THE LORD FORBID THAT I SHOULD DO SUCH A THING

1 Samuel 24:1-22,

Key Verse: 24:6

He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.”

Since David has become a fugitive, he may have asked himself, “How long do I have to endure this life?” However today’s passage shows that God is working continually with a purpose to raise him up as a leader. There is a saying that disciples are made, not born. In the same way, good leaders are made and not born. God put David in various circumstances where He trained him in many ways. In last week’s passage David learned how to inquire of the Lord in times of crisis, becoming a man of prayer. Through today’s passage, God is aiming at perfection to train him to be a mature servant of the Lord.

I. FOR HE IS THE ANOINTED (1-7)

Look at v 1. After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.”In the previous chapter Saul and his men almost captured David, but David was saved by God’s intervention. As soon as Saul returns from the military campaign, he resumes his pursuit of David. This reminds us of our enemy Satan who is persistently coming to attack at anytime. One of Saul’s servants informs him that David is in the Desert of En Gedi. En Gedi is an oasis in Israel, located in the western shore of the Dead Sea. There are many caves and waterfalls with many trees. It is a good hiding place for David and his men. Psalm 57 shows how David prayed that time, “I am in the midst of lions; I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts”  By looking up to God, he kept his faith. “My heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music.Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples.Let us look at v 2. “So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.” Navy seals are one of the most courageous fighting teams in the world. Its special forces group named TEAM six(DEVGRU) brought down Osama Bin Laden successfully. Likewise Saul made Israel’s special force team with 3000 men in order to kill David. But when he arrived in En Gedi, he couldn’t resist nature calling and went into the cave alone. This happened to be the same cave where David and his men were hiding from him. Perhaps God had planned this perfect situation to train David.  As they watched the king relieving himself, what did David’s men say? Look at v 4a “The men said, “This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’”  When they said, “This is the day the Lord spoke of” or “as you wish,” they believed that God was giving David the perfect chance to kill Saul. Indeed, at this point Saul was a bad guy. He disobeyed God’s command. He even tried to kill his own son Jonathan for being a friend to David. He murdered 85 innocent priests and their families. Saul deserved to be punished. David could have agreed with his men. Indeed, David could have easily killed the king if he wanted to. Or he simply could have motioned for one of his men to get the job done. However he must have thought about what God wants rather than what his men wanted.

Here for a moment let’s think about how much David must have been tempted. What David’s men were asking him to do was the temptation of choosing a shortcut. What would have been the outcome if he ended up choosing to take such a shortcut? First of all David and his men must have been sick and tired of hiding themselves. Imagine how difficult it must have been for 600 people to hide in a dark cave. It would have been stuffy and inconvenient. Naturally they must have been compelled to choose such a shortcut in order to finish their lives as fugitives by killing Saul right then and there in this opportunity. David must have been tempted most because he is the very person who had suffered the most. Shortcuts are always before us. Computers are at our fingertips; making short work of research that used to take hours. Smartphones offer us really a great amout of information and convenience. Many shortcuts in life are logical, convenient, and even legitimate; appealing to our young millenial generation who are completely computer saavy. Regardless, we must remember the very important fact that there are many who are not. In real life there are no shortcuts to meaningful achievement and success. Likewise, there are no shortcuts to meaningful, lasting relationships with the Lord. In reality, as our dreams begin to fade, and time seems to go faster, bitterness and desperation can take hold and shortcuts become strongly appealing. However, there are dangers to taking shortcuts. Shortcuts do not often lead us where we truly want to go according to God’s desire. What is worse, shortcuts waste our valuable time in delaying the formation of a solid foundation. Shortcuts exchange things that are lasting with things that are temporary. Choosing shortcuts often results in regrets.

What are the benefits of taking the long way? Just as it takes time to turn a young boy David into a leader, God leads him on this long journey. In this way the LORD prepares him with a solid foundation; his personal faith and knowing a purpose in God and reaching where he truly wants to go. Likewise we often times find in the Bible that God who knows what’s best for us, doesn’t always take the short route. Often God chooses the long way. God’s way is always the best way. God makes use of delays in order to test David’s loyalty and obedience, and to train him in how to come to God under pressure. David learned a lot through having to be patient in God’s waiting room.  The best thing to do when you are in God's waiting room is to be patient like David and let God do His work in your life.

Let’s see what David does. Look at v4b “Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.” David did not cut off Saul’s head but the corner of his robe. Why did he cut off the piece of king’s robe? We do not know the exact reason. First he might have been tempted to kill Saul according to his men’s seemingly legitimate advice. However as he approached him, David chose the long way of God’s training until God approves to end it. Through cutting Saul’s robe, maybe David wanted some sort of evidence proving his innocence that he spared king’s life. David’s men might have been troubled that he did not take the opportunity to kill Saul. But David was concerned with something else.

Look at v 5. “Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.” Please take notice of the word, “conscience.” Our creator God has given us ‘unique feature of discernment’ called “conscience.” Have you ever heard of an animal that is conscience-stricken? Some theorists of the human mind consider the conscience to be the leading part of our mind and responsible for logic and reasoning. The conscience controls all the actions that we do on purpose while being awake. For example, when we decide to make a voluntary action like David when he moved his hand to use his sword, we are using our conscious mind. The conscious mind is also considered to be the gatekeeper that is monitoring and overseeing any and all action. So if someone tries to present you with a belief that doesn't match yours, then your conscious mind will filter or reject that belief and make a final decision as the captain of your mind. David was conscience-stricken; feeling guilty when he cut off the piece of king’s robe. Perhaps this was because he had not properly filtered and rejected what his men had said and was influenced enough to cut his robe. Here his conscience functions as a watchdog. He felt he had made a bad move. I believe that God was aiming at perfection in David’s life; to act accordingly in God’s image and likeness rather than compromising or rationalization at lower levels such as the ego or the id. We can see that this is a perfect training for David to fan into flame God’s virtue like superego or conscience to take leadership for others.

Now he turned around and said. Let us read v 6-7 together. “He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.” 7 With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.” The royal robe was a symbol of the king’s dignity and authority. David had shown disrespect for the king by cutting a corner off of the robe. Saul did not deserve David’s loyalty and respect; he was a man obsessed with killing David out of jealousy and hatred. Yet despite his shortcomings, he was still the Lord’s anointed. God had placed his authority on this man for the moment. David mentioned the Lord 3 times in v 6. “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed… for he is the anointed of the LORD.” In other words, he was thinking of the Lord when he saw the king. David feared the Lord. His conscience was stricken because of his holy fear of the Lord.  We can also see that the phrase “My master,” “the LORD’s anointed” or the anointed of the LORD” is repeated. To lift his hand against the Lord’s anointed would be an act of rebellion against the Lord. It is one thing for David to recognize the Lord’s anointing on Samuel who always did what pleased God. But it is another thing to recognize the Lord’s anointing on a crazy leader like Saul who does evil things. Again when God anointed Saul, He had special purpose for him. God chose Saul as a king over Israel and his kingship was ordained by God’s sovereign will. Therefore, Saul’s kingship came from God, and people were required to respect Saul as they respect God. Saul was a wicked king but David knew that he must respect Saul as long as God kept his position as king. It’s up to God to take it from him in his own time and in his own way. This is not a merely matter of politics. God’s kingdom is God’s kingdom. It can not be taken by human power as my wish. It’s strictly God’s own business. It was great learning curve for David and it matured his personal faith. He could recognize clearly that God was sovereign, even when his anointed servant was not right before him. Thus David saw him with God’s eyes simply because he was the one whom God anointed. To David, to show disrespect for God’s servant was to show disrespect for the Lord. If David did lift his hand against Saul, he would be no different than any other worldly king who seized power by force. 2 Cor 10:3 reads, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.”

To be a man after God’s own heart, David has to wait on God. He had to patiently endure God’s training through Saul. Psalm 18:23 shows how much he had struggled before the Lord in saying “I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.” When young people are growing in faith like David, it is almost inevitable that there will be friction with some other servants of God. But David shows us how to handle this through his deep respect for God and for God’s anointed one. We also must have a right attitude toward the Lord’s anointed servants. So there is clear order: The LORD supreme Almighty God first who made and keep his promise, the lord superior human master, and myself as his servant. In Psalm 110:1, David confessed, “The Lord says to my lord:“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” He learned such clear order in this training period and kept it always and succeeded as a humble king.

The same principle can be applied to our families and our church. Parents in a family are God’s anointed ones. Their role is to teach God’s principles in the Bible to their children and to establish a godly house. God also anoints his servants in the church as leaders to encourage and take care of God’s flock. Church members are required to show their respect toward leaders as God wants. Earlier in 1 Samuel, we had learned about Eli’s tragic family history. Eli’s sons did not respect God at all. When they had no respect for God, they also treated their father as a nobody. This is one example that shows how if someone has no respect for God, they do not respect God’s servants as well. God’s servants and parents are not perfect. We can find weaknesses in them. But that shouldn’t be our excuse not to respect them. David didn’t try to find Saul’s weaknesses although Saul had lots of them. Rather he simply said “….for he is the Lord’s anointed.” and he spared his life, respecting his kingship. He could do that simply because he honoured God and his anointed one. In the same way we also must respect God’s servants because they are God’s anointed ones. I pray that we may grow as God respecting people by respecting his anointed ones. I also pray that our growing students may respect their Bible teachers as they respect God.

II. May the LORD judge between you and me.(8-22)

Look at v 8. “Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.” David exposed himself by coming out of the cave. It was a dangerous thing to do. David’s courage came from God who had been with David every moment of his life. David was able to humble himself before the king and he appealed to the king for his innocence in v 9-11. David’s defense for his innocence was powerful. David explained how he had an opportunity to harm the king in the cave, but he did not, even though some of his men urged him to do. He showed the piece of king’s robe in his hand and said(11), “I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you.”

In his appeal to Saul, David also expressed his faith in God who is the God of judgement. He said to Saul in verse 12.  “May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.” He also said in v 15, “May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.” Here the word, ‘judge’ is repeated. David understood through the words of God that vengeance belongs to the Lord. Deuteronomy 32:35 says “It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.” Romans 12:19 also says, “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.”

Have you ever heard the expression “Don’t get mad; get even!” It means rather than getting angry because someone has wronged you, you should do something that will hurt them as much or even more as they hurt you. This can be appealing to our instinct. Revenge is a popular theme in movies. People often like to watch stories of vengeful men who take bloody action in retribution against their enemies for the loss of their loved ones. But we have to know that vengeance and retaliation are not biblical ways to deal with our enemies or adversaries. As we learned from David, bringing men to justice belongs to God. God is judge of all creation. Ecc 12:14 says “For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” If we try to judge or punish others according to what they have done to us, we are challenging God’s authority. We also remember Jesus’ prayer on the cross. “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” Jesus had the right to condemn his enemies but rather he forgave and prayed for us sinners.

As we live our life’s journey, we see all kinds of people. Some may be good or some may be bad. Some may be the worst. Sometimes we have a hard time because of people’s wrongdoings and wicked behaviours. Joseph in the Bible was betrayed by his brothers. He was also falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife. He was thrown into jail and he stayed there for over 10 years although he was an innocent man. But according to God’s sovereign will Joseph came out of prison, and he became a prime minister in Egypt. He then had power to take revenge against his brothers and Potiphar’s wife if he wanted to. But he didn’t do that. Joseph forgave them. It’s because he believed in God who trained him with His sovereign will and plan. Then he became a channel of blessing for many. God has his divine plan for each of us. Sometimes God leads us to bear with someone or some situation. At some point, we could be mistreated or we can be hurt by someone although we are innocent. Then, we don’t understand why God put us in such a situation. We may become doubtful of God’s fairness. David was in that exact situation where he could be doubtful of God’s fair judgement. But David put his faith in God. He believed that God is fair to judge between Saul and him. During his fugitive life, he didn’t understand fully about God’s fairness, but David kept putting his trust in God. That’s why he spared Saul’s life, and David let God judge between them. In the end, God proved his fairness by fulfilling his promise. Later Saul died in fierce battle against the Philistines and God exalted David as king over Israel. David endured hardship with Saul to the end. May we endure and overcome certain people or situations in the LORD whose judgement is fair and just.

What was Saul’s response to David’s appeal? He said, “Is that your voice, David my son?”(16). He called David his son. He also wept aloud. King Saul also admitted that David had treated him well even though he had treated David badly. The fact was undeniable. David had a piece of Saul’s royal robe in his hand to prove what he was saying. Saul also told David that he would be a king someday and the kingdom of Israel would be established in his hands (20). With his tearful confession, it appeared that Saul finally repented his hatred towards David. However we learned previously that Saul repented easily before Samuel using the words, “I have sinned,” without really meaning it. Apparently David and his men did not believe that Saul was a changed man. They went back up to the stronghold to continue to hide themselves from the king’s force until God’s time had come.

Let’s think about what David might have gone through personally through this Lord’s holy training to be raised up as a spiritual leader. In a time when people did as they saw fit, David made a powerful turn in making his personal decision to serve God. I would like to come up with a couple of qualities of a leader that God is pleased with. First, a leader submits to God’s sovereignty. Satan rebelled against the sovereign rule of God. He always wanted to lead, like God. Rebellion against God is sin. It is seeking to rise above God. But as a young man, David first learns to submit to the sovereignty of God. Second, a leader accepts suffering. Suffering is the means by which God prepares David for leadership. He’s tempted to avoid suffering, but suffering is God’s appointed means for him. David is willing to suffer in order to obey God, even though it’s not an easy thing for him. Suffering is the price David is willing to pay in order to serve Saul faithfully. In fact this is an image of Jesus Christ. In the early stages of the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, the devil tempted him to bow down to him in order to bypass all sufferings down the road as he promised to give Jesus all kingdoms on earth. But Jesus rebuked him and chose to suffer and lay down his life for us as the Good Shepherd. Also apostle Paul chose to suffer for the glory of God and his world mission purpose and he suffered a lot in serving many God’s flocks. Many contemporary Christians may have not tasted or may hate to take the cup of suffering. But suffering has a powerful way of changing us. In and through glorious suffering we are sanctified. Practically putting our priority on serving God and others are not convenient because this requires us to deny ourselves constantly. But it is glorious, meaningful suffering that’s different from worldly, fruitless, or meaningless suffering. Submission to the Sovereign Lord and suffering are related. Submission is subordinating our own personal interests in order to serve another. Christians may think and teach that suffering is not God’s will, and that true faith will be rewarded by immediate blessing and the absence of pain. They may be seeking opportunities rather than standing on biblical principles. That’s why God has given us a heart. Like a compass, our hearts takes His eternal words of truth deeply and have a bird’s eye view on our lives and teaches us powerfully about where we are now at and where is the right direction we need to go! And we will be a source of blessing for many like David.

Through this passage I learned how to honor my Lord and His anointed servant. My missionary life can be summed up as a struggle to choose either God’s way or my own shortcut path. God’s long way is to serve His mission as a Bible teacher while my shortcut is to go back to my old life and to focus on making money only. Often times I am tempted to go back to my old way when opportunities become available. But through this passage I am very thankful to the Lord who helped me to choose God’s best way to surrender myself humbly in order to serve many souls. May the Lord help me to joyfully serve my campus mission through Bible studies and become a blessing.

In conclusion David didn’t kill Saul despite a perfect opportunity. He could simply bypass his long suffering. But he did not go ahead of God in dealing with his enemy. He deeply respected God and let God judge his enemy. In this way he grew to be a man after God’s own heart. God blessed David who chose to suffer and serve God only; having him grow into God’s glory by becoming leadership material that God is pleased with and who fulfils God’s purpose to mold him into Jesus’ image. Rom 8:17 points out, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”Mat 5:48 says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” I praise the Lord who has vision for each of us to grow according to his own image. In this way let us all seek to be men and women, like David, whose heart is after God’s own heart, for His glory.

One word: For he is the anointed of the Lord!