

How does God Prepare His Servant?

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Alice. It would be helpful if you keep that Bible passage open in front of you this evening as we travel through it. But before we do that, let me just pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word. We thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in it, but we confess that it is sometimes difficult. And Holy Spirit, we ask this evening that you would enlighten us.

That your words, Lord, would give us light and that you would grant us understanding. For your son's glory. Amen. So it would be helpful if you keep that passage open in front of you this evening.

But I want to start off by asking you a question. How do you feel about preparation? So the two most stressful times of the year for me at the moment are May and December.

Because in May and December, I have exams. Now I am supposed to, and normally try to, spend weeks reading material, poring over lecture notes and writing out essays to questions that could potentially come up.

[1 : 0 8] And then after all of those weeks of preparation, I sit a three-hour exam. So even just talking to you this evening about it stresses me out. But preparation is part of everyday life, isn't it?

So whether that's preparation for exams, for work, for big life events, preparation is part of everyday life. But do we think about our lives and all of the struggles that come our way as preparation?

So the question that I would like you to keep in the back of your minds this evening is, how does God prepare his servant? So tonight we're going to be looking at the first installment of what you could call the fugitive narrative of David's life.

From 1 Samuel chapter 21 to chapter 31. And in these chapters, we see David's rise to the throne of Israel and Saul's demise as the king who has been rejected by God.

And as we walk through these chapters, we need to put ourselves in Israel's shoes and think about what they would have heard when this book was read to them.

[2 : 2 2] So they would have read the book from start to finish. So 1 and 2 Samuel. And so we get a kind of fragmented view of the book because we take out little slots.

And so we need to try really hard to get the big picture of the whole book. So in the beginning of 1 Samuel, God raises up a prophet, a person who speaks God's word to God's people.

And then he warned them about their desire for a king and said that he told them what this king would be like. But Israel ignored the warning and looked to the physical appearance of Saul and crowned him king.

But he disobeyed God time and time again. And so he was rejected in chapter 15. And then David is anointed as the new king.

And God is now preparing him for the day when he will finally sit on the throne of Israel. So the question I want us to think about is how does God prepare his servant? In chapters 21 to 31, God is preparing David and it isn't easy for him.

[3 : 32] These chapters are hugely instructive for us though because we see God is permitting David to go through troubles. Which make him not run away from God, but they make him run to God and trust in him.

And we see that God is sovereignly ruling over this whole situation and tension between David and Saul. So how does God prepare his servant?

Well in our passage tonight we see three emotions and three situations that God takes David through. And each of them is preparing him to be king. To rule over God's people in God's promised land.

So the first thing that we see in this passage is desperation. Chapter 21 verses 1 to 9. Desperation. So David has fled the comfort of his life in the palace because Saul, the one sitting on the throne, wants him dead.

Saul even throws a spear to kill his own son in chapter 20 because he thought that Jonathan was helping out David. And so David runs to a place called Nob and we see David's desperation in two ways.

[4 : 48] Firstly if you look at verse 3 you see that he's hungry. And secondly if you look at verse 8 we see he's defenseless. So David is this high ranking army commander and yet he has no sword and he has no provisions.

And in his desperate state he arrives at Nob and notice the priest's reaction as he sees David coming in verse 1. It says that he trembled.

Now in reality David is the one who's afraid because he has the king of the land on his tail. So why is this priest afraid?

Well probably because when he sees David coming by himself with no army and no provisions he might be thinking that David's acting on his own. David has suddenly gone rogue.

David shows up as a one man show and the priest asks him why are you alone? Am I to be afraid? And in verse 2 we see a secretive story told by David which is a complete lie.

[5 : 58] He says that he's on a secret mission for Saul. And that he's going to meet his men, his army in a certain place. Now we must look at this and call it what it is.

David is lying. David is God's anointed king, yes absolutely. But he is not God's perfect king. And the author of 1 Samuel doesn't comment as to whether this was the right thing to do or not.

But elsewhere in the Bible lying is condemned. And the Bible isn't afraid to call lying what it is. Sin. So why does David lie?

Well I think the most logical explanation is that he knows Saul will be hot on his heels as he arrives at Nob. And he's lying in an attempt to save and protect the priest from Saul.

And this doesn't actually work out and we'll see that next week in chapter 22. But the application of this little bit of this narrative is not that we should go out and lie to people.

[7 : 03] That would be wrong. David commits a sin in this passage and we are not encouraged to do the same. And so David is in a desperate situation and in verse 3 he asks the priests for provisions because he is hungry.

And then in verses 4 and 6 we get this dialogue about certain bread that the priest has. It's the bread of presence or consecrated bread which sat before God and which was set apart.

It was holy according to the law in Leviticus chapter 24 verses 5 to 9 that you can look up later on. And according to those verses in Leviticus only priests were allowed to eat this bread.

But Ahimelech gives the bread to David. Now at this point think of how the Israelites would react. They would be gasping in shock as they hear this being read.

Why would the priest purposefully and consciously disobey God's law? Surely he's in the wrong. Surely he is doing wrong.

[8 : 16] Now I don't think we can cast this off as a complete disregard for God's law because the priest actually cares about uncleanness. But what we can do is let the more easier to understand passages of the Bible help us understand the more difficult passages.

So in Mark's gospel in chapter 2 Jesus uses this situation as an illustration of how the law was intended to serve God's king and God's kingdom and not hinder it.

So through this priest God is providing for his anointed king who is in a desperate situation. But notice the detail in verse 7.

This whole time during this whole conversation one of Saul's servants is lurking in the background. Now like the villain in the cartoons you used to watch or maybe still do watch.

You can imagine Doeg tiptoeing in the background grinning and rubbing his hands together as he sees David chatting with this priest. He's the baddie who's waiting for that opportunity, waiting for the perfect time to pounce and catch his defenseless and desperate prey.

[9 : 36] So we see him lurking and watching in the shadows. And we'll see more from Doeg next week. But just the mention of his name here should worry us.

Because not only is he an Edomite and therefore an enemy of Israel, but he's also a servant of Saul.

Meaning that when Saul told all of his men in chapter 19 verse 1 to kill David, Doeg was probably there. Saul has a pair of eyes in the camp.

So David is desperate. He is on the run. He is hungry. And in verse 8 he has no sword. David is a defenseless fugitive.

And so he asks the priest for a sword and is given Goliath's sword. The Philistine champion that he killed in chapter 17. So the fugitive narrative starts in Nob with desperation.

[10 : 38] David on the run, fearing for his life. Hungry and defenseless. With the whole of Israel's forces on his heel. But what happens? Well God provides for him.

God sees David's needs and he provides. Now David could have broken down and complained about this whole situation and given up. And we wouldn't have said anything.

But instead he trusted in the God who has anointed him and appointed him king. He didn't let go and let God. But he trusted God and he kept on going.

And that meant that in his desperation, instead of him wallowing in self-pity, he ran to his God. God used David even though he lied to a priest.

Now this is no encouragement to lie. But God uses David's bad situation and turns it to good. In his hour of need, he trusted God. And God provided in a very desperate situation.

[11 : 46] So how does God prepare his servant? Well we need to look at this passage through our New Testament lens.

We are not David. We are not God's anointed one. That is Jesus. But we are God's people. Who are followers of Jesus. And so as we live out our lives of devotion to God's anointed one, we are told that we are going to suffer.

We're told that there will be times where we too will be in desperate situations. Now maybe you've been there. Maybe you've been without a job for months or years.

Maybe you're exhausted from looking after the kids all the time. Or looking after a loved one who has poor health. You know those times when you're just at your wits end and you have no idea where to go or what to do.

For our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, they might be in a very similar situation to David. They have to flee their homes because of their allegiance to our King.

[12 : 56] Their desperate situation is very different from ours, but the outcome should be exactly the same. What do we do in those moments? In our desperation, we should trust in God and get going.

Continue to live out our lives in obedience and submission to His will. So as we live in a world which is against God and against Jesus, then the world will be against us.

We're told that we will suffer on account of our allegiance to Jesus. We're told that the world will hate us, but that hatred is first and foremost against the God that we serve.

And our suffering and desperation shouldn't make us shrink away or hide. But it should lead us to live out our lives in obedience to the God who loves us, the God who has called us, and the God who equips us.

Trust in God and get going. But this does not mean that we, like David, will find all the provision that we want.

[14 : 06] We shouldn't take from this that if we run to God and we give Him all of our heart's desires and live out our lives in obedience and submission, that God will just grant whatever wish we want.

But we are to suffer and we will be in desperate situations. But all of these situations are preparing us for a glorious future with Him and in His service.

Preparation isn't always easy. But preparation by God and for His service in obedience to His King is always, always worth it.

Keep going. Keep being obedient. And the second thing that we see in this passage is fear.

In verses 10 to 15, fear. So we've seen David afraid before in the book so far. And we'll see it again before our series ends in 1 Samuel.

[15 : 07] But there's something different about these verses. So look with me at verse 10. David fled from Saul and he went to Gath. So you can imagine the scene.

David is walking around Israel. But all the while he has this feeling in his stomach that he's being watched. Constantly ducking and diving. Constantly dodging people's gaze.

Always looking over his shoulder. In Israel, David is a walking target for Saul's army. It's like that show on Channel 4, Celebrity Hunted.

And the idea is that a celebrity has to hide from a group of people who are trying to hunt them down for 14 days. They cannot be seen by anyone. And they have people looking high and low for them.

So that is how David feels. Every person that he sees is a potential threat. And so he fears for his life.

[16 : 11] So much that he needs to leave Israel. But where does he go? Gath. David. What were you thinking? In his fear of Saul, he's walking into a death trap.

Now maybe you remember who was from Gath. It was Goliath. The champion of the Philistine army. The one, if you remember, who David killed with a stone. Cut off his head.

In front of the whole Philistine army for everyone to see. And now he's walking into Gath. And to top it all off, he's carrying Goliath's sword.

And he really thinks he's not going to go unnoticed. And so the worst case scenario plays out before our very eyes in verse 11. David is recognized and they ask, isn't this David the king of the land?

Now by this, they don't mean the actual king. They aren't recognizing him as the man who sits on the throne. But they're recognizing him as an important commander or ruler in the land of Israel.

[17 : 20] But look at the end of verse 11. Because they definitely haven't forgotten who he is. They recall the song that the Israelite woman sang and danced to as they rejoiced in David's victories.

Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands. So you can imagine as they recall that song.

They can remember the family members who fell during those wars. They can remember the loved ones that they lost. And so they take David right before the king. And David isn't stupid.

He knows exactly what is coming his way as he stands before the king of Gath. And so it makes sense, doesn't it, in verse 12, that he takes all of these words to heart and is very much afraid.

David describes his ordeal as he reflects on his captivity in Gath in Psalm 56. I won't read it out, but he says that his enemies oppressed, trampled, attacked, injured, lurked, stirred up strife, watched him and waited all out of hatred for God and for David.

[18 : 35] And we don't know how long David was in Gath, but it wasn't a walk in the park. And so David comes up with a plan to escape.

And in verse 13, it says that he pretended to be insane in their presence. He acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

David put on a good show. And so as the king of Gath looks at David, he cannot believe that what the people say is right.

He cannot believe that this is the man who slayed the champion of the Philistine army. The king says in verse 15, I don't need another madman in my service.

So David's plan worked. And as he reflects on this ordeal in Psalm 34, he says how his fear was turned to praise.

[19 : 38] Psalm 34 verses 4 to 6 say this. I sought the Lord and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears. Those who looked to him are radiant.

Their faces are never covered with shame. The poor man called and the Lord heard him. He saved him out of all his troubles. So do you see what David is saying?

His fear drove him to run to God. His fear drove him into the arms of the almighty savior. And what happened? Well, God heard.

God answered. God delivered. And God saved his servant. David's fear led him to trust in God. And God took that fear and brought about a wonderful, miraculous rescue.

What does it mean? How does God prepare his servant? Now fear is something that affects everyone. And in this situation, David's fear leads him to trust in God.

[20 : 51] So how much more should our trust and confidence be in God because of where we stand in history? Our confidence should be firmly rooted in God because he sent his son into this broken world to bring forgiveness to his people.

So the biggest thing that people should fear is separation and alienation from God. But as Christians, Jesus, the ultimate king, the ultimate anointed one, took the punishment that we deserve on the cross.

And so sin and death have no power over us. But there are situations where we will be afraid. Our world is still imperfect.

There will be situations where we suffer on account of our faith in Jesus. And we see that in the New Testament. And we are warned about that. But the reality is that all of our sufferings and all of the trials that we face here and now in this life are preparing us for a glory that far outweighs any desperation and any fear that we face in this life.

Have confidence in God. And in your times of fear, in your times of suffering and trouble, run to God. You will find him to be the best comforter that ever existed.

[22 : 20] The best deliverer and the best reward as you enter into his glory, which blows all of our struggles out of the water. Preparation isn't always easy.

But preparation by God and for his service and obedience to his king is always, always worth it.

Keep going. Keep being obedient. The third thing that we see in this passage is a plea.

In chapter 22, verses 1 to 5, a plea. So you'll see the plea itself at the end of verse 3, where David asked the king of Moab if his parents can stay with him.

And his reasoning is, until I learn what God will do for me. So even now in his time of distress, in his fear and in his running for his life, David's main concern isn't his life, but it's what God will do with him.

[23 : 25] His main concern is God's will. But that's me jumping ahead slightly. So look back at chapter 22, verse 1.

David has escaped to a cave. So just put yourself in his shoes for a second. He's been anointed king over Israel.

And here he is in a cave. So he could be sitting there asking himself, how on earth will he ever be king? He's fleeing for his life and hiding in a cave, not in a palace.

And during his time in this cave, David wrote two psalms. Psalm 57 and Psalm 142. And in Psalm 57, verse 2, David says, I cry out to God most high.

And he continues and says, to God who fulfills his purposes for me. So David looks at his situation and sees all of his struggle and troubles.

[24 : 33] And he knows that the whole situation is part of God's plan and God's purpose. But notice how his response is not out of anger or frustration.

He doesn't accuse God of hating him or abandoning him because he's in this cave. But he looks at it and he knows that the only place he can run to now is God.

The only one who can help him now is God. And so God provided a way for David to escape the clutches of the Philistines. And now he's sitting in a cave.

And in verse 1, his whole family hears of his whereabouts. And they go to him. Now I doubt this family reunion is only because his family missed him.

They haven't seen him in a wee while. That could very well have played a part in it. But I think the primary reason is because they were in danger. So as we'll see next week, Saul has completely lost his mind.

[25 : 35] His hatred for David has taken over and he's lost all sense. So it could be that David's family were being threatened. So that Saul could find out where David was.

And so when they hear of his whereabouts, they run to him. But they don't come alone. Verse 2. It says, All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him and he became their commander.

Now this is a whole different story. David, who'd previously been the commander of a thousand men, A strong army whose purpose was fighting and conquering, Is now the commander of an army of 400.

And they aren't even the best people in Israel, but they are the outcasts. Those who are also on the run from Saul. So how is David ever going to be king if he has no army And he's stuck in a cave with a motley crew of Israel's outcasts?

Well, he's going to become king because God has his plan. And David looks at his situation and sees that this is all part of God's purposes.

[26 : 58] But do you see what's happening to the nation of Israel? Samuel's warning to them in chapters 8, verses 11 to 17 is coming true.

The prophet Samuel warned them that, warned Israel that if they cried out for a king, That he wouldn't be any good for them. That they would have to give their money, their family and their crops to him.

And that is exactly what we see being played out here. Saul took to the throne. And as we look on, we see the rise of David and the demise of Saul.

And it all comes back to one thing. Obedience to God. Saul is not acting like a king should. But he's become a hard ruler.

Who's executing his power however he sees fit. And so Israel are hard pressed. And they flee and flock to David. There's something different about that man.

[27 : 59] He's not the same as Saul. So David looks at this motley crew of followers and decides to go to Moab in verse 3. Now this was a very, very smart move.

Because the Moabites were enemies of Saul. As listed in chapter 14, verse 47. Because he'd fought against them in the past. But the Moabites were family to David.

Because his great grandmother was Ruth, the Moabites. And you can read the story of her life in the book of Ruth just before the book of Judges.

And so David goes to Moab on family business. And asks the king if he can look after his elderly parents as he learns what God will do for him.

Now David doesn't know what God is doing. He doesn't know what God is preparing him for. He can look at this whole situation. But he can't make any sense of it.

[28 : 59] But still remember that verse of Psalm 57 verse 2. David knows that God is fulfilling his purposes. And in verse 5, a prophet comes and tells David to leave the stronghold where he was staying.

And go back to the land of Judah. The prophet is saying, go back. Back into the firing line. Back into the place where Saul could get a grip of him.

Back to the promised land of God's people. Back to a place that would mean suffering. Why? Well, we don't really know.

But what unfolds in the next chapters is that David becomes more well known. More liked. And he actually protects God's people. When the king of Israel is hunting him down.

God told him to go because that was God's will. And David doesn't argue. He just goes. The word of the Lord is made known to David.

[30 : 07] But God has stopped speaking to Saul. God is protected, protecting and preparing his king. And he has rejected the king Saul who was on a downward spiral.

Now, we don't know whether the 400 people went with David or not. But we see later on in the book that they were with him. So it's likely that they did.

But why would anyone follow this man? Why would anyone march behind him knowing that they're walking into harm's way? Why would anyone follow David into a path of suffering?

Because he is God's anointed. That is why David's men follow him. And that is why we follow Jesus. On a path that we know will lead to suffering.

Because he is God's chosen and anointed king. So how does God prepare his servant? Well, he tells him where to go.

[31 : 11] And so that God's will is done. But that requires obedience. And submission to God's will. So in the Bible, we have the word of God that instructs us in his will.

And we have the Holy Spirit living within us to guide us as we live out our lives. But how different would our lives be if we spent our time more concerned with how we could accomplish God's will rather than how we can make our own lives more comfortable?

How different would our lives be if we submitted fully and obediently to God's word and lived out our Christian faith in every single area of our life?

I think we'd see a big difference. In this whole chapter, God's anointed king is being humbled. He's gone from a king's court to a cave.

From being the commander of a thousand men to the leader of an army of 400 outcasts. Looking at this from the outside, he is not a leader anyone would want to get behind.

[32 : 26] Everyone in their right mind would walk away. In fact, they'd run away. But they stay because he is God's anointed. Doesn't this remind you of Jesus, our king, who did the completely unexpected and sat with the tax collectors and sinners, the outcasts of Israel?

Instead of the religious leaders and the rulers, Jesus started off his ministry with 12 men, a group of misfits who were ordinary people, a cause that nobody in their right mind would join.

But today there is an estimated 2.3 billion Christians in the world. David is being prepared for a life of service for God.

Jesus is God's ultimate servant king who became flesh and dwelt among us. And he is calling us to himself, preparing us for a life of obedience and suffering.

So what does our king call us to do? Well, we'll finish with these words in just a few moments. This is our God, the servant king.

[33 : 46] And this is what he does. He calls us to follow him, to bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to the servant king.

We are called into a life of obedient service of a great, great king. And that service isn't easy, but the glory that awaits those who finish well is far beyond any struggle that we face here and now.

Preparation isn't always easy, but preparation by God and for his service in obedience to his king is always, always worth it.

Keep going. Keep being obedient. Let's pray together. And just in the quietness of our own hearts, maybe there is something that you need to bring before the Lord.

Or maybe you're in a situation where you need his help. Use this time to cry out to him. Heavenly Father, our prayer is simple.

[35 : 12] Turn our desperation into service. Turn our fear into praise.

And turn our prayers into a greater trust for you. For your glory and fame alone. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.