

Read 1 Samuel 24:1-22.

Do you ever have it where you've planned something out in your mind and just wish that whatever it was that your brilliant mind just came up with could be immediately put down on paper?

I had that the other night. I was driving home from spending an evening with the young adults, and an idea for this message popped into my head. And so there I was in my car, brimming with excitement, brainstorming and rehearsing out maybe a five-minute segment which in the moment felt really empowering.

And then it hit me. Shoot, this is all just in my head. I have to somehow remember this and write it all out. So after I parked, I pull out my phone to start typing, but by that point all I could remember was fragments. And it just wasn't the same; I'd lost it. So eventually I just gave up.

This kind of thing happens all the time. We plan out a conversation in our minds, thinking that in the moment we'll remember, and then when we come face-to-face with the person we recall nothing.

Public speaking, same thing. You try to do it off the cuff, having rehearsed it perfectly, but then after the fact? Should've written it down.

Whenever we have those moments when our brain just feels on fire—the creative juices are flowing, the perfect words are coming out, the situation is playing out exactly how we want it to. Those are moments when we would *love* to have a personal AI system jotting it all down, dictating exactly what our mind is thinking. It would be *so convenient*.

I would imagine, though, that for all of us here, that those times are few-and-far-between compared to the amount of times that we're incredibly thankful we *don't* have a personal AI system jotting everything down.

Because the reality is that our minds—as powerful and mysterious as they are—are full of thoughts that we would dread anyone actually hearing.

Most of the time we would rather people *not* know what we're actually thinking, am I right? We would much prefer that our internal processing remain within the safety and privacy of our own thoughts.

And that's simply because—as some have put it—the line between good and evil runs down the middle of every human person, and that includes the mind. Our minds, our internal processing, is where our greatest battle is. This back-and-forth between choosing what is good and choosing what is perhaps not so good. What is within God's good order for us, and what perhaps is outside of it.

In the passage that we've just read this morning, we're given a bit of a glimpse into the mind of David and the inner battle that he would have experienced in this situation with Saul.

Now, David's actually the character in Scripture who we probably know the most about, simply because of all the psalms that are written by him and give us a window into his very raw and honest prayer life. He's the one in Scripture who has publicly bared his soul the most.

But in this passage, here in 1 Samuel 24, David's really caught between a rock and a hard place. He's found himself in a situation where he needs to make a judgment call, with pressures around him to lean a certain way.

And the decision that he makes is indicative of something pretty significant.

By this point in the story of God's old covenant with His people, the people of Israel have begged the prophet Samuel (the son of Hannah, who we looked at last week) to give them a king, because they want to be like all the other nations.

They want to look like the other nations that have a human monarch, a fancy palace at the center of the capital city, a king who they can *see*, who looks powerful and authoritative, with chariots and armies and all the like.

Human nature has not changed very much, if we want to be honest with ourselves. We'd all prefer to put our trust in something that we can *see*.

Now, this wasn't, of course, God's desire for Israel. They rejected Him as king, and so He gives the people what they want. Through the prophet Samuel, he appoints Saul as king, a man who looks the part—which is what they wanted; someone strong and powerful—but wasn't actually a man after God's heart.

And by this point in the book of 1 Samuel, God is disappointed with Saul and does in fact have a different king in mind for Israel, a young Shepherd boy named David. And as the story goes along, it becomes clear to Saul that God has chosen David to succeed him, and Saul's not happy about it. So he's trying to kill David.

David has fled with his own little army of men, and while Saul's away on a military campaign, he finds out that David's actually nearby, in the dessert of En Gedi.

And in a situation that is almost a bit slapstick (you got to think this section of Scripture was definitely written by a dude), Saul goes into a cave to relieve himself—to use the 'toilet' as my son would say—and it just so happens to be the cave where David and his men are hiding.

Now, Saul is very obviously unaware that he's in a vulnerable position in this moment. And the men just go nuts on David. "*Now* David, do it *now*. This is your opportunity! God's given him into your hands. He's opened the door right in front of you. The guy who *hates you* and has been trying to *kill you* is right here, free for the taking."

In other words, all your problems, David, could be dealt with and disappear if you just take control of this opportunity. All your problems will go away if you just get rid of this one person in your life.

Imagine the inner battle that David would be having in this moment. All my problems could disappear. I'd be free. I'd be free to live my own life again. It'd get my life back. I wouldn't have to run or hide or live in fear. All it would take is for me to get rid of this one person. When he's gone, I'll be free to be who God wants me to be.

Imagine the wrestling he'd be doing with God in this moment. God, have you really given Saul over to me? Is this an open door that you've orchestrated where I can get revenge and finally move on? Or are you testing me? I know that you're a God of mercy, but how can I really show mercy to someone who hates me? Is this you or not?

I would imagine that we've all had these kinds of moments, where we are torn between offering mercy to someone and running where our own frustrations want to take us.

Because naturally—and I really do mean naturally—we feel better when we are given permission to be angry. Like, just let me be angry. And it feels so good when we explain our anger to others and receive their affirmation. We feel justified.

And so really, if I just secretly hate someone, what's the harm? If I ghost them or secretly hold bitterness against them, what's the big deal? My life would be better without this person and their problems weighing me down.

There's no point trying to reconcile with someone who clearly doesn't seem capable of admitting their own faults, so why bother?

And yet something just doesn't feel quite right. Because we know that our own minds are constantly pulled between what we feel is the straight and narrow, and what our own desires—or the pressures around us—are saying is actually the better option.

This past week in our staff devotional time, we read a portion from a Timothy Keller devotional that spoke about this battle we face as Christians between living the old life and embracing the new life. "Every day," he writes, "is a battle. Will you operate out of your old self or your new self?"

The self that David is being pressured by his friends to embody is the self that indulges in selfish hopes and freedoms.

“All my problems will go away.” Sure, but we know that’s not actually true.

“I will feel more free.” For a time, perhaps. But that feeling will go away.

“I will be in control of my life again.” Yes, but only until the next issue comes around.

The pressures to pursue these freedoms that David felt in this moment were *strong*. And yet he can’t do it. He cuts off a corner of Saul’s robe instead, and even then he still feels guilty.

Look at the huge swing in perception that happens here. David has crept up to Saul *with the intention of killing him*, of doing what all of his men had encouraged him to do.

But in a split moment of judgment, he chooses a different path.

Look at what he says: “*The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.*” He then *rebukes* his men rather than affirming them and keeps them from attacking Saul.

What’s happened here? Simply this: that David has chosen to look at Saul the way that the Lord looks at Saul. Because look at how much emphasis he puts on the Lord. And he refuses to do anything that would undermine the Lord, *even though* Saul was clearly operating in the wrong. *Even though* Saul was clearly not a good or godly King to be leading Israel.

I just love this story, because this story makes it so abundantly clear that that that wrestling, that inner battle that David was experiencing, was absolutely essential in his ability to choose the better way.

It wasn’t just a simple matter. He had to weigh the options. He hadn’t just gone with what others told him to do. He considered the pressures for a better and freer life; but he didn’t accept it as the default. He questioned whether that was actually the best option. The ‘good’ choice. The godly choice.

David enters into the battlefield of his own fallen nature yet under the Lordship of His God. He lets himself feel that tension. He wrestles with that tension. He tries to identify that tension.

And he chooses to see this situation not from his own limited perspective, but from God’s. He refuses to do anything that might undermine or misrepresent who He knows God to be.

What's so significant about this moment is that David chooses to see his enemy through the eyes of the Lord. And this dilemma, this moment for him, was so significant to him that he wanted to have it written down on paper.

Now, I want to just pause here and invite you to think of someone who you feel has caused a 'dilemma' in your own mind, an inner battle. Someone who you might need to see—or ask the Spirit to help you to see—through the eyes of the Lord.

Who does the Holy Spirit bring to mind when you think of someone that you are in disagreement with, someone you are holding something against, someone who has made you feel less free, someone who has maybe even made your life miserable, someone you have a hard time feeling any kind of love for.

How would the Lord have you see them? How does *He* see this person?

How do Jesus's words in Matthew 5:7, "*Blessed are the merciful...*" come into play?

If you were around this summer, you might remember that throughout our Beatitude series, I tried to routinely emphasize that all of the Beatitudes hold together.

In other words, one naturally leads into the other. Embodying one Beatitude, such as being poor in spirit, will naturally allow the Kingdom of God to break through you in such a way that you begin to embody the others—like a light breaking through a small crack in the wall, and overtime the crack just gets wider and wider and more light shines through.

Case-in-point, look at how David approaches Saul *after having chosen* the path of mercy. He humbly bows down before him, the man who's trying to kill him. His face is in the dirt. And he explains to Saul that even though Saul is bent on harming him, he has no intention of repaying back that harm.

In being merciful, David also experienced the Kingdom way of being poor in spirit. And meek. And pure in heart. And peacemaking.

In being merciful, he also hungered and thirsted for righteousness. Because he knew that the judgments of God were better than his own ideas of what was good.

In being merciful, he may very well have put himself at risk of persecution—even by his own men—because he was seeking to see his enemy through the eyes of God.

See, what the Beatitudes are getting at is the 'all in' factor of living under the Lordship of Christ. And I had at least three or four conversations this past week on this very topic, so I'm feeling that it's something to talk about.

When the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom come near, starts to invade us and transform us to care more about *His* Kingdom than our ideas of what is good, when this happens there is no such thing as lukewarm faith.

That's not to say that we have to be perfect, but it's simply to point to the *intention* and *mission* that the Holy Spirit has been given: to transform us into all-in disciples of Jesus, so that every corner of our lives is dedicated to and submissive to *and empowered by* the Lordship of Jesus.

I've quoted this before, but it's so good I have to quote it again. Catholic writer and priest, Brennan Manning, once said this:

"The gospel is absurd and the life of Jesus is meaningless unless we believe that He lived, died, and rose again with but one purpose in mind: to make brand-new creation. Not to make people with better morals but to create a community of prophets and professional lovers, men and women who would surrender to the mystery of the fire of the Spirit that burns within, who would live in ever greater fidelity to the omnipresent Word of God, who would enter into the center of it all, the very heart and mystery of Christ, into the center of the flame that consumes, purifies, and sets everything aglow with peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love.

"This, my friend, is what it really means to be a Christian."

David has a Beatitude legacy because when he was in a pressure-cooker of expectations and 'false freedoms' and battling between the pressure to be king or submit to God as King, he made a judgment call that demonstrated that the Kingdom of God was a stronger fire within him than the desire for his own kingdom.

He wanted to be all in. And look at the result. Not only is David transformed by this decision, but so is his enemy.

The text says that Saul wept before David, and said to him, "*You are more righteous than I... May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today.*"

Saul—who as we know from the story, goes back and forth between hating David and forgiving him—at least in this moment, is also able to see David through the lens of God and ask for God's goodness to fall on his enemy.

The man who Saul hated is now the man for whom Saul is seeking God's mercy and goodness. And its proof that battling and wrestling for God's Kingdom purposes is a worthwhile endeavour. That there is opportunity for transformation when we consider *Christ's* perspective on someone rather be directed by our own.

Scripture reminds us over and over that we *will be* tempted by other voices telling us to enforce our own judgments. And it's in those inner battles, those moral dilemmas—when *we're* feeling caught between a rock and a hard place—that we have opportunity to lay down our own assumptions and be open to the Spirit of Jesus who helps us to see others through the eyes of God.

Because Jesus Himself, in the moment of his betrayal, in the moment of his greatest vulnerability and fear—a moment that had to be written down—looked his enemy in the eyes and said, “Friend, do what you came to do.”

To the very end, Judas was still a friend in the eyes of Jesus.

And it's that gesture of mercy—that endless, relentless, extension of mercy—that Jesus extends to us saying, “Take it! Take it. Don't throw it away. Let it transform you. Let it be the lens by which your whole vision is framed. Let it be the window by which you see others.”

Let your eyes look at others the way that I look at you.