

**1 Samuel 23:1-29**

**SI:** On a historical level, the book of 1 Samuel is about the establishment of Israel’s monarchy, and about how David became God’s chosen king. On a spiritual level, 1 Samuel is about what it means to live by faith.

**INTRO:** I’m sure many of you have seen the famous Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, Robert Redford and Paul Newman. The whole movie is basically an extended chase scene.

After robbing a train the outlaws get chased by a posse of Pinkerton men. And no matter what they do, they can’t shake them.

Every time the Pinkerton men reappear once again, hot on their trail Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid say:

“Who are those guys?”

Of course they know who they are.

But they are expressing their frustration and discouragement that they just keep coming and coming. Who are those guys?

This section of 1 Samuel is an extended chase scene.

David is on the run, he’s always looking over his shoulder.

David hadn’t done anything wrong.

His only “crime” was he had been chosen and anointed by God.

He had the life of a peaceful shepherd until God showed up.

After that, he became a man on the run.

Cities weren’t safe. He goes from cave to forest to hilltop hideout to desert.

All this time he’s conscious that Saul is after him, looking for him.

Saul keeps coming and coming like the posse of Pinkerton men.

So how does this period of David’s life, this extended chase scene, speak to our lives today? What’s the point of connection?

I think a connection could be made to those problems and troubles in life that don’t stop, they just keep coming and coming.

Perennial problems, long-term troubles.

Some of you have experienced those, some of you are in them right now.

May have to do with finances and work,

or relational, trouble with your children or marriage,

or of a physical nature, an illness or pain, anxiety or depression.

It may be a long-term spiritual struggle, against some temptation or sin

or negative, damaging emotion.

You might get some short-term relief, but here it comes again, hot on your tail.

I think this also applies to big issues in the church and in society that Christians are sometimes caught up in either by deliberate choice or by circumstance.

My daughter Adrienne and her new husband Eliot and other daughter Eliza have become part of a church in Chattanooga, PCA church, New City Fellowship.

New City is about 40 years old and it started with a deliberate mission—

to use the Gospel to heal the rifts between black people and white people.

Racial reconciliation. They've been very deliberate about it all these years.

But as my girls have explained to me, the growing racial tensions in society have raised new tensions and debates even in the church.

Sometimes Christians are caught up in negative political or economic forces that are out of their control but the ripple effect goes on and on.

We've made it a habit for a number of years to pray every Lord's Day for the persecuted church.

Believers in those countries experience hostility and discrimination that keeps coming and coming. So I think there are lots of connection with David.

Almost every chapter in 1 Samuel there is an episode David wrote a Psalm about.

With this chapter it's the Ziphites, these fellow Israelites who told Saul where David was hiding and almost got him killed.

David wrote about that in Psalm 54. The intro says:

When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said: "Is not David hiding among us?"

Let me just read one verse

Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.

With all this going on in his life, David believed that God was his helper, and that the Lord would sustain him.

What's neat is that we can look at the story and see how it happened.

The Lord helped David in three ways—

through a priest, through a friend, and through a providence.

Hopefully this will encourage you because all three of these manifestations of God's help come to you through Jesus.

Jesus is a priest, a friend, sovereign controller of every detail of your life.

Let's walk through these three manifestations of who God is and how it speaks to us today as followers of Jesus Christ.

## **MP#1 David got help through a priest, and you can get help from your priest for your perennial problems and long-term troubles**

What the author of 1 Samuel clearly wants us to see here and throughout the story is a contrast between David and Saul.

Time and again set side by side and we are to notice the contrast.

Contrast that jumps out in this chapter is that David has access to God, and to God's word, and God's wisdom.

David repeatedly seeks out God's word and guidance and wisdom.

And he gets it! Through the priest.

Gives him God's word even when he repeats questions because he is afraid or men are afraid. David gets answers.

But did you notice Saul? None of it going on with him.

No hint that there is any divine access at all for Saul.

In fact, he doesn't seem to be interested in it. Not seeking it.

Saul's not asking God.

He's a man making his own strategic decisions. In doing so, entirely dependent on human assets, human intelligence—rumors, informants, spies, people bought off.

And he gets all this info, processes it, tries to make best decisions.

But it never quite seems to work. It's never enough.

Never gets quite what he needs to put a final nail in David's coffin.

Like Roadrunner and Wiley E. Coyote.

Never works out, even though he has all this firepower and manpower.

You get the sense that Saul is becoming increasingly frustrated and angry that it isn't working out, the information he's getting is not enough.

Vs 22-23, talking to Ziphites who have ratted out David.

Saul says: They tell me he's very crafty! Find all hiding places. Definite info!

Wants more and better info, but never works out. Not sufficient.

I'm often like Saul when I react to perennial problems and long-term troubles.

What do I need to know to fix this thing? Are you ever like that?

But we don't have to be like Saul, we don't have to rely totally on human data—we have access to divine guidance because we have a priest. Heb 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

When you're in a time of need, through Jesus you have help and access.  
David had the priest Abiathar with his ephod.

It's a little mysterious and unclear, how the ephod worked.

Seems you asked the Lord a question and it came back yes or no.  
Somebody at Covenant Group said it sounds like the magic 8 ball~

We have more than that. Our high priest speaks to us through what has been  
spoken and inscripturated. Beautiful and rich and true.

Hebrews 4. This word is God's word—living and powerful and active.  
True. I've seen its living, active power in people's lives.

As a pastor I've sat at a few deathbeds. Not many. We're a young church.

On those occasions I could just try to be a warm, pastoral presence.

Use my human assets to try to bring some comfort.

But the best thing to do, the thing that I've seen change people is read the word.

I've read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm to dying people and I've seen with my own eyes  
a wave of confidence and peace and assurance washing over them.

Because their priest is speaking those words to their hearts—  
not me, I'm not the priest—Jesus Christ their great high priest,  
giving grace to help in time of need.

If Jesus can help people who are dying, then he can certainly help you  
face whatever it is you are facing.

I ran across a quote from Malcolm Muggeridge this week.

He was a British journalist, agnostic most of his life, became a Christian.  
Commenting here on the non-stop decay of Western culture and institutions,  
the erosion freedoms and goodness in civic life. Big things I mentioned earlier.  
Notice he talks about trying to find help from human resources, how all are  
frustrated, like Saul. But you'll see where he finds his help.

When "we see around us at every hand the decay of the institutions and instruments of power, see empires falling to pieces, money in total disarray, dictators and parliamentarians alike nonplussed by the confusion and conflicts which encompass them. For it is precisely when every earthly hope has been explored and found wanting, when every possibility of help from earthly sources has been sought and is not forthcoming, when every recourse this world offers, moral as well as material, has been explored to no effect, when in the shivering cold the last fagot has been thrown on the fire and in the gathering darkness every glimmer of light has finally flickered out, it's then that Christ's hands reach out, sure and firm. Then Christ's words bring their inexpressible comfort, then His light shines brightest, abolishing the darkness forever. So finding in everything only deception and nothingness, the soul is constrained to have recourse to God Himself and to rest content with Him."

You have a priest!

## **MP#1 David got help through a friend, and you can get help from your friend for your perennial problems and long-term troubles**

God also manifests himself to David as a friend—talking about Jonathan. Last time these two close friends see each other in this life.

Let's focus on one detail about this final meeting, what Jonathan did for David. He did the best thing a Christian friend can do.

Says in verse 16: Helped him find strength in God.

“He strengthened his hand in God.”

Idea is Jonathan comes and takes his friend's hand and puts it into God's hand.

Isn't it interesting this is the image Muggeridge used? Christ's hands reached out.

How did Jonathan strengthen David's hand in God?

We're getting an abbreviated summary of their time together—

I'm sure there was some small talk and jokes and smiles—warriors.

But the way he strengthened his hand in God was to speak God's promises into David's life. He just repeated the promises God made to David.

You will be king over Israel.

I know now you're stuck in a forest and on the run from my father Saul, but you will be king over Israel. Jonathan just speaks God's promises.

When you are going through long-term troubles, you need a friend who does that.

Some of you are blessed to say you have good friends, good Christian friends.

I hope this body of believers will be a source of friendship to each of you.

Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen.

There are personality differences and life-experience differences that sometimes prevent even sincere believers from finding and making good friends.

And even if you do have good friends they will eventually leave—misunderstanding, change in circumstances, even death.

Friends ultimately leave us so we need a friend who won't.

The remarkable thing is the Gospel says that God in Jesus becomes your friend.

Read article about the theological implications of musical instruments in worship. Author contrasted two instruments—the organ and the guitar.

Not many churches have organs any more. I grew up in a pipe organ church.

Of course, guitars have become more and more common in church.

But anyway, the author pointed out that the sound and the feel of the organ is grand and majestic. It makes the worshipper feel small and a sense of awe.

The organ is also one of the hardest instruments to play, but often, in a church

setting, the organist cannot even be seen, hidden behind the console.  
Theologically, the organ has a message in worship.

It speaks of the grandeur, the majesty, the transcendence, even invisibility of God.

What about the guitar? It's an egalitarian instrument. It's accessible.

It's a sound that makes the worshipper feel involved and connected.

The guitarist isn't hidden like the organist, he's right there, face to face with the congregation, they watch and follow not just sound, even how he plays.

Theologically, the message of the guitar is the presence of God, the closeness of God, his immanence, his incarnation in Christ.

The author wasn't saying we need both organs and guitars—

Need to accomplish both in music and worship, grandeur, transcendence, awe—  
and a sense of intimacy and closeness and friendship with God in Christ.

Paul got it. Paul focuses our eyes on the majesty and glory of God.

But Paul also knew the Gospel meant God was his friend through Christ.

2 Timothy 4:16-17

Paul writing about a time being persecuted, and some of his friends left him.

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength.

That's what a friend does, right? Paul knew it.

He knew he had a friend in the Lord even when people had deserted him

Jonathan Edwards, greatest mind country ever produced, president of Princeton,

54 years old, throat ravaged by smallpox as a result of an inoculation gone bad.

He was dying far too young. He was at the height of his powers, but he was dying.

His wife, Sarah, who he deeply loved is not there, she was away and word had not reached her about his fatal condition.

So he asked his one daughter who is there to dictate some final words to his wife.

When he finished, he knew death was minutes away, he looked around and said:

“Now where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing friend?”

Here's a man who wrote at a great intellectual and theological level

of the majesty and sovereignty of God,

but he knew that God as his true and never-failing friend through Jesus.

You have that same friend. Nothing in this world, no crisis, no problem, no matter how long and wearying in which you don't have this friend standing at your side.

**MP#3 David got help through a providence, and you can get help from the sovereign controller of every detail of your life.**

God also manifests himself and helps David through a providential event.

He's the sovereign, invisible controller of all things.

We see the Lord in the last event in the chapter, the messenger that appears in the nick of time that distracts Saul from pursuit of David.

The ultimate reason for Saul's inability to capture David was not his faulty intelligence but because God didn't let him capture David.

God allowed the chase but he didn't allow the capture.

Vs. 14. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands. Written carefully to convey that the Lord is in control.

Now let's look at this very last event in the chapter.

This is the closest Saul got to catching David. It's very dramatic.

Saul chasing David in desert of Maon, Hebrew, lots of participles, action

You could film this scene for a movie and you'd be on the edge of your seat.

This is what made me think of *Butch Cassidy*.

It's a Western. The outlaws and the posse are racing up two gullies in the desert.

It says Saul was on one of the mountain and David on the other side.

The road split around mountain, Saul divided forces and capture inevitable.

Saul's going to get him. Trap's about to spring shut.

This probably is the closest call David ever had.

What happens? Messenger appears. Philistines are coming!

Saul has to break off the pursuit and turn to immediate threat.

Just as he was about to capture David, the enemies of Israel became David's ally at just the right time. The timing could not have been more perfect.

What a lucky coincidence.

If there's a sovereign God, then there can't be lucky coincidences.

This is God's providence. This is God working all things for good.

Some providences are more striking and apparent than others.

But every event of your life is under his control.

There's nothing ordinary about your life or accidental about your life.

God's not wringing his hands, wondering how he's going to keep you and preserve you and deliver you from this perennial problem, long-term trouble.

He's in control of everything.

That doesn't mean your life won't be without challenges.

Don't see many health and wealth preachers pointing to David's life—

come to God and have it great. Your best life now.

But as seemingly out of control as this time of David's life was—

it was a God-blessed, God-protected, God-anointed, God-directed life.  
And David knew in the midst of all the trouble God was upholding him.

Now, who is this that sovereignly directs the details of our lives?  
God. Yes. But we're Trinitarians.

We believe in one God who exists in three persons—Father, Son, Holy Spirit.  
Helpful to pay attention to Bible's revelation about the special work of each.  
Father plans, the Son does the work, Holy Spirit applies and perfects.

So who is it who is working in your life, sovereignly directing all the details?  
Who is it who sent that messenger at just the right time,  
and who even before that arranged for Philistines to attack?  
And who put David in that position, so he could experience help?  
It's God the Son. It's Jesus Christ. He's the sovereign arranger.

Did you catch that in our reading of Colossians 1 earlier?

“All things created by him and for him and in him all things hold together.”  
Jesus condescended to become your friend, yet he is at the same time holding  
together all the details of your life and working out his perfect will.  
To those who love him, who've been called by him—  
all the problems and troubles of life in this fallen world are being used  
by God for his purposes and for your good.

So no matter what you are going through, this is not a time to be afraid,  
this is not a time to be despondent—it's a time to be expectant.  
When God's people are faced with challenges we don't cringe—  
we look on Jesus with faith, fixing our eyes on him, waiting to see what he will  
bring out of this. We know it will be good. We know it will be good for us.