**23rd November 2014**

**1 Samuel 24**

There is a story of a truck driver sitting in a restaurant minding his own business when a motorcycle gang came in and began to harass the trucker. One hoodlum in particular, got right up in his face and said, "You think you’re a big man when you’re in that 18 wheeler big truck. But you get out of that truck and your nothing but a wimp.” The trucker just ignored him and kept on eating. Finally after some more verbal abuse that the trucker disregarded the gang member took his orange juice and poured it all over his food and said, "How do you like that?" The trucker just pushed himself back from the table went over to the cash register, paid and walked out. And the biker looked at the waitress and said, "He’s nothing. Once he gets out of that truck he’s not much of a man is he?" And the waitress who was looking out the window said, "No, and he’s not much of a truck driver either, he just ran over 6 motorcycles on the way out of here."

We kind of like that. That appeals to our carnal nature. When we get cut down we like to find some clever way to cut back. But God says, "Resist that impulse. Don’t take revenge or hold a grudge."

This week we had the news of another beheading of a Western hostage Peter Kassig. He changed his name to Abdul Rahman, after he converted to Islam. His grandfather was a co founder of Christians for peace and justice in the middle East and advocated for Palestinians in their search for a homeland. His parents speaking from a Methodist Church in Indianapolis spoke with great dignity and restraint. They said

"Our hearts are battered, but they will mend. The world is broken, but it will be healed in the end. And good will prevail as the one God of many names will prevail,"

"Pray also for all people in Syria, in Iraq, and around the world that are held against their will. And lastly, please allow our small family the time and privacy to mourn, cry -- and yes, forgive -- and begin to heal,"

The violence of Islamic jihadists has created fear and resentment. It is stoking concerns about immigration that is feeding into politics and election issues. The fear of the foreigner and the backlash and desire for revenge.

This week residents of the German town of Wunsiedel adopted a novel tactic against neo-Nazis who stage an annual march through their streets. They were marching against immigration so Citizens of the town sponsored the neo-Nazis for each metre they marched, and raised nearly £8000 for EXIT-Deutschland, a charity which helps people leave far-right groups. It was a very interesting response to their intimidation.

Revenge: It may be one of life’s most subtle temptations. All of us probably at one time or another have wanted to get even for being mistreated. Maybe it was because an employer promised you something and never came through. Maybe a mate walked out on you when you needed him or her the most. Maybe it was a parent who failed you or someone in the Church who hurt you or has not appreciated your efforts. And now you are waiting for the chance to get even or your seething inside because you are holding a grudge.

Your ability or inability to handle this temptation will speak volumes about your character and if you are a Christian, it’s a good measure as to how far you’ve grown in your Christian walk.

Most of our culture today doesn’t recognize it as revenge. It is called "my rights." Or in our more educated moments we call it "justified retaliation." "I don’t get mad - I just get even."

But whatever we call it, God calls it revenge. And His feelings toward personal vengeance are anything but ambivalent. God very clearly commands us through the Bible that if there is to be any "getting even", we are to leave for Him to do. Why is God so adamant about resisting this temptation? Because He knows what it does to us and others. He knows the resentment that poisons us and the pain we inflict upon others by getting even is never in anyone’s best interest.

But how do we resist? Especially when the feelings are so strong within us? Well, in our passage today we may get some suggestions.

Our sermons this month have followed David from the sheepfolds of Judea to the battle fields of Israel.  We have watched a boy mature into a man.  Last week we saw how King Saul had become jealous of David .

Today, we find David hiding in a cave with his men. He is hiding from Saul who has an army of three thousand men and they are out to find David and kill him.

David was hated, not for evil in his life, but because his life was pleasing to the Lord!  You see, David had never wronged Saul, but Saul was after David anyway.

It is inevitable that some people will be against you as you go through life, especially if you are a leader.  Just be sure they are against you for doing right, and not for doing wrong. ( Matt. 5:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:14-15.)  Sometimes people are against us for good reason!  Sometimes, they are right and we are wrong!  If people are to find fault with us, let it not be because we are stubborn, hateful and mean; rather let it be because we are holy, decent and good!

While David is in that cave, he is presented with an opportunity to exact revenge upon his greatest enemy.

King Saul needs to go to the loo. He sees a cave and thinks, as you do if you have ever been caught short in the countryside, there is a sheltered secluded spot to spend the proverbial penny.

David has the perfect opportunity to kill Saul, claim the throne and elevate himself all the way to the very top.  But, David does not do what most people would have done in that situation.  Instead of reacting with hatred, revenge and murder; David displays, love, grace, compassion and forgiveness.

In this little glimpse into the life of David, we are allowed to see the real heart of this man.  Here, it is easy to see why the Lord called David, “*A man after Mine Own heart.*”

So here are four suggestions on avoiding revenge.

1. **Resist harming those who oppose You (vv. 4–7**

David's men sought to persuade David to attack Saul. "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you'" (v.4).

To these men, David was a hero!  If he failed to kill his enemy when he was given the chance, would he not look like a coward in their eyes?  There was the subtle temptation to get even and to protect his reputation.

How many times have we retaliated against someone who hurt us in an effort to protect our reputation?  We do not want others to think that we were weak.  We want the respect of those around us, so we lash out when we have the chance, thinking it makes us look big to those around us.

My friends, I don’t want to hurt you, but when you think that way, you are living an illusion!  You never look more childish and more petty than when you take your revenge just to save face before others.  Look at the example of Jesus and learn a valuable lesson – Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:53; Luke 23:34; 1 Pet. 2:23.  Our reputation means nothing!  Our opportunities to display the spirit of Jesus Christ mean everything!)

In all fairness, David had every right to harm Saul since David was now the rightful king of Israel. He even buys into this idea by sneaking near Saul and cutting off a piece of his robe. But afterward David's heart struck him. He would not seek the harm of the Lord's anointed king. David is affirming Saul's worth and respecting that though he is a flawed and sinful man, yet he is still the king God initially chose for Israel.

Those of you that have been in the military were taught to salute, but you understand that you salute the rank, not the man. The man wearing the stripes might be an absolute fool. But you saluted the rank out of your respect for authority. And David was saying, "No matter how awful Saul has been, I shouldn’t have been disrespectful to the Lord’s King."

This is an important point for us as we deal with conflict. It's not about us! We so quickly see the hurt others cause us and the pain they have inflicted on us, and we forget many sacred truths about them. They are created in God's image. If they are Christians, Christ redeemed and purchased them. If they are not Christians, they need the Gospel. If we could see past the hurt, our hearts should be struck. We will want to move toward them and display humility and patience.

Our housegroups are looking at the topic of humanity - who we are? It is a foundational belief that humanity is created in the image of God. There is something of God in everyone. From the kindest saint to the evil terrorist. Once we reduce our humanity to mere biology or psychology, or sociology then we ae in danger of reducing our humanity and making us nothing special just the product of genetics, or brain conditioning, or social and cultural forces. The value and dignity of humanity is an essential belief that should affect how we treat and respond and value each person – whether friend or foe, stranger or neighbour.

We must also be aware that others may urge us to listen to our natural instincts to fight back. Even well-intentioned Christians may encourage us to fight with the weapons of this world. We must be careful to heed any advice that may hinder reconciliation and growth between us and those who oppose us. How easy would it be to write someone off when perhaps God is doing something bigger in both our lives.

In what ways are you only seeing the hurt someone is causing you? How can you affirm their worth and value as a person created in the image of God?

2. **Make the first move to reconcile (vv. 8-15)**

David seeks reconciliation with Saul. At great cost and risk to himself, he pursued Saul to clarify and resolve the situation. Saul need not fear David. Saul need not believe the lie that David was his enemy. David wanted to clarify this. Saul should fear David as he should fear a dead dog or a flea (v. 15).

This is how we should approach our enemies. Sitting back and waiting for them to make the first move feels natural and justified. But God gives us the strength and courage to move toward our enemies first. David is helpful here for a two reasons.

First, he confronts Saul's paranoia. He says, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm?'" (v. 9). Often conflicts arise because of what we heard about someone or what they heard about us. We have no evidence that David wanted to harm Saul. Saul believed a lie. David gently confronted him on this.

Second, David clarifies his intentions with Saul. He meant him no harm. "But my hand shall not be against you" (v. 13). The longer a conflict festers and grows, the more slanted our views of others become. What began as a small point of contention can turn into a major misconception. We must seek to clarify our motives and intent as we pursue others and seek to reconcile with them.

David follows clear, biblical principles that teach us how we should react when we are wronged by others. Look at what he did:

      1.  v. 8 David took the first step.

      2.  v. 8 David humbled himself before Saul.

      3.  v. 8 David honoured his Lord and King, Saul.

      4.  v. 9-11 David spoke the absolute truth concerning the

            situation.

      5.  v. 9-11 David declared his own guilt.

      6.  v. 12-13 David committed himself to doing the right thing.

      7.  v. 12-15 David placed his case in the hand of the Judge of the universe.

Who are you avoiding that you should pursue? Are you waiting on them to move first? Why not rather go to them, clarify the situation and gently confront what has perhaps turned into a misconception?

3. **Agree to do each other good (vv. 16–22)**

David and Saul reached an agreement. While Saul's promise will only be temporary (1 Sam. 26), David would keep his word to Saul. He would do Saul and his house good as long as he was king. We see evidence of this in how David responds to Saul's death (2 Sam. 1:17–27) as well as the story of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9)

Evidence of true reconciliation is continuing love and goodness. Conflict always gives us a chance to get closer to one another, grow in our own understanding of ourselves and others, and glorify our God. If a genuine commitment to do one another good is not reached, then reconciliation has not taken place.

C.S. Lewis said, "Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive" (C.S. Lewis, [*Mere Christianity*](http://www.lifeway.com/product/001062881)). Many of us love the idea of reconciliation and doing good to our enemies, but when we have to do it, we see our true intentions and motivations.

Thomas A. Edison was working on a crazy contraption called a "light bulb" and it took a whole team of men 24 straight hours to put just one together. The story goes that when Edison was finished with one light bulb, he gave it to a young boy helper, who nervously carried it up the stairs. Step by step he cautiously watched his hands, obviously frightened of dropping such a priceless piece of work.

You've probably guessed what happened by now; the poor young fellow dropped the bulb at the top of the stairs. It took the entire team of men twenty-four more hours to make another bulb. Finally, tired and ready for a break, Edison was ready to have his bulb carried up the stairs. He gave it to the same young boy who dropped the first one.

Maybe that is what true forgiveness is all about!  It is coming to the place where we trust the offending person once again!

Why are we so reluctant to do good to those who have opposed us? How can we overcome this and truly seek the good of others? Are you committed to the good of those who previously opposed you?

Abraham Lincoln was once being criticized for his attitude towards his enemies. "*Why do you try to make friends with them?*” a colleague asked. "*You should try to destroy them." “Am I not destroying my enemies,*" the President asked gently, "*when I make them my friends?*"

4. **Finally place your situation in the hands of God.** V 15 and also 2 Sam 1

David says in verse 15: May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.’

Paul writes in Rom. 12:19 - "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."(NIV)

Jesus didn’t teach that you just sit back and let everybody run over you and there is no hope for justice. The message of Jesus is: You sit back and you take it sometimes because you know that in the end that God is just and He will extract revenge, if there is no repentance.

That’s what David was able to do. He waited in the wilderness for 8 years! And then there came that day when the 15th verse comes true and God takes care of Saul. And there is great irony in Saul’s death. Saul is in battle and he is wounded critically. Even facing death his main concern was to preserve his image. He offers no prayer of repentance, no plea for help and so he attempts suicide with his sword. But to his dismay, we learn 2 Sam.1, Saul doesn’t die right away. As he is in his death throes he turns to a stranger who has suddenly appeared and asks him to "stand over him and kill him."

If you remember in a previous sermon why Saul was rejected and David appointed the new King was because of Saul’s act of disobedience to God to completely destroy the nation of the Amalekites. Guess what nationality this stranger is that gladly destroys him? That’s right, he’s an Amalekite. The very enemy that God had ordered Saul to destroy now destroys him. The events of his sad career had come full circle.

And so David takes over the throne, the truth is known, he is vindicated and he becomes Israel’s greatest King.  
But waiting on the Lord is such a hard thing to do when we’re the one mistreated, isn’t it?

The secret of handling mistreatment, is keeping your eye on the goal. Our goal should be the same as David’s and that is first of all, to please God. In order to do that it may mean swallowing our pride or putting up with unjust treatment. But keep your mind on the goal and remember God has the last word. Our motto needs to be: “Don’t lash out.. leave it to the Lord.”

May we resist harming those who oppose us; may we make the first move to try and seek reconciliation; may we agree to do good to the other; but in the end we leave it to God to decide.

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