

The Perfect Opportunity

I. To Get Revenge

II. To Show Faith

(1 Samuel 26:7-25) So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. {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 my 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; either 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." {12} So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep. {13} Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the hill some distance away; there was a wide space between them. {14} He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, "Aren't you going to answer me, Abner?" Abner replied, "Who are you who calls to the king?" {15} David said, "You're a man, aren't you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn't you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. {16} What you have done is not good. As surely as the LORD lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the Lord's anointed. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?" {17} Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is that your voice, David my son?" David replied, "Yes it is, my lord the king." {18} And he added, "Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of? {19} Now let my lord the king listen to his servant's words. If the LORD has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the LORD! They have now driven me from my share in the Lord's inheritance and have said, 'Go, serve other gods.' {20} Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the LORD. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea--as one hunts a partridge in the mountains." {21} Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly." {22} "Here is the king's spear," David answered. "Let one of your young men come over and get it. {23} The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. {24} As surely as I valued your life today, so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble." {25} Then Saul said to David, "May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph." So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

Tell me, have you ever had a few laughs at the expense of someone who was sound asleep? You know, your roommate is dead to the world, and you sneak into his room and kind of tickle his nose with a feather and watch him swat the fly. Or better yet, you fill his hand full of shaving cream and let him slap that on his face. Chances are, we've all had the opportunity to make a joke of someone when they were sleeping.

In our text for today we meet a man who also had the opportunity to take advantage of someone who was sleeping. Only in his case, it wasn't just a chance to get a laugh. It was a chance to get something much more serious. It was a chance to get revenge. Today we turn our attention to a critical moment in the life of King David. Here in 1st Samuel chapter 26, God gives to David what we might call,

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II. To Show Faith

First, the perfect opportunity to get revenge. Why do I say that? Well, look at the first verse of our text. It reads, *So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul,*

lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Can you picture the scene? King Saul and his army of three thousand soldiers have come down to the desert of Ziph, a desolate region west of the Dead Sea, for the express purpose of finding and killing David. But now in the middle of the night, David and his nephew Abishai have snuck into the camp of Saul's army and find themselves standing directly over Saul, who is sound asleep. Young Abisha can hardly believe their good fortune. He sees this as the perfect opportunity to kind of even the deck. He whispers to Uncle David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands." In fact, Abishai is ready to do the honors. "Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice." In other words, "Boss, I can't miss! One spear thrust through his heart and your sworn enemy will be going nowhere. He'll be dead!"

Now someone might ask, what reason did David have to want King Saul killed? Well, first, because that's what Saul wanted to do to David. Saul was so jealous of David that he's already sent an army out to kill him. Back when David was working in the palace, Saul, in a fit of rage, had tried to pin David to the wall with a spear. Ever since that moment, David has been running for his life. He knows that Saul is out to kill him.

Certainly, it would have crossed David's mind that here was the perfect opportunity to kind of turn the tables on Saul, to make a retaliatory strike. It would be a chance to even the score—especially when you realize that God had already told David that he was going to be the next king. Maybe this was all part of God's succession plan: Let David get revenge on Saul, and at the same time, clear the path for him to ascend the throne. Apparently, that's how David's nephew read the situation. What does Abishai say? *"Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands."* In other words, "Come on, David! This is the perfect opportunity to get what's coming to you. The perfect opportunity to make Saul pay for what he's done. The perfect opportunity to get revenge."

Tell me, has the voice that was whispering in David's ear ever whispered in your ear? You know the one. The one that says, "You're not going to let him get away with that, are you?" Or, "what she did to you is wrong. You need to make it right. You need to make her pay."

My friends, isn't that little voice inside of each one of us? When someone sins against us. When they hurt us with something they say or do. When we've been mistreated or disrespected or betrayed in some way—whether by our spouse or by our boss, or by our government, or by our world. When we feel like we've been treated unfairly, when we feel unjustly accused or unjustly punished, we feel like someone has to make things right. We think, "And if God won't do it, then I'll guess I'll have to do it myself. Somebody's got to pay."

My friends, do you realize how often that kind of thinking drives human behavior? Last week on my trip home from the Philippines, I took the time to watch a couple of movies. (I realize that other than the Luther film this week, the only time I watch movies is when I'm stuck on a plane for 20 hours.) Anyway, one of the movies I watched was called the Revenant, with Leonardo DiCaprio. Anybody seen that movie? (It's kind of gory. I'm glad I was watching the edited version.) Anyway, the gist of the movie is that DiCaprio's character, after being mauled by a bear, basically spends the rest of the movie absolutely determined to get revenge on the man who had left him for dead.

Now, chances are you and I are not going to crawl for miles through the frozen tundra to bring someone down, but that doesn't mean we might not hold a grudge against someone, or give them the silent treatment, or run them down behind their back. In each case, there is something inside of us that wants to make them pay for what they did. We want to even the score. And in

each case, that something inside of us is sin. What does Scripture say? *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.”* And again, *“Do not take revenge, my friends.”* (Romans 12:17,19).

The question is, how do we overcome the desire to get revenge? How do we keep from taking out our frustrations on those who have hurt us? To answer that question, let's go back to our text for today. Here we'll see that the situation that David found himself in was not only the Perfect Opportunity to get Revenge. It was also:

II. The Perfect Opportunity to show his Faith.

I want you to notice how often David's words and actions are an expression of his faith in God. First, David acknowledges that God is the one who put Saul in a position of authority over David. Saul is still God's anointed representative who is therefore worthy of David's honor and respect. That's why, when Abishai offers to kill Saul, David says, *“Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?”*

Secondly, David shows faith in God by leaving Saul's final judgment in God's hands. How does David put it? *“As surely as the Lord lives, the Lord himself will strike him [Saul]; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.”* In other words, how Saul dies, whether by natural or unnatural causes, whether it's timely or untimely—all that, David says, is in God's hands.

And thirdly, David shows his faith in God by basically taking the high road. Instead of running a spear through Saul, he simply “borrows” Saul's spear and water jug—first, to have a little fun at the expense of Saul's body guard, Abner. David calls out to Abner from across the valley, *“Why didn't you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head? What you've done is not good.”*

But, actually, David had a much more important point to make. David wanted to show to his own men, and more importantly, to Saul's men, that he was a man of faith. I mean, think about it. Saul had undoubtedly told his soldiers that David was a bad man—that's why they were out to kill him. How could David prove his innocence? How could he prove that he was, as Scripture puts it, *a man after God's own heart*? He could prove it by doing exactly what he did here. Rather than using this perfect opportunity to kill Saul, he uses it to forgive him, to show him mercy. And in so doing, David showed the men around him what God's heart looks like.

My friends isn't the same thing true for each one of you? In the pages of Holy Scripture God has revealed to you what his heart looks like. He has shown you the love he has for you in Christ Jesus your savior. In the washing of holy baptism he has washed you clean and made you his precious child. In the sacrament of the Holy Supper he is restored the relationship that you have with God. All these are expressions of God's unconditional, undeserved love for you. It is God's love for you, even though you were once his enemy, which in turn gives you the desire and the ability to show that love to others, even when they treat you like you are their enemy. In fact, that's one of the things that distinguishes you as men and women of faith.

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus says that it's not hard for people to love those who love them. How does Jesus put it? *“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”* (Matthew 5:46-47) But you see, Jesus holds you and me to a higher standard. How does he put it? *“You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' {44} But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, {45} that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:43-45)* Now, don't misunderstand those words. Jesus is not saying that if you love your enemies you'll

qualify for a position as a child of God. No, it's the other way around. Because God has made you his children, by grace, through faith in Jesus. Because he has revealed his heart to you—in fact, because he's put his heart in you by the power of the Holy Spirit, you dear Christians are fully equipped to do what nobody in this world expects you to do. And that is, to love even your enemies.

So what does that mean for your life? Maybe you're thinking to yourself, "Pastor, I don't think I have any 'enemies'. I don't think anyone is trying to kill me." Well, praise God for that. But maybe instead of thinking of your enemy as some guy with a knife in your back, think of the person that person at work who kind of rubs you the wrong way, the one who is hard to get along with. Or that family member kind of brings out the worst in you. You know, there's always some conflict, always some hard feelings. Think of the person you really don't like, the person who really doesn't like you. What will you do to love that "enemy"?

Here, let me give you three suggestions. First, pray for that person. What does Jesus say? *Pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44)*. It's hard to hate someone when you are sincerely praying for them. Secondly, do something for that person that is totally unexpected. Figure out what that person needs and then meet that need. How did St. Paul put it in our epistle reading today? *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink."* (Romans 12:20) Sometimes when we put our faith into action, our heart will follow. And finally, when it comes to those who have hurt you, those who have sinned against you, trust that God knows the truth. Entrust yourself into his hands. Live your life, grateful that he's forgiven your sins, and confident that he can and will deal with the sins of others.

My friends, the bottom line is this: We're all going to be presented with lots of "opportunities" in life. Opportunities to take justice into our own hands. Opportunities to pay back people for the nasty things they did or said. Opportunities to get revenge. But every one of those opportunities is also an opportunity to leave the justice up to God, an opportunity to put our faith into action, an opportunity to love and forgive those who don't always love us. For when we do that, we show that, by God's grace, we are the children of our Heavenly Father. Yes, we show that we have God's heart. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.