines would do was wait until the Israelites had done all the work of separating the grain from the chaff and then raid the threshing floors to take all their grain.

If you remember from the book of Ruth, when Ruth went to meet Boaz at night and basically propose marriage, Boaz was sleeping with the grain. Why'd he do that? To protect the grain from potential thieves. That's what the Philistines were doing: raiding Keilah's harvest and threshed grain.

And you really see David's godly character come out here. He's been a commander in Saul's army, he loves the people of Israel, and wants to see to their protection. And even as he's on the run from Saul for his own life, his concern is not primarily about his own well-being, but about the well-being of others. How do we know that?

Because he proactively asks the Lord: Do I go? Do I go save them? God didn't tell David to go, David asked if he should. And God says yes! This is my will. David tells the troops to mount up. And they're like, "Uh, are you sure about that? We're stretched pretty thin as it is seeing as how we're on the run from Saul." Just in case, David asks the Lord again: "Are you sure, God?" "Yes, I'm sure. Go deliver them." And he does.

Now, here's the thing. God knows what's about to happen. He knows David is going to help them, go defeat the Philistines for them, and then the people of Keilah - if God hadn't intervened - would have handed David and his men over to Saul! Thanks for the deliverance!

What's up with that? Didn't God know that would happen when David asked the first time? Of course he did. Why didn't God just let Keilah get destroyed? Because our God is a God of unparalleled grace. And sometimes it's his will that we serve people in a particular way all the while he knows what will go down in the future.

Have you ever served people and loved people who later betrayed you? How many parents have done everything they can to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord - not perfectly, but with a

sincere heart - only to have their child walk away from the Lord as an adult? Completely reject Christianity. Was pouring our lives into them when they were growing up a mistake? Of course not. We did what God commanded.

How many times have we served people in our church or neighborhood only to have them turn on us and betray us in some underhanded way. We didn't know who they really were? Does that mean we just don't serve any more? Of course not. We don't grow weary of doing good.

There have been many times in my life I've poured into people, invested hours, and even financially invested in them, only to have them walk away. Or just randomly cut off all communication or turn on me. What do we do with that? It's hard not to feel betrayed.

First of all - and I know you know this is coming - but those times we are betrayed we can remember that God sovereignly orchestrates that. God wasn't caught off guard here. "Sorry, David, I didn't know they'd turn on you." Yes he did. And in his sovereign grace he saved them anyway. Betrayal and redemption go hand in hand - just ask Jesus about Judas, the son of perdition.

Paul prays in the book of Philippians that he might share in the sufferings of Christ, becoming like Jesus in his death (**Phil 3:10-11**). To get there, you have to suffer. If you're going to know Jesus more - especially in his death - you know what you're going to experience? Betrayal. By the way, God answered Paul's prayer. By the end of Paul's life countless people, countless churches, had either rejected him, betrayed him, or ignored him. But Paul knew Christ in his sufferings all the more.

We also need to remember that God often shows **us** grace and charity when we take advantage of it, doesn't he? How many times have we presumed on God's grace and done things to God that were sinful? "But that was different than this!" Well, maybe, but you think God is going to just give us a pass because in our estimation our crime was less than theirs? No. Showing grace to others starts with remember the grace we have in Christ.

Third, so what? So what they abused our grace and kindness. God will still reward us when we stand in judgment for the kind deeds we did. And they will give an account for what they did in the judgment. This is the basic advice we give our kids, isn't it? Don't worry about what they're doing, you worry about what you're doing. God will take care of it in the end.

So we are commanded to serve those who will betray us. We don't know who might betray us, but if you live long enough you will be. Here's the second thing we can take away:

2) This is a hard one to swallow: Many times those we help have complicated situations they have to deal with.

Read 6-14

I'm going to make 2 points with this section. The first, as I mentioned, is that some people have complicated situations. It's easy for us to ridicule the people Keilah for being willing to turn David over immediately after he saved them. What's their problem? What in the world were they thinking?

Here's their problem and here's what they're thinking: They're thinking, we live just a stones throw from the Philistines! We need the support and strength of the Israelite army. Yeah, it's great that David and his men saved us, but what's going to happen to us after they leave? Is David going to come back and continually keep them safe from the Philistines? Probably not. So we need to make sure we're not on Saul's bad side so we still have military support, which means David can't stay.

On the other hand if they do let David stay, maybe David will kill the Philistines for them but now Saul would be after them. We can't put it past Saul - the demon-possessed maniac king to not wage a siege war against one of his own cities and slaughter them all anyway.

So they're in a really tough spot. You know when voting time comes around everyone talks about voting for the lesser of 2 what? Evils. That's always how it's been in a democracy. But these guys don't even have that luxury. They have to choose the 2 least bad out of 3 possible armies to upset. Think about that: "I've got 3 armies who

could kill me, which of the 3 do I think would do the least damage if I betray them?" And David, as helpful as he just was, seems to be the least able to help them long term.

Listen, that's how our lives are sometimes. Very rarely are our lives just squeaky clean, cut-and-dry, where everything just sort of works out in the end and ethical questions are always easy to solve. No, our lives are this rag-tag collection of complicated ethical dilemmas where we're just trying to do the best we can to work it out.

I want you to notice 2 things about this situation though. First, God had compassion on the people of Keilah. He knew what was going on, he knew the decisions they would make in the future, and he still saved them. He still kept them from death. This wasn't some sort of test to see if they were worthy of life or something. God used David, who was in a tough situation already, put him even more in harm's way to rescue these guys, knowing all the while they would turn David and his men over if they stayed. And in God's grace he still saved them. That's what our God does, he saves undeserving people.

Second, notice David's response. Or really, lack of response. He asks God, "Is it true Saul is coming and the people will give me up?" Yes. So David gets up and goes. No malice, no revenge, no harsh words, no cursing the people, no killing the people. He'll threaten to kill people later in life that betray him. But here he just leaves. We even have a psalm written probably at this time - Psalm 63 - and there's no hint of bitterness or anger.

We don't know how the people of Keilah approached the situation. Maybe they were relieved that David left because they didn't want to betray the men who just saved them. Side: David's little band has increased from 400 to 600 men now. His popularity is growing. And yet we know very little about what the reaction was of the people of Keilah.

That's not to excuse their betrayal or treachery. What we can learn is that it is helpful to acknowledge the difficulty of a situation some people are put in. And listen, there are going to be times in life where we just don't come to any resolution on a situation. There's just no agreement, no common ground, and we just move along. As much as we want peace and unity, in a broken and fallen world, there will be times when we just move on.

Third, and again this comes from the same section so I'll keep it brief, 3) Ironically our enemies often believe that God is on their side. **Read 7, 19-21**

Isn't that interesting? We know that the Lord is no longer with Saul, but in Saul's mind the Lord is still with him and for him. The Lord has given David into his hand! The Lord bless you for ratting out David! Saul probably even feels vindicated because David is running and Saul is succeeding. He's almost got David!

It sounds a lot like what Jesus warned the disciples about in **John 16:2-4**: Jesus: "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

All throughout history people have killed Christians and persecuted Christians thinking that what they were doing was offering service to God. And it doesn't even have to be killing people for them to feel they are offering service to God. They can do it by slander, or gossip, or blackballing people, misrepresenting them. All in the name of God.

And when they do we remind ourselves of Jesus's words in **Matt. 5:11-12**: Blessed are you when other revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We can rejoice in the midst of any persecution, any character assassination, knowing that this has been the legacy of every faithful prophet of God since the foundation of the world. And every faithful person who endures it well receives a reward.

4) You need truth to sustain you for the long haul. **Read 15-18**

We might be tempted to think that Jonathan's encouragement to David was just a nicety. He was just trying to tell David to buck up. In reality, Jonathan probably knew that David had been anointed to be king over Israel. He didn't know that he would die before that happened, but he most likely knew about God's design for David to reign over Israel.

Why that's important is because this isn't Jonathan just simply tossing out little bits of superficial encouragement to David.

Instead, it's Jonathan anchoring David's soul with truth that will keep him going. **Vs. 16** has a very unique phrase in the OT. **Read 16**

What does it mean that he strengthened his hand in God? To strengthen someone's hand is a euphemism in the OT for encourage them. NASB: "Encouraged him" - that's the idea. But it's not just generic encouragement. It's encouragement grounded in truth.

He encouraged him *in God*. Or the NIV: helped him find strength in God. That's the idea, is that the encouragement Jonathan gives David is not cheap and cheesy platitudes. A platitude is a saying that is so overused that it really means nothing. "Don't worry, be happy" or "buck up, it'll be alright."

No, this is Jonathan taking truths about God and applying them to David. He's probably reminding David of the lovingkindness of God despite his trials. Reminding David of God's anointing him to be king. Reminding David to walk in a manner worthy of a true man of God. Reminding David to find his strength in the Lord.

Listen to some of the psalms David wrote during this time:

Psa. 63:3-11: Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you...for you have been my help...your right hand upholds me...those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God..."

God's love and help and strong right arm and God's coming judgement of the wicked were what upheld David during severe trials.

Psa. 54:4-7: Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. He will return the evil to my enemies; 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.

Those are the truths that David was sustained with as he's feeling the weight of betrayal by those he just rescued.

Let me just encourage you, that far from being a hobby or side interest, having a depth of theology is the only thing that will sustain you through difficult times. And there is no more difficult time than when those who are closest to you, whom you have served betray you.

And let me just say that when you go to encourage those who are wading through a tough time, don't give simple platitudes and nice sayings. What will strengthen their hand in God - in the truth and faithfulness of God despite our situations.

Side: I think it is noteworthy that this is the last time Jonathan sees David. Jonathan will be killed in a few chapters. But the last time we see them together their fellowship centers around God, and Jonathan is strengthening David in the Lord, renewing his covenant with David. We don't know how long we have with anyone, let me encourage all of us to not fill our discussions with weather and sports and political speculation and nothingness. Let's make sure we are strengthening one another in God.

Last thing we can learn from David who ministered to those who betrayed him:

5) Don't Get Jaded. **Read 19-24**

So what do the people of Ziph do to David? Almost exactly the same thing as the people of Keilah. We might even argue over which city was the more treacherous: Keilah **would have** handed David over had he stayed there. But the people of Ziph actually approached Saul to do that and agree to track David and do recon for Saul to keep tabs on David's whereabouts.

It's only at the last minute that Saul gets word that the Philistines are attacking and he leaves David alone. Obviously God had a hand in keeping David safe in that situation.

I say that the last thing we can learn is to not get jaded. Don't become cynical or harsh toward those who have hurt us. Where is that in the passage? It's not in this passage, but it's in the next 3 chapters. In the next 3 chapters we see David's mercy shine forth. He will spare Saul's life twice - he could have easily killed this psychopath but he doesn't. He also spares the life of a foolish man named Nabal. Nabal was almost killed by David until his wife intervened, but nevertheless David spared him.

David is not marked by cynicism or anger or a chip on his shoulder or vengeance no matter how bad things get. He's marked by grace - the same grace God has shown him.

We're going to go through a lot in life. There will be plenty of difficulty that you'll go through, and if you've gone through a lot there will be plenty more. Remember the grace of God in Christ. Remember he will sort it out in the end. We're still called to serve him in merciful faithfulness now.

Pray