

A God who Encourages

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[0 : 00] Well could you please turn with me to the passage we read in 1st Samuel 23. 1st Samuel 23, we're looking at the whole chapter, but if you look with me, especially at verses 16 and 17.

1st Samuel 23, verses 16 and 17. And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God.

And he said to him, Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.

I don't know how any of you came into this building today. I don't know how any of you felt when you woke up this morning. Maybe you came into this building feeling very blessed, very encouraged.

That maybe you came here today feeling broken. Maybe you came feeling bruised. Maybe you came feeling bitter about the experiences and providences that are coming your way.

[1 : 01] Well however you feel today, I want you to come away from this place hopefully encouraged. Because this passage in 1st Samuel 23 contains some staggering claims about a God who encourages.

And what we're going to look at today is the way that God encourages David. In three different locations and in three different ways. The first thing we see is the encouragement in Keilah.

In verses 1 to 13. And in these verses we see that David enjoys guidance from God and access to God. David enjoys guidance from God and access to God.

In verses 1 to 6 we see that David delivers Keilah. David is told in verse 1 that the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and robbing the threshing floors. Now Keilah was a walled city about three miles from the cave of Adullam where David was staying.

And the Philistines, Israel's enemies, are coming to Keilah during the wheat harvest. And they're going off with their hard earned crops. And David's immediate response you see in verse 2 is to inquire of the Lord.

[2 : 03] He has a passion for the welfare of God's people. But he also has a passion to walk in line with the will and word of God. And so he asks the Lord if he should fight. And the Lord says in verse 2, go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah.

But in verse 3 we see that David's men are reluctant to take on the Philistines. They're already running from Saul. And that is bad enough. But when they're even more afraid of those Philistines than they are of Saul.

And when they hear David's proposal to attack the Philistines. They turn around and they say, you cannot be serious. This is too much. This is too great a challenge. And so again David inquires of the Lord.

This time in front of his men. When the Lord says to him in verse 4. Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will give the Philistines into your hand. And so in verse 5 we see that David and his men go and attack and destroy the Philistines.

And suddenly we read in verse 6. When Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, had fled to David to Keilah. He had come down with the ephod in his hand. Now I just want to note with you that verse 6 is not a throw away line.

[3 : 10] Verse 6 shows us how David could inquire of the Lord. You remember that Abiathar had fled to David after Saul had killed the priest at Nob in chapter 22.

And this man, Abiathar, has taken the ephod with him. The ephod was the apron. It was the priestly garment on which the Urim and Thummim were attached. The Urim and Thummim were those devices given by the Lord to the priests in the book of Exodus.

As a means of discerning his will. And so the presence of Abiathar and the ephod in verse 6 is showing us that David has a priest.

Through whom he receives guidance from God. And through whom he has access to God. And then verses 7 to 13 David flees from Keilah.

In delivering Keilah from the Philistines, David has exposed his way to vows to Saul. And when Saul hears this he is delighted saying in verse 7, God has given him into my hand for he has shut himself in by entering a town at his gates and bars.

[4 : 14] And so Saul gathers all his forces to go against David. It's such a sad reflection on Saul, isn't it? That Saul had been anointed by the Lord to do what?

Fight the Philistines. And Saul does nothing when the Philistines come against his own people, the people of Keilah. But as soon as he hears that David is in Keilah, then he musters his forces to go and attack the Lord's anointed David.

Now David learns that Saul is coming. And he makes a twofold inquiry of the Lord through Abiathar verses 9 to 12. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to Saul? And will Saul come down as your servant has heard?

And the Lord answers yes to both questions. And the Lord says, yes Saul is going to come down David. And yes, the people of Keilah will deliver you into my hand, into their hand, into Saul's hand. And so David flees from Keilah. The same city he had delivered. Verse 13. Do you see how utterly thankless and fickle the people of Keilah are?

[5 : 18] They have experienced the deliverance of God. The salvation of God. The rescue of God through David. And it was all grace. They didn't even ask to be delivered.

It was a gift. A free gift from God through David. And yet when they hear that Saul was coming toward them and could annihilate them for sheltering David, as he had done to the people of Nob in chapter 22, they're willing to give David up.

They're fickle. They're thankless. And I wonder, friends, do we see something of people's reaction to the gospel there? You see, there are some people, and Jesus speaks about them, who are happy to have a Jesus who will deliver them.

They are happy to have a Jesus who will save them. They are happy to have a Jesus who will promise them heaven when they die. But when they hear the same Jesus speak about taking up crosses and following him, the same Jesus speak about being rejected for his name's sake, the same Jesus saying all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted, they say, that's too much. And they reject him. They're as fickle and thankless as the people of Keilah. So we see that while in Keilah, David enjoys guidance from God and access to God.

[6 : 35] And today, like David, we can all enjoy guidance from God. I think it can be very tempting for many of us to think it must have been easier living in the biblical period when people heard the direct voice of God.

But today we have the direct voice of God contained in his written word, the Bible. This book tells us what God prohibits and what God commands.

This book tells us what options are wise and beneficial to us and will strengthen our relationship with Jesus. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3, All scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be equipped for every good work.

To have God's word before us, to have an open Bible before us today, friends, is to have God's encouraging voice addressing us in a wise manner, a loving manner, a kingly manner, a sovereign manner, a gracious manner.

When we've got the Bible open before us in church, we're actually saying, I am sitting under the authority of God and I am going to receive guidance from this God. But also like David, we can enjoy access to God.

[7 : 53] You see, as David stands with Abiyathur, he is aware that this priest is bringing him into the presence of God. As David stands with Abiyathur, he is aware that he has access to God in a way that Saul could only dream of.

And today, friends, we have an even greater priest than David. The Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who brings us access to God. The one who brings us peace with God. The one who brings us the favour and smile of God.

The writer to the Hebrews says, Today, friends, we do not come into God's presence boasting in how good we have been or how good we hope to be or how good we are.

We come into the presence of God this morning confident in our great high priest and his finished work that enables us to go behind the curtain and stand in the presence of God and stand, as it were, under the very smile of God and the benediction of God.

So that's the encouragement David receives at Kiva. Guidance from God and access to God. This brings us to the encouragement in Ziph.

[9 : 27] Verses 14 to 18. And we see that David enjoys fellowship with and strengthening from Jonathan. David enjoys fellowship with and strengthening from Jonathan. David is constantly running from Saul, as we see in verse 14.

Saul is in the desert. Constantly changing location because Saul is obsessively and compulsively hunting him down. Every day Saul is seeking David's life. There's no relief. There's no let up. He's like a hunted animal. And I wonder, have you ever been in a distressing situation? Or a depressing situation? Or a discouraging situation? A hard situation? Which has gone on day after day.

It's thudding over and over. And there seems to be no relief. And it is breaking you. And you desperately need encouragement. You desperately need a friendly face.

Well, David needed encouragement. He needed a friendly face. And in verses 15 and 16, his best friend Jonathan comes to him. You remember, David and Jonathan were bound together in their shared love for the people of God and the glory of God.

[10 : 30] And so Jonathan hears where David is and he goes to him. And I just want to note there's two things here with you. Jonathan's coming to David is a sacrificial act. Jonathan is safe with his father and he goes to David knowing that if Saul finds out he will kill him.

Jonathan enjoys the luxurious life of the crown prince and yet he goes to David in the hard, biting environment of the wilderness. A true friend is one who is willing to sacrifice time and energy and labour and endure hardship with their friend and for their friend.

And that is Jonathan. He is a sacrificial friend. But Jonathan's coming to David is also a sensitive act. Jonathan could have focused on how hard his life was becoming.

The fact that going to David posed a risk to his life. The fact that David's been anointed as king that he would never be king. The fact that his father has been accusing him of a conspiracy against him because of his friendship with David.

But Jonathan considers David's plight about his own problems. A true friend looks not only to their own interests but is sensitive to the interests of others and that is Jonathan.

[11 : 44] He is sensitive to David's plight. And we see in verses 16 and 17 that Jonathan encourages David. We read in verse 16 that Jonathan strengthened David's hand in God.

What a lovely phrase that is. It is almost as if Jonathan is taking David's shaking, trembling, weak, faltering hands and placing them in the firm, loving grip of God.

And Jonathan helps David find strength in God by reminding him of God's promises. Verse 17 He said, Do not fear for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you.

Saul my father also knows this. Now David knew those promises. He knew them. But I don't know about you but sometimes when trouble and trial hits us and there seems to be no relief from our pain and darkness is our closest friend we struggle to remember God's promises.

We suffer from spiritual amnesia and we need the encouragement of a friend who will remind us of those promises. And that is what Jonathan does. He takes David's trembling, weak, shaking, faltering hand guides it into the loving grip of a loving God by saying, David, remember God's past promises of future grace.

[13 : 03] Remember the promises of God, David. Remember the gospel. And then in verse 18 they leave each other. They make a covenant, a bond of loyalty with one another and Jonathan goes home while David remains at Horesh.

It is a solemn scene of separation. You see, David and Jonathan are never going to see each other this side of eternity. The next time we will see Jonathan, he's dying on the battlefield of Gilboa, chapter 31.

Jonathan has served his God-given task in redemptive history. He had been appointed by the Lord to deliver God's people, chapter 14. He had been appointed by the Lord to protect God's anointed

king, chapters 18 and 20.

He had been appointed by the Lord to encourage God's anointed king, chapter 23, and now he can depart in peace. His story is over. He has played his role in the drama of redemption.

And friends, I'd go so far to say that the Lord Jesus would never have come into this world had it not been for Jonathan and his protection of the Lord's descendant David.

[14:10] What a role in the drama of redemption. So while in Ziph, David enjoys fellowship with encouragement from Jonathan. And as we look at Jonathan, we're given a model of what true friendship looks like.

You see, it's good for Christians to enjoy socialising. Good for Christians to enjoy having meals together. Good for Christians to enjoy watching films and enjoying sports together. Good for us to be together. I always say there are no such thing as lone rangers in the kingdom of heaven. You don't go it alone as a Christian. Please don't ever think it is your personal relationship with Jesus.

Yes, it's a personal relationship, but it's not a private relationship. It's about being together. But Christian friendship and fellowship is even deeper than this.

It is about strengthening each other in God. It is about reminding each other of God and his promises, who he is, what he has done, what he is doing, what he promises to do in our lives.

[15:12] It is about reminding each other that the Lord is our good shepherd who has given his life for the sheep. It is about reminding us that God is for us. He is with us. He is in us. And he is working all things together for our good.

It is about reminding us that God is faithful and he promises he will never leave nor forsake his people. And when we see one another suffering spiritual amnesia, forgetting who our God is, then we are to remind each other.

If we would be true friends to one another, we'll not simply be nice to each other. We'll not even simply invite each other to each other's homes.

We will seek to strengthen and encourage each other with those gospel promises. But you know, I think as we look at Jonathan, we're also seeing a picture of the greatest friend of all.

You see, Jonathan functions here really as a picture, a foreshadowing, a type of the Lord Jesus in this passage. Because like Jonathan, Jesus came from a place of safety into our wilderness world of hardship and danger.

[16:21] And like Jonathan, Jesus left the riches and comforts and glory of his heavenly home to enter our poverty and our experience. And like Jonathan, Jesus gave thought to our needs, not to his own, and reflected on our misery, not his own, and didn't simply bring words of salvation and promise.

He actually purchased the salvation and the promises with his blood at Calvary. And now in the same, Jesus lives as the greatest friend of all, who sympathises with the weaknesses of his followers and offers grace to help his followers in their time of need and who promises his followers he will not leave them nor forsake them but will return for them and take them to be with him at the end of time.

Maybe some of you have been let down by people in the past. You've maybe been betrayed or felt betrayed by a friend, a family member, a loved one.

You've given your heart to someone and they've trampled it underfoot. You wonder if you could ever trust again. And there is a friend who sticks closer than any brother.

A friend who will not let us down. And his name is Jesus. And his passion is that we would know the secure joy of being in the family of God and enveloped in the everlasting arms of God simply through trusting in him.

[17:52] What an encouragement to you in our today, friends. What an incentive to trust and follow our faithful friend who says, I will not leave you. I will not forsake you. I have come once for you and I will come again for you.

This brings us finally to the encouragement in my own. The encouragement in my own. Verses 19 to 29. We've seen these verses that David enjoys providential help and deliverance from the Lord. David enjoys providential help and deliverance from the Lord. In verses 19 and 20 we read about the inhabitants of Ziph and their desire to betray David. The people of Ziph are from the tribe of Judah.

They're David's distant relatives and they're willing to hand over their own relative, the anointed king, the deliverer of Israel, David, to the antichrist king, Saul, for their own benefit.

It is a tremendous act of betrayal. And I wonder do we see the shadows of an even greater act of betrayal where in the New Testament we need of one who actually shared bread with Jesus, fellowship with Jesus before betraying him with a kiss of friendship for 30 pieces of silver.

[19 : 06] And Saul is absolutely delighted with this betrayal as we see in verses 21 to 23. We're really given an insight into Saul's advanced spiritual depravity in these verses because he makes a completely inappropriate spiritual statement.

Verse 21, he says, May you be blessed by the Lord for you have had compassion on me. The Ziphites have betrayed the Lord's anointed. And Saul calls them blessed.

What blasphemy! And Saul goes on and he asks the Ziphites to first find out where David usually goes. And then he asks them to find out who has seen him. And then he asks them to find out all the hiding places that David uses.

And then in verses 24 to 26, we read about Saul and the Ziphites closing in on David. In verses 24 and 25, the tension begins to amount where we read.

Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maom in the Araba to the south of Jishimon. And Saul and his men went to seek him and David was told so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maom.

[20 : 10] And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maom. And then in verse 26, we're told that David and Saul are both at the same mountain. Saul is on one side of the mountain.

David is on the other side of the mountain. Saul and his forces are closing in on David. They're almost a hairspray, a step between David and death. If this were a television series, this would be the point where the credits come up saying to be continued for next week in the life of David.

But I'm not going to cut my short of the sermon just yet today. It's a very tense episode though. And just when you and I can barely handle attention anymore, there is this providential interruption, verses 27 to 29.

Saul is informed that the Philistines are invading and he stops pursuing David to go after the Philistines. And the rocks of Maom become known in Hebrew as Selah Hamakaloth, which means rock of parting or rock of escape.

These ancient rocks will become a lasting monument to David's close shave. But even more significantly, these rocks will become a lasting monument to the God who delivered David at the eleventh hour.

[21 : 26] Because we might be tempted to read this narrative blindly. We might be tempted to think, well, wasn't David lucky? We might be tempted to say, what a marvellous coincidence that the Philistines came just at the right time.

We might be tempted to say, oh, it's a good job the Philistines chose to attack Saul when they did. But this passage actually compels us to read this account through the eyes of faith.

I always say to people, maybe they get fed up when we've seen it, but there is no such thing as luck for the Christian. There are no such thing as God coincidences when it comes to the Christian.

There are God incidents. He is sovereign. He is in control. And his hand is in everything. From the smallest to the greatest, he is sovereign.

And David sees that. And he sees God's hand in all of this. And he composes the words of Psalm 54 that we will sing in a few moments in response to this. Because David comes and stands at the rock of escape not thinking, I'm so lucky.

[22 : 32] David stands at the rock of escape rejoicing in his God saying, God is my helper and God is my deliverer. He is the upholder of my life.

So while I'm at home, David enjoys providential help and deliverance from God. And today you and I are encouraged to see God's hand of providence in our lives. I wonder, do you see avenues that you could have gone down?

Maybe a job. Maybe a move. Maybe a relationship. And it just seemed that God slammed the door shut in your face and it seemed so unfair at the time.

And you felt so angry with God. But in hindsight you can say, behold God is my helper. The Lord is the upholder of my life. I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

Or maybe you went down a particular avenue and it crushed you and it broke you and you really wish you had never gone down that avenue. And sometimes you wonder, why did God let me go down that avenue?

[23 : 35] But even still you know you're in the unshakable arms of a loving God and you can say, behold God is my helper. The Lord is the upholder of my life. I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good.

Today, friends, we are encouraged to see and thank God for his hand of providence in our lives. Recognizing he's never abandoned us at any moment.

and we can trace that sovereign hand in all the intimacies, in all the intimacies, in all the complexities of our lives that we might not even understand this side of eternity.

But above all, we're encouraged to praise God for his providential help and deliverance as seen supremely in the gospel. You see, as David composes the words of Psalm 54, he's rejoicing in God's present deliverance of him.

But he is also writing under the inspiration of God's Spirit and looking forward to the greatest deliverance of all, the deliverance Jesus accomplished for his people through his life, death, and resurrection.

[24 : 43] And as we reflect on that providence, as we reflect on that deliverance, as we reflect on that salvation, as we reflect on that rescue, we're encouraged not to be thankless and fickle like the people of Keilah, but to say with David of the one greater than David, the Lord Jesus is my helper and the Lord Jesus is the upholder of my life and I will give thanks to your name, Lord Jesus, because you, O Lord Jesus, have a good name.

Today we have seen the encouragements, the resources that God gave David at Keilah, at Ziph, and at Ma'on. And these are exactly the same encouragements and resources he gives you and I today.

And so as we start a new week, as we start a new day, let's be encouraged. Let's be encouraged that we can have guidance from God and access to God.

Let's be encouraged that we can receive strength from our God who makes wonderful promises.

And let's be encouraged that we can rest on the providential salvation and deliverance that our God has given us through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Let's be encouraged. Amen. I'll close in worship by singing the words of Psalm 54.

[26 : 19] Psalm 54, the Scottish Salter version of page 284, the singing of Old Psalm. Save me, O God, by thy great name, and judge me by thy strength. My prayer here, O God, give me your strength to my words at length.

For they that strangers are to me, to up against me lies. O pleasure, or seek my soul in God, said not before their eyes. Psalm 54, the whole song, we'll start to sing.

Save me, O God, by thy great name, and judge me by thy strength.

I pray, O God, give me your strength. O God, give me your strength.

O God, my words at length. For they that strangers are to me, to run against me, O precious sea, my soul, and God, shed on me for their eyes.

[27 : 53] The Lord, my God, my helper is. O therefore, I am bold, He takeeth part with every one that loves my soul of hope.

unto my heaven, He shall mischief and ill repay, O for thy truths they cut them all and sweep and lean away.

I will a sacrifice to thee, give with me willness thy name, O Lord, because it is good with grace I will confess for he hath me in ever from all adversities and his desire my eye has seen upon my enemies enemies.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you so much that you are the God who wants his people to be encouraged and that you have even given us this passage from your word that records real events in real historical time to remind us that you are the God who gives his people guidance and they may enjoy access into your presence, that you are the God who strengthens his people with his promises and you are the God who delivers his people and whose hand of providence is continually on their lives.

May each and every one of us be resting on the provision that is found in the gospel and we ask and pray that as we close this communion season that we would go away from this place encouraged, built up and strengthened in our own faith.

[31 : 06] We thank you for Andrew and for his ministry over this weekend. We pray that you bless and encourage him as he goes back to his own congregation that he would see fruit for his labours, that he would see people worshipping you in spirit and in truth and that you give him a vision for the ministry within that place.

We remember Myrtle here asking that he too be strengthened, built up and encouraged in his walk with you in his leadership of this congregation and that in everything he does he would simply want to decrease that you Lord would increase.

Bless the curcession, the deacon's cord, every person in this congregation and may we all know what it is to have the smile of God turned toward us as we rest on his son, our saviour Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen.