

LESSON 9 ~ RETURN GOOD FOR EVIL

AUGUST 30, 2020

Background Scripture: I Samuel 24, 26

Lesson Passage: 1 Samuel 24:3-7; 26:8-11; Romans 12:17-21 (NIV)

Introduction: Do you desire God's best for your life? Unfortunately, many people miss out on blessings because they are unwilling to wait for His timing. Scripture encourages believers to be patient. David was a good example of this virtue when he refused the use of violence to take the throne that he knew would eventually be his. King Saul—who had become envious of the shepherd's ability, anointing, and popularity—planned to murder the young man. Twice during this time of pursuit, David had been within arm's reach of Saul and easily able to kill his pursuer. But in both instances, he chose to wait for God's timing. He was unwilling to take matters into his own hands, even though ending Saul's life would have provided much relief. Thankfully, David was patient. Notice the attributes that allowed him to wait for the Lord's timing. First, he had strong faith and believed that God would gain victory in the right time and with the right method. Second, he had the correct values: Killing a king would violate his conscience. Third, discernment helped him realize that assassination would mean stepping out of God's will. Fourth, strength played a role in the decision. How difficult it must have been to resist taking action that would result in freedom and possible royalty.

Scripture Reference: 1 Samuel 24:3-7; 26:8-11 (NIV)

3 He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. 4 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.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. 5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. 6 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. 1 Samuel 26:8-11; 8 Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won't strike him twice." 9 But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? 10 As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. 11 But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

Scripture Reference: Romans 12:17-21 (NIV)

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 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. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Topic Explored: "Return Good for Evil" ~ Patience is refined in trying times when you're frustrated with the waiting and tempted to act outside of God's will. Always seek His wisdom,

and follow the instruction you receive. Remember that “those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength” (Isaiah 40:31). Our message comes from the last three chapters of 1 Samuel, where David spares the lives of evil men. In chapter 24 David spared Saul’s life. In chapter 25, David spared Nabal. And now in chapter 26 David spares Saul again! Chapters 24 and 26 are very similar stories, but they have a different focus. We saw that the focus in chapter 24 was on returning good for evil. The focus here in chapter 26 is on leaving it up to God. In between these two episodes, in chapter 25, David learned from his incident with Nabal not to be rash and not to take things into his own hands. He learned to be patient and wait on God.

Memory Verses: *19 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* (Romans 1:19). NIV

Lesson Focus: 1 Samuel 26:8-11 (NIV)

Verses 8-11 ~ Part of trusting God to make things right is to watch out for temptation (Matthew 26:41) again. You can’t trust God to make things right if you insist on doing things wrong! When it comes to seeking personal revenge, the Bible tells us we need to watch out for temptation. Remember it’s God’s job to decide, **not yours**. Abishai asks David for permission to kill Saul right then and there, but David tells him no. David gives him two reasons. 1) Saul is the Lord’s anointed king. 2) God himself will strike Saul. Either Saul’s time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. God made Saul king, and David knows it’s God’s job to decide how and when to remove Saul from office.

David has learned from his whole episode with Nabal back in chapter 25 to trust God with the timing and the details. It would not only be wrong to kill Saul, but David also sees it as totally unnecessary. It’s not his job. God’s got this. David has learned his lesson from the episode with Nabal, and this time he’s going to leave it up to God. David tells Abishai to grab Saul’s spear and water jug, and together they retreat from the enemy camp. Abishai was most likely frustrated with David’s decision. He was convinced that God had given them this opportunity to kill Saul, not to show mercy to him. But David is absolutely right here. Romans 12:19 says: “*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.*” Leave room for God’s wrath. Leave room for God’s work. Leave it up to God. How do you leave it up to God? First, trust God to make things right. Watch out for temptation. Remember that it’s God’s job to decide, not yours.

Lesson Focus: 1 Samuel 24:3-7 (NIV)

Verses 3-4 ~ After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats. He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. 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.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe (1 Samuel 24:1-4). If you remember, Saul had broken off his pursuit of David to attend to the Philistines. But now, as soon as he finishes with the Philistines, he is right back at it with David.

David and his men are in the Desert of En Gedi. It is a wild place of cliffs and caves and wilderness but also of springs. So, David and his men have gone here for shelter, water and protection. Now when Saul learns that David is in the Desert of En Gedi, he takes three thousand chosen men from all Israel and sets out after David. Chosen men refers to the best of the best,

the military elite. So, Saul has three thousand trained soldiers going after David and his motley crew of six hundred men. While they are in the desert hunting for David, nature calls, and Saul goes into a cave to relieve himself. But unknown to him David and his men are hiding far in the back of the cave. So, here is Saul all alone in the cave and in a very vulnerable position. Saul has been looking for an opportunity to kill David. Now David has the opportunity to kill Saul!

In fact, that's exactly what David's men encourage him to do. They even tell him, "God has provided this opportunity for you!" But instead, David just sneaks up and cuts off a corner of Saul's robe. The Bible tells us Saul is relieving himself, which means he is using the facilities as it were, and perhaps resting and taking a brief nap as well. He would probably have removed his robe either way, and so David could cut off a corner of the robe unnoticed.

Saul has been trying to kill David and would strike at the first opportunity. Now David has the opportunity to kill Saul and refuses to do so (Romans 12:17a). This is a very hard lesson for us to learn and obey. When someone treats us bad, we naturally want to return the favor. If someone is mean to us, we want to be mean back to them. If someone yells at us, we want to yell at them. If someone cheats us, we want to cheat them. If someone steals from us, we want to steal from them. But God says don't repay evil for evil. Why not? Because then you would be doing evil! Just because someone has done you wrong doesn't give you the right to do wrong also. Two wrongs don't make it right. Someone mistreating of you does not justify you mistreating them. That's the first lesson. Don't repay evil for evil.

Verses 5-7 ~ Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. It is part of your Christian testimony. David is careful to do what is right in his men's eyes. After cutting off the corner of Saul's robe, David is conscience-stricken even for doing such a minor thing. He rebukes his men and won't allow them to attack Saul, telling them that it would be wrong to lift a hand against the Lord's anointed. David has great respect for Saul as the Lord's anointed. God was the one who put Saul into power. David will wait for God to remove him from power. David's not going to try and help God along, so to speak. There's a saying in the military. "You don't salute the man; you salute the rank." And even though Saul is a terrible king right now, he is still the king. He is still God's anointed one, and David is not going to lift his hand against God's anointed.

David is careful to do what is right in the eyes of his men, and we also should be careful to what is right in the eyes of others. In fact, that's exactly what the next part of Romans 12:17 says: "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." (Romans 12:17b) When you are tempted to return evil for evil, stop and think about your Christian testimony.

Lesson Focus: Romans 1:17-21 (NIV)

Verses 17-20 ~ "*In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.*" At first that seems like a gruesome description. It sounds like you're doing something bad to someone rather than good. But Paul is quoting from Proverbs; and in the book of Proverbs this is a poetic image or a metaphor for conviction of sin. "Burning coals on the head" would refer to the feelings of shame we experience for doing wrong. By doing good to your enemy, you will heap burning coals of shame and conviction on his head. That is, your good actions in response to their evil actions will lead them to conviction of sin and hopefully repentance as well.

Verses 21 ~ “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” When someone has hurt you, when someone has angered you or wronged you – do not give in to bitterness, anger or revenge. Ask God to help you forgive them.

Let’s talk about it. . .

- **Read: 1 Samuel 24:12. How do we apply the principle of not lifting a hand against the Lord's anointed in our day? What provisions are there in 1 Timothy 5:19-20 for calling leaders to account. What do you think God will do to those who slander, persecute, and martyr his appointed leaders?**

Making it personal:

Closing Prayer: *“Lord Jesus, following Your example and command, we pray for our enemies today. We ask first that You would saturate our lives with the Holy Spirit’s power and might. We release any unforgiveness, thoughts of revenge, or hateful emotions that can quench Your Spirit in our hearts. Then give us wisdom as we seek how to bless, to love, and to pray for our enemies. When we waver, not wanting to pray for our enemies, help us to remember Your grace in our own lives, and what we would be without You. In Your Name we pray. Amen!”*