

1 Samuel 26:1-25

**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:** When I was a child my parents read a Bible story book to me called *The Bible In Pictures for Little Eyes* by Kenneth Taylor.

It was a wide, short book, so every page had one picture and a short story.

The pictures themselves were a variety of what I guess you would call classic Sunday school art. Probably drawn in 20s, 30s, 40s.

Some were so arresting that to this day,

when I read certain Bible stories those pictures will come to mind.

This story was one of them.

The picture is David and Abishai standing over a sleeping King Saul.

Abishai has a spear raised over Saul, but David has his hand on the spear.

I’m sure that picture intrigued me as a little boy.

It’s a great story.

Whenever a soldier goes right into the heart of the enemy position and comes out again, that’s the stuff of legends.

If you’ve ever read *Band of Brothers* by Stephen Ambrose or seen the mini-series, you’ll remember the time Lt. Speirs runs right through the middle of a German occupied town to give a message to Americans on the other side. Then runs back.

The Germans so dumfounded by this American sprinting by, can’t shoot straight.

When brave soldiers go right into the heart of the enemy position

it’s always to gain some kind of advantage that will help them destroy the enemy.

Lt. Speirs made his famous run because he wanted the Americans on the other side of the town to know what was happening so they could trap Germans and destroy.

What’s unique about this story is that David didn’t go into the heart of the enemy camp to destroy his enemy, he went there to try to save his enemy.

He went there because he loved his enemy.

Love your enemies. Forgive those who have wronged you.

The Bible says that a lot. It’s an important biblical theme.

Jesus Christ himself taught us to pray:

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

This story shows us a powerful example of loving your enemies.

So let's look at it under three points.

First, loving neighbors. Have to start here to lay the foundation.

Second, loving enemies. Probably the main point of the story.

Third, one step further, loving fools. Uniquely challenging.

Will see throughout how you can't do any of this without Jesus.

Credit where credit is due:

Sharing thoughts and insights from a sermon by Dr. Timothy Keller on passage.

## MP#1 Loving neighbors

Children's Catechism asks:

Q. What is the sum of the ten commandments?

A. To love God with all my heart, and my neighbor as myself.

Q. Who is your neighbor?

A. All my fellow men are my neighbors.

As I said, if we're going to learn to love enemies, start with loving neighbors.

Saul got some intelligence from and went with 3,000 picked soldiers to get David. They camped in a field with Saul in the middle. The safest place.

But with God's help and great skill, David and Abishai sneaked into camp right up to where Saul was sleeping.

Saul's spear was right by his head and Abishai whispered to David.

"The Lord has delivered your enemy into your hands.

Let me pin to ground with one thrust of spear. Won't have to strike twice."

One silencing thrust. He won't cry out. Just like movies where guard is stabbed.

David whispers: No—and gives a theological reason.

Vs. 11 Don't destroy him. Who can lay a hand on God's anointed and be guiltless?

This is a theme repeated three times in chapter. Again in vs. 16

David talking to Abner refers to Saul as the Lord's anointed.

Again in vs. 23, talking to Saul.

Lord delivered you into my hands, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed.

Anointed people in Israel were prophets, priests, kings.

They were supposed to save the people and serve the people.

The anointing gave them a sacred dignity.

David knew that Saul in himself deserved to die. Violated his anointing.

He had murdered innocent Israelites. He was trying to murder David.

But as an anointed one, David treated Saul with sacred dignity.

By sacred I mean the sense that God himself had touched Saul in a special way.

What does it have to do with loving our neighbors?

Here's the point:

There is a sense in which every person you meet has been touched by God and because of that bears a sacred dignity.

You could even say, in a sense, that every human being has been anointed.

And what I'm talking about is that wonderful statement in Genesis 1 which says that all human beings are made in the image of God.

What that fully means has been debated by theologians.

What does it mean that we are made in the image of God, somehow reflect God?

Is it our rationality? Our morality? Our relational capacity? Creativity?  
It's probably all those things.

But what's clear is that all people have a sacred dignity because of God's image.  
And that means that we must treat them in a certain way.

James 3 says don't you dare curse another human being,  
don't you dare speak abusively to another human being. Why not?  
Because you're cursing God's image. Cursing God's reflection.  
Even if it's a person like Saul who deserves to be cursed because he's done  
wicked things, that person is still made in the image of God.

Just like David reminded Abishai that Saul was the Lord's anointed.  
This person has been touched by God and because of that deserves respect.

Here's how John Calvin put it:

The Lord commands us to do good to all without exception. Yet the greatest part of humans  
are most unworthy, if they be judged on their own merits. But Scripture teaches that we are not  
to consider what they merit of themselves, but to look upon the image of God in all of them—to  
which owe all honor and love. So you say, [this person] has deserved something far different  
from me. Yes, but what has the Lord deserved from you? We remember to look upon the image  
of God in them which effaces their transgressions and with its beauty and dignity and allows us  
to love and embrace them.

When you look at somebody who doesn't deserve great treatment Calvin says:

Ok, ask self: But what does the Lord deserve? Person is in the image of God.

What does that person's Maker deserve from you?

David looked at somebody who deserved death, deserved being pinned to the  
ground with one thrust of a spear, but at great risk treated him with sacred dignity.

We should treat everybody that way.

We should never be abusive and harsh with our language.

We should treat people we think are below us, who serve us, the store clerk,  
the waitress, the customer service person on the phone as human beings  
made in the image of God deserving sacred dignity.

Even our enemies are made in the image of God,  
and that brings us to the heart of this story.

**MP#2 Loving enemies**

This first point about loving your neighbor sets the table for the next point—loving your enemy—which is the situation David found himself in.

How do you love someone who has wronged you, who owes you?

David says something about that too.

He gives theological reasoning for not avenging self on his enemy. Vs. 10  
As surely as the LORD lives, the LORD himself will strike him;  
either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.

Those are three very different outcomes.

It could be that God says this person is so wicked, strike dead right now.

Or, maybe he'll die at a ripe old age. Or, maybe he'll die in battle.

The point is: Only God knows what he deserves.

Only God has the wisdom to know what your enemy deserves.

You must never try to give people what they deserve.

If you are a judge or civil authority, another matter. Office—another sermon.

But never in your personal dealings. You aren't wise enough.

You don't know that person's motivations, background.

Don't know if should be struck down now or mercifully allowed to die in old age.

And God alone has the right to give your enemy what he deserves.

You don't have the right to give him what he deserves because you deserve to die

None of us live as we ought to live. None of us love God, love our neighbor.

If you are alive today, it is only because of God's forgiveness and mercy.

Jesus says that if you have received mercy, then you have to extend mercy.

You don't have the right to punish people.

Remember Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18.

King forgives his servant an enormous debt.

But servant then oppresses fellow servant who owes him small debt.

King finds out and says: Shouldn't you have forgiven his debt? Mercy removed.

Mark 11:25, if worshipping and have anything against anyone—forgive.

There's another reason you should forgive.

David, by forgiving Saul and not taking vengeance doesn't become Saul.

If he had allowed himself to get full of self-pity, self-righteousness that he justified taking vengeance, David would have become a king like Saul.

When you don't forgive, you become a little bit like the person who wronged you.

Makes you feel sorry for self, noble, self-righteous, justify cruel behavior.

If you don't completely forgive, the evil wins. Seeps in you.

So what is forgiveness?

When someone wrongs you, to forgive that person is a triple commitment.

Commitment first not to bring the wrong up to the person to punish him.

Not to pull it out and throw in person's face to make feel bad.

Commitment not to bring up to other people hoping they will punish him.

You're not going to tell and retell the wrong to others, hoping to undermine reputation, to get other people to think badly of him for what he did to you.

Commitment not to bring up to self, hoping some day, somehow this person who wronged you will feel the pain you've felt and get what's coming to him.

That means you're going to quit hitting the rewind button and replaying over and over the wrong done to you.

David does all this: He doesn't strike Saul, doesn't allow Abishai strike Saul.

And did you notice in conversation with Saul, he says: My lord the king.

Doesn't say: You envious, bitter murderer. You terrible person.

Reason David didn't kill him or let other people kill him is that in his heart

he wasn't killing him. He actually thought respectfully of him. My lord the king.

Truly wanted Saul to be changed and restored to be a better man.

Doing this hurts. Every time you forgive, it hurts.

Every time you refrain from bringing it up to the person to get back, it hurts.

Every time you refrain from telling other people how he wronged you, it hurts.

Every time you turn thoughts away from nursing resentment, it hurts.

It hurts because you are paying for the wrong instead of other person.

Essay by young man who forgave a woman who led him on and jilted him.

Once I was engaged to a woman who changed her mind. I forgave her. But it took forgiving her in small sums over a year—done when I spoke to her and refrained from rehashing the past, done whenever I renounced jealousy and self-pity when I saw her with another man, and done when I praised her to others when I wanted to slice away at her reputation. Those were the payments. Pain is the consequence of sin. There is no easy way to deal with it. Wood, nails and pain are the currency of forgiveness, the love that heals.”

Why does he call this payments? When forgive just say: Forget it. No problem.

But someone pays. If neighborhood kids put baseball through window, either you make them pay, or parents pay, or say: Forget it. No problem. Means you pay.

There is certainly forgiveness for little things where we don't feel the cost.

But when it's big things that do hurt and you don't try to make person pay, by making person feel bad or by ruining his reputation, it's a payment. It costs.

Abishai said: Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand.

You're putting yourself at risk by not striking him down.

But David paid by putting himself at risk.

Does this mean you let the person get away with it? Might sound like that.  
Might sound like you don't confront person with the wrong they've done.  
But that's not what I said: Don't bring it up to punish the person.  
That brings us to third point. . .

### **MP#3 Loving fools**

Saul has a moment of clarity and after being confronted by David, calls self fool.

Fool not dumb or stupid. Fool is someone who lives a God-ignoring life.

People like that are often willfully and destructively blind to harm do others.

I'm not talking about someone who is just immature and irresponsible.

Someone who borrows your car and wrecks it and can't pay for it. I feel terrible.  
But I'm talking about those people we sometimes encounter who are really bad.

Who are destructive ways and words and are in denial about it.

People who wreck people and relationships and who keep doing bad things to you  
That's a fool. How do you love a fool? How did David love Saul?

He didn't just forgive him and go on his way. He took Saul's spear and water jug.  
And he went to a high hill where he was not only safe from assault, could be heard.

He called down and first person who answered was Abner, Saul's chief general.  
Then Saul wakes up and says: Is that you, David.

David says: Look, my lord the king, I could have killed you. Here's the proof.  
And Saul is struck with remorse and his conscience shakes him and he says:

David, my son, I've been a fool.

What's going on in this scene?

David was being realistically and aggressively loving.

He was not being passive. Forgiveness does not mean being passive.

At least not in this situation.

He goes after Saul, but not vindictively, not to make Saul pay.

He's given up the opportunity to make Saul pay with his life.

Even now he doesn't try to make Saul pay with harsh words.

He's going after Saul's hardness of heart.

Look Saul, I've loved you, I've valued your life. I respect you.

And Saul starts to melt.

Most of us don't do what David did.

When we're wronged we say nothing on outside, but inside we boil—or—  
we let it out, we talk to the person to make them feel bad and punish them,  
make them feel as bad as we feel.

David does neither. Forgives Saul from the heart.

So when he talks to him, it's not to try to make him feel bad, but to restore him.

To forgive and love a person is never just to let him keep on sinning.

That's the worst thing for him. Becoming evil.

Like CS Lewis said, on way to becoming something horrible in eternity.

So if you really love the person and are concerned about the people who might be hurt by him, then you're going to lovingly confront.

Might take ingenuity. Look what David had to arrange to have convo with Saul.

It was complicated and it was risky.

Abishai said: Just kill him. Simpler and safer!

But notice this too: David was realistic.

He was realistic that Saul probably wouldn't change.

Even when Saul was visibly moved and said all the right things,

David didn't trust him and come down off safe position on the hill.

He was right not to trust Saul, because he didn't stick with his repentance.

Now you might think that if he didn't trust Saul, that means he didn't forgive him.

But forgiveness is an expression of love.

Naively trusting someone who's going to wrong you again is not loving.

It's not loving to let somebody sin against you. It's not the best thing for them.

So when you confront someone who has wronged you, it's not for your sake.

It's for their sake and for the sake of other people they might wrong.

If you confront people out of love, and truly without a desire to make them pay for hurting you and make them feel bad, simply to show them what's wrong—they may not change.

But if you confront them out of vindictiveness, they will never change.

See your confrontation as vengeance and retaliation and they will certainly resist.

Only hope is to forgive with the hope of restoring,

and at the same time doing so with eyes wide open and realistic.

Where do we get the strength to do this?

It's not hard to say nothing and boil inside. It's not hard to let them have it.

What David did was really hard.

Refrain from punishing or getting others to punish, hope for restoration your heart.

You get the strength by seeing how God's anointed one loves you.

Throughout 1 Samuel David foreshadows Jesus Christ, type, advance echo.

David was struck but didn't strike back. Jesus: Father, forgive them.

David committed himself to God. Jesus: Into your hands, I commit my spirit.

David took a risky path to try to restore someone who ultimately did not change.



Jesus: Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I have longed to gather, not willing.

Why did Jesus have to be crucified? Why couldn't God say, just forget it? If we know, if as finite beings even we know how much it costs us to forgive when we've been sinned against, how hard it is to give up our anger, give up our vengeance, give up even replaying the offense over and over in minds—then what must the price be for God?

He created us in his image. He's got a holy and pure anger and vengeance that is stirred by our ingratitude and rebellion. He remembers everything. So he had to pay a terrible price to forgive us.

And that terrible payment was nothing less than the death of his perfect Son.

That young man said it was a year of agony forgiving the woman who jilted him.

Think of Jesus' agony. The agony of hell concentrated in hours of darkness. When you see Jesus loving you and forgiving you, makes you love him.

Enables you to love and forgive other people, even enemies and fools. Knowing and feeling you are a sinner saved by the death of Jesus gives you the humility to forgive. You can never forgive someone you feel superior too.

Use this test: Are you saying: I would never do what that person did to me.

Gospel said you have all the seeds of that evil in own heart.

Just haven't had the occasion to do it. That humbles you.

Which if you don't have, there are lots of people you will never forgive.

Second, Gospel gives you the affirmation you need.

Reason hard to forgive some people, have hurt you in ways that took things away from you that were so important to you for your happiness and sense of worth and reputation. Those things are gone.

But if you know that your real worth and reputation is in your Father.

Know when people wrong you, they can't really rob you of your treasure and reputation in Jesus. So when you see Jesus loving you and forgiving you.

When you love him for the way he loves you, you'll be able to forgive.

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”