

1 Samuel 23

A tale of three Kings and an encourager
What's your greatest need?

Good morning!

Could you reach into the pockets behind you and pull out a bible.

Please turn to page 282

As you do here's your starter for ten, take a moment to confer with your neighbour to answer the following question...

How many ruling royal families are there in the world today? **SLIDE**

Well according to a couple of sources on the internet there are thought to be 29...

And here they all are... **SLIDE**

Now for a follow up question and an opportunity to weed out any republicans, ask your neighbour 'in a best case scenario what would you say was the job of a King or a Queen?' **SLIDE**

Well today we are going to think about three Kings, but not the christmas ones. And we're going to think about the job they were given as we look at our next chapter on David's life.

??? will come and read 1 Samuel 23 to us...

Now before we get into the detail of our passage we need to set it in some context to understand where we are in the story of David's life and what it meant to be the King of Israel – what the job description looked like.

Context SLIDE

As you may remember Saul has been established as Israel's first King - at the request of the people in 1 Samuel 8. **SLIDE**

We want a king over us. Then we shall be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.

1 Sam 8:19-20

So there's a clear job description: A king was expected to lead, defend and protect.

But it didn't end there. Way back in Israel's history God anticipated a time when Israel would want a king – in Deuteronomy 17 God tells Moses this:

SLIDE

"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,' be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites..."

SLIDE

*When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law... It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to **revere the Lord his God** and follow carefully all the words of this law.*

SLIDE

Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel."

Deut 17:14 – 20

So the King was expected to know God's law, his commands. To read it, follow it and not forget it so that he will revere the Lord. In other words to appreciate, admire, cherish, value, to love and delight in **God** more than anything else.

Notice too, that the King is chosen by God.

God selects him in order to be the best representation of himself to the people.

So the King holds a pretty unique place in Israel, not just because of his status but because he represents God to the people.

It's why David can say in Psalm 2 with full confidence **SLIDE**

"I have installed my king...

You are my son;

today I have become your father."

The king held a very special relationship with God.

So how's our job description looking? **SLIDE**

The King of Israel must:

- Lead, defend and protect the people
- Remember God's commands and revere him
- Be God's chosen representative to the people

So let's come to 1 Samuel with that job description in mind.

Saul is anointed King in chp 9. But by chp 13 he has failed in his leadership and Samuel says:

"You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure..."

1 Samuel 13:12-13

God goes further:

"I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions."

1 Samuel 15:11

So in chp 16 David is anointed in place of Saul. David is God's preferred choice; a man after his own heart, who delights in knowing God and his interests.

David's popularity grew throughout Israel. And he enjoyed great victories as he defended the nation from her enemies.

Enemies like Goliath.

His success led to Saul getting more and more angry, jealous and fearful. David is seen as a threat and Saul attempts to kill him.

So since chp 21 David has been on the run from Saul.
And whilst on the run, David has picked up around 600 followers.

So that's the context
Now we pick up the story in chapter 23.

So let's just remind ourselves of the King's job description **SLIDE**:

The King of Israel must:

- Lead, defend and protect the people
- Remember God's commands and revere him
- Be God's chosen representative to the people

Our task now is to rate how well our kings are doing and to consider what they felt their greatest need was; firstly David, then Saul.

And given it's the weekend, if they're doing well at the task they get a **SLIDE** 'ding' and if they're failing they get a traditional, if not legendary, **SLIDE** 'buzz'. So **SLIDE** 'ping' for success, **SLIDE** 'buzz' for fail – okay? Still with me?

So to our first king, King David? **SLIDE**

Right at the start of the chapter there is a familiar problem; the Philistines. Once again Israel's enemy is attacking, this time robbing a town of its food.

Hearing the news David wants to find out God's perspective on the situation, what should he do about the Philistine raids?

So right at the start David shows his reverence and value for God by asking him what to do. 'PING'

SLIDE

David knows the king should defend his people. No longer operating under the direct command of Saul, David chooses to help the Jews in Keilah, and fulfill his kingly duty by defending the people. 'PING'

SLIDE

David trusts what God tells him, acts on it and succeeds. And David successfully defends the people. (HURRAH!!)

David consults God again in vs 10. This time he learns that Saul is on his way to hunt him down and destroy the city.

The irony here is those who David had just defended, won't now defend him; David learns the people of Keilah will give him over to Saul.

Having been given God's perspective a second time he acts. David defends the people again, this time not by fighting but by leaving (vs10).

This back and forth with God not only shows his reverence for God but also how he represents God. Think of the trinity - God in three persons in a perfect relationship, delighting and enjoying each other. Relationships are at the heart of the trinity. Jesus confirms this in John 14 when says

"I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me"

David acts as God's representative by displaying his relationship with his heavenly father - wanting to know what he should do. "How should I act in this situation?
I will do exactly what I've been told."

David knew that his greatest need was his relationship with God.

Then David is chased all over the wilderness. vs 14-15
And in vs 19-24, he faces another betrayal.

It's a really challenging time; his own people want to betray him, and Saul is hunting him down.

It's significant then that sandwiched between the two betrayals of Keilah and Ziph David meets his close friend Jonathan.

Saul can't find David, but his son Jonathan can.

Jonathan the encourager **SLIDE**

Jonathan has come to encourage David, to help him find strength in the Lord vs 16. What he does is remind David of a promise that God has given to David. 'You shall be king over Israel' vs17

And what he goes on to tell David is pretty remarkable. Both Jonathan and, he claims, his dad know that David will be crowned as King.

Let's just reflect for a moment - Jonathan is the rightful heir to the throne, just as Prince Charles will be crowned King after the Queen, Prince Jonathan was set to be crowned King after Saul.

But Jonathan knows that God is at work. He's heard God's promise to David and knows God's favour is on him - nothing will stand in the way.

Unlike his father Jonathan does not oppose the promise. Instead he chooses to submit to it.

So knowing that his friend is in a really tough spot Jonathan comes to bring encouragement by reminding David of God's promise to him, to strengthen him in God.

Okay Back to our check list

So what kind of King is David?
Represents God - yep **SLIDE** 'PING'
Reveres God - yep **SLIDE** 'PING'
Defends the people - yep **SLIDE** 'PING'

Now lets move to King Saul – **SLIDE**
How does he do against the job description? **SLIDE - job description**

Does he defend the people?
Well no. He's more interested to hear about David than the defeat of the Philistines - so that's a clear 'BUZZ' isn't it?

And what about his reverence for God?
Well, in complete contrast to David, at no point in the chapter does Saul ask God what he should do. Instead we read, in vs 7, that Saul is living under a delusion that God is with him and providing him with opportunities to capture David.

In vs 21 he calls God's blessing down on the Ziphites for their betrayal of David.

So no reverence there "BUZZ" and certainly not acting as God's representative, not valuing his relationship with him "BUZZ".

It's easy to see that King Saul is bitter, jealous, selfish, paranoid, brutal and desperate.

He doesn't put his trust in God, instead he takes matters into his own hands and is out to protect his position by seeking his own solution - get rid of David and Saul stays in power.

Not great, right?
A real "BUZZ" of a King in reality.

But no surprises here, right? After all Saul has stopped listening to God, hasn't he?
He's turned away from God to serve his own agenda.

Not like David.
David has kept his perspective right and pure, hasn't he?
David is the model king - a man after God's own heart after all - right?

Well no, not entirely.
It wouldn't be right to make this a case of good King David vs bad King Saul.

There is a sliver of detail that reminds us that even David is flawed.
A priest is mentioned in vs 6 & 9 - Abiathar

We're told he was the son of the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech along with 85 other priests had been slaughtered by Saul in the last chapter. They had been killed because Saul had discovered Ahimelech had helped David by giving him some bread, in chp 21, and this enraged Saul. And the killing didn't end with the priests. Saul completely flattens the city the priests are from.

Why had Ahimelech helped David?

Well at the start of chp 21 we read that David tells Ahimelech that he's on a secret mission, at Saul's command, and that he was off to rendezvous with his army and he needed some food.

BUT David deceived Ahimelech.

Ahimelech thought that David was acting under Saul's orders - but the whole thing was a lie. He was on the run. Ahimelech thought he was helping Saul's military commander - not a wanted man, running in fear of his life.

It's a reminder that even the best earthly leaders will let us down - but what is really striking is that God still favours David.

The point of this chapter isn't to see a black and white comparison between two Kings. This is no pantomime caricature of good vs evil. Both Kings are flawed.

The difference between them lies in what they identified as their greatest need - Saul saw his need as ending the challenge to his throne, focussing on his immediate circumstances.

David knew that his greatest need lay in his relationship with God and not in ending his difficult circumstances.

We're not to conclude what we should make more effort to be more like good King David 'PING' and less like bad King Saul "BUZZ".

No, that's not the point. This is no gameshow.

The point of the story is to consider what our greatest need is, to reflect on whether it is orientated around delighting in God?

Is God worth following in spite of every calamity and tragedy we could possibly face? Is God worth delighting in spite of our circumstances?

At the end of chapter 22 David takes full responsibility for his actions that led to Ahimelech's death, look at what he says in vs 23 of chp 22 to Abiathar:

"Stay with me; don't be afraid. The man who wants to kill you is trying to kill me too. You will be safe with me."

On what basis could David make that promise?
Because of his hope in the third King in our story.

God is the perfect King - SLIDE

What do we learn about God in this story?

Well the story tells us that God knows everything and that he has control of the whole situation.

He is the only King between all three who has any real authority - isn't he?

He's the King who tells David that he will defeat the Philistines (vs2, vs4).

But more than that, David's success isn't down to him leading a particularly powerful and effective army; notice in vs 4 God says "I will give the Philistines into your hand".

It is God who achieves the victory not David. God is the one who stands behind David and enables him to defend his people.

God is the only one who holds a full perspective on what is going on.

It's God who confirms to David the rumours that Saul is on his way, in vs9-10.

And it's God who tells David whether the people of Keilah will hand him over to Saul vs 12.

Was it David's cunning that kept Saul at bay? Or his military insight, his intelligence, his charm or skill?

Nope,

Look at vs 14, the narrator is really clear that God is in control and wouldn't give David over to Saul.

We see that at the end of the story too. Following the tip off from the Ziphites the chapter ends with David being chased around the wilderness by Saul and his entire army is closing in; vs 26: only a mountain separates the two armies. Now the chase is on, tension is rising as Saul hones in on David.

But deliverance comes in vs27 in the form of Israel's old enemy.

The Philistines are back and seemingly this time Saul takes up his kingly responsibility and ends the chase. And David escapes again.

God proves himself worthy of being trusted.

He is the only one who has the full perspective of what is going on around David.

He knows the future and has the power to control it - he gives the Philistines into David's hands.

And He will not give David over to Saul's hands (vs 14).

God is the perfect King.

But what does that mean?

Well its bound up with God's character - his righteousness.

In this chapter we have a picture of God delighting in his appointed representative; watching over David, helping and intervening in his situation.

And God's chosen King is delighting in his relationship with God; David is continually going to him for guidance and help - revering him and asking him for his perspective on everything.

Remember the language of Psalm 2?

Here is David, as son delighting in God, his Father.

We're to see that David genuinely values his relationship with God, he is motivated in cultivating and investing in his relationship with God because to coin a phrase he is worth it.

David knows that knowing God is his greatest need - that's what it means to be a man after God's own heart.

And it's a complete contrast to Saul.

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So what should we take from this story for the week ahead?

I think there are four things we can take

- God is busy
- Mimic Jonathan
- Get true perspective
- Check your greatest need

God is busy SLIDE

There is an incredible and astonishing encouragement for us here in this story.

The big thing we're to hear from the passage is that God is busy. Here is a picture of the creator of everything, busy demonstrating his clear authority over all of life as he watches over David. God has a unique and unrivalled perspective on the things happening in David's life.

Does it mean that David breezes through life without any troubles, worries or difficulties?

No David is in real difficulty isn't he? His life is under genuine threat.

Is God watching David because he is particularly good?

No we've seen that David is flawed like Saul.

But David trusts God.

Many of us here are also going through some pretty heavy situations – things that are unimaginably hard and difficult; situations in your own life or in the lives of your wider family.

And as a church family we are currently going through one of the most testing times we have ever faced, aren't we?

Well listen to the encouragement of God's word – God is busy, he's at work as a King watching over those who love him.

It's a theme that has its echo in the new testament – Romans 8:28 **SLIDE**

"...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose..."

So God is at work... SLIDE

The author of all life is not distant and blind to our circumstances or our struggles and trials. God is

active, engaged and focused. We may not always see it in the heat of the moment but our heavenly father is working ceaselessly, energetically and purposefully on our behalf, in our circumstances.

God is working to guarantee us a glorious future with him - one which will not spoil or fade.

God is work

..for our good. SLIDE

The result of God's ceaseless activity in our lives is for our benefit -it is good. This verse wants to assure us that God's work will end well for us. God is wholly good in character, so it follows that his purposes and intentions for those that love him are wholly good.

David knew this better than anyone. It's why he didn't take matters into his own hands. We'll hear next week that David could have ended the turmoil that he faced - but choose instead to trust God to be in control.

David doesn't make the mistake of Saul in seeking to serve his own agenda – he knows the truth of this verse in Romans. **SLIDE**

“...in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose...”

So do we believe this? Can we say with confidence that God is at work in our turmoil? It's not always easy to see, is it?

Mimic Jonathan

Well for those of us with greater confidence in that verse we need to mimic Jonathan **SLIDE** and take the time to encourage others with God's promises.

We need to be actively encouraging and strengthening those we know to be under threat.

Are we active in looking for opportunities to encourage those in difficulty? Are we being like Jonathan to the church family? Drawing attention to the promises of God.

That's hard to do here on a Sunday morning isn't it? Easy to hide in the crowd of faces perhaps. It's why being part of a home group is so essential; meeting in small numbers, building friendships and trust, and being active encouragers. Encouraging those in turmoil to fix their eyes on God's promises.

Get true perspective SLIDE

BUT How?

Well David had access to God through a priest and an ephod (vs6). An ephod could be a symbolic piece of clothing worn by the priest or an object (Judges 8:27) through which God spoke.

By contrast we have someone far, far better – **SLIDE**

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

SLIDE

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Hebrews 1:1-3

We have a better King than David

We have access to Jesus – God's Son and true King who is an exact representation of God. And he has come into the world and spoken to us.

So we have direct access to the Author of life himself, not through priests or rituals, or symbolic clothing but knowing, trusting and delighting in King Jesus; listening to his words and asking for his perspective and help on our situation.

So for the Christian, be confident.

God is our perfect King, his is in control of our situation and working for our good.

And finally

Check your greatest need - SLIDE

I'll leave you with one last question

What is your greatest need right now?

An end to your turmoil? A job? More money? A bigger home? A promotion? A spouse perhaps? Good health maybe? Relief from your struggles and difficulties - that would be great wouldn't it?

There is something called the Heidelberg catechism - written in 1500s which is a summary of the Christian faith:

And it starts like this:

What is our only comfort in life and in death?

That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

This story confirms that.

David knew that it didn't matter what situation he faced, how ever troubling or difficult so long as he has his heavenly King to love and cherish - that was his only comfort.

Is he our only comfort too?

Let's delight in our relationship with his son, God's radiant representative - Jesus.

Let's pray.