



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Lessons from the Life of David: 1 Samuel 23:1-29

“The Rock of Escape”

TRANSCRIPT

Some people may think in the light of the fact that Dr. Daniel is going to speak on Calvinistic Evangelism, that the subject and the message will be extremely short. [Laughter] Because the idea of a lot of people is, unfortunately, that Calvinists cannot evangelize. So Dr. Daniel, I'm sure you'll have at least a message of an hour long? So or at least the regular hour, time together. And I would encourage you to come because one of the, I hate to say it so forthrightly, you may think deep down within I'm glad to say it, but I really don't like to say it, one of the ignorances of Arminianism is that Calvinists cannot, by virtue of their doctrine, evangelize in a logical and rational way. So I hope that you will come and if you are unable to come this Wednesday that you will get the tape and listen to the message.

We're turning to 1 Samuel chapter 23 and we are looking at the entire chapter, so I'm going to read through verse 1 through verse 29 of 1 Samuel chapter 23.

“Then they told David, saying, ‘Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors.’ [Incidentally, it was the custom of the Philistines, evidently, to come up at the time of the harvest and to invade the land a little bit in order to steal the harvest. And so, that is evidently the occasion for this visit or invasion of the

Philistines.] Therefore David enquired of the Lord, saying, ‘Shall I go and attack these Philistines?’ And the Lord said unto David, Go, and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah. But David's men said to him, ‘Look, we are afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?’”

And, incidentally, Keilah was in Judah, but it was considerably south of Jerusalem and quite south also of Saul and his men. But, evidently, these men felt that they would be in something like a vise. They would have Saul on their back with his soldiers and then in front of them they would have the Philistines. And so, naturally, they were afraid they were going to be caught in a vise, like Stonewall Jackson used to be happy to do in the Civil War; if he could catch the enemy in a vise that was good military strategy.

“Then David enquired of the Lord once again. And the Lord answered him and said, ‘Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into your hand.’ And David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand.” [The ephod was part of the priestly garment on which were the Urim and Thumim from which guidance was obtained through the Lord.]

“And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, God has delivered him into mine hand; for he has shut himself in, by entering a town that has gates and bars. Then Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him; he said to Abiathar the priest, ‘Bring hither the ephod here.’ Then said David, ‘O Lord God of Israel, your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell your servant.’ And the Lord answers [in reverse of

the questions of David, he says] He will come down. Then David said, ‘Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver you.’ So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah, so he halted the expedition.”

Have you noticed Saul was told in verse 7? Verse 9, David knew. And then we have again, then verse 13, then it was told Saul. You may think that the C.I.A. is something that is relatively modern. But it’s not. To spy on your enemy, from the beginning of time, was necessary. Information is what warring armies need. And so, there were local C.I.A.’s. I’m using the term broadly, of course, and that is the reason for these “then it was told” or “David knew” they were giving information to their respective heads. In verse 14.

“And David stayed in strong holds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not delivered him into his hand. So David saw that Saul was come to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a forest. Then Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David in the wood, 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 thou shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you; even my father Saul knows that.’ So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord and David stayed in the wood, and Jonathan went to his own house. Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is David not hiding with us in the strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now, therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand.’ And Saul said, ‘Blessed are you of the Lord; for you have compassion on me. Please go, and find out for sure and see the place where his

hideout is, and who has seen him there: For I am told he is very crafty. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall be, if he is in the land that I will search for him throughout all the clans of Judah.’

So they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon when Saul and his men went to seek him. They told David; [There’s “they” again.] Therefore, he went down to the rock, and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon. Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. [That, in the light of the place where they were, down to the southeast of Jerusalem and not far from the Dead Sea, it’s likely that the mountain is not mountain, but a large cliff, according to most of the Old Testament students.] So David made haste to get away from Saul for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, Hurry and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines: So they called that place the Rock of Escape.”

Now the term that is used for escape here, is a term that has as its fundamental meaning divide, to be smooth or to divide and so most of the Old Testament commentators like to think that this should be something like ‘The place of division.’ But if that is correct, and there’s a slight question about it, we still find this cliff is a rock of escape, for David. And so it may well be called that, even though the precise rendering of it may be the rock of division.

“Then David went up from there, and dwelt in the strong holds of Engedi, down near the Dead Sea.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for the word of God and we thank Thee for all of the lessons that are so beautifully taught in these accounts of the life of David and those who lived at the time that he did. We thank Thee for him. We thank Thee for his faith. We give Thee thanks, also, for his experiences for they are very instructive for us so many centuries later. Enable us, Lord, by Thy grace, to learn the lessons and to live our lives in accordance with them. Give us something of the earnestness of the great king to be and if it please Thee, Lord, some of the great love that he did have for Thee.

We pray, Lord, for our country in these very difficult times, for our President; give wisdom and guidance to him beyond his own natural understanding. And we pray, Lord, for the whole Church of Christ, for all of the assemblies of the saints as they meet and hear the word of God and seek, by Thy grace, to respond to it. Give fruit today, as the word is proclaimed, both here and elsewhere.

We pray for the sick, for those who have requested our prayers and for the basis of them, we ask that Thou will give answers to the petitions. We especially pray for those who are suffering, and some are suffering very, very deeply. For those in the hospital, we commit them to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon them. Give wisdom to the doctors and bless their families in these experiences, which are so difficult.

We commit our meeting to Thee and pray that Thou will be with us in it.
For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] One of the great blessings of being in the Church of Jesus Christ is the fact that we have not only young children, who are new in the faith and who have come to

believe in our Lord, but we have middle-aged people, that’s anybody around 35 – and then we have old people, who have been here so long that they can remember Mr. Fuller, and heavenly Sunshine. And it’s so glad to have someone like Merle Weaver, so old to have remembered [laughter] and how great it is for the rest of us to have the testimony of these older people about the days of Charles E. Fuller and his evangelistic radio programs. Thank you, Merle, for reminding us of that. And when I get your age, then, I hope I’ll be able to share some of those things with others, as well. For those of you who don’t know, he’s younger than I am. [More laughter] He’ll probably want to tell you how much, later on. I think it’s about six years but, at any rate, he’s younger.

Now, the subject for today as we continue our studies in the life of David is “The Rock of Escape” the title taken from the verse near the end of the chapter, the 28th verse, where David experiences one of his many deliverances. There is a remarkable text that David, himself, writes in one of his psalms, it’s one, I’m sure that you are probably familiar with. It’s Psalm 34 in verse 19, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” Many and varied were the afflictions of this progenitor of the messiah. Few were more in jeopardy more often than David, the son of Jesse. And the remarkable thing about it, of course, is that these experiences were the things that fitted him to write the psalms. And so when you find in the psalms expressions of bitter grief and then overflowing in abundance joy, you can look back into the life of David and you can surely see if you study him carefully, that he knew all of these experiences and all of the things that stand between them. And we learn from him and we are, therefore, his debtors.

When my grandmother, on my mother’s side, was on her death bed it turned out to be, in Jasper, Alabama, I went over, I was in the insurance business at the time and had, in the meantime, been converted, I went over to visit her and while I was there, I took her Bible and asked her what she would like for me to read. She was a very devout Methodist, who every summer attended camp meeting in Columbus, Mississippi, which

was her home. And so, as I took her Bible and read a passage, which she asked me to read and I've forgotten exactly which it was, I noticed one thing about her Bible. The Bible was relatively used in the New Testament and not as much in the Old Testament. But the one book that she used more than anything else was the Book of the Psalms. The pages of the Psalms in her Bible were somewhat dog-eared, reflecting the fact that she had often, she was a widow, she had often appealed to those psalms for the comfort and consolation and strengthening that she needed.

Mr. Spurgeon once said, “Strange that the painful events in David’s life should end in enriching the repertoire of the national minstrelsy, out of a sour ungenerous soil sprang up the honey bearing flowers of psalmody. Had he never been cruelly hunted by Saul, Israel and the church of God and after-ages, would have missed this song. The music of the sanctuary is in no small degree indebted to the trials of the saints. Affliction is the tuner of the hearts of sanctified songsters.” Well I think that we can see that for, fortunately, we have psalms that David wrote, evidently, at the time that he is experiencing the things that we are studying.

Another striking instance of God’s providential care for his saints is shown us in chapter 23, as a matter of fact, a number of these instances, but one stands out. The God of Bethel, Jacob’s God, the God of Bethel, authors the Rock of Escape. And his anointed servant is saved to assume his promised dominion, The God of Bethel. When we think of the God of Bethel, a phrase often used by expositors of Holy Scripture and students of the word of God, we go back and think about God’s dealings with Jacob. Jacob was a cheat, as we know, and had by his treachery and by his cheating managed to obtain the birthright from his brother, and not only that, but he had also obtained the blessing and his mother was privy to it and assisted in it. And when it became evident to Esau that Jacob had stolen his birthright and stolen his blessing, he determined that he was going to slay him, if he could get his hands upon him.

And so you'll remember, that with the help of his mother, Rebecca, Jacob then flees to the east and along the way stops at a place called Bethel, a fugitive from justice, running away from home, a man who had faith, which is what Esau did not have, but, nevertheless, a man with many, many flaws in his character. So here, as he put his head down and fell asleep, tired from his journey, you'll remember, that he had a dream, a vision it turned out to be. He saw a ladder and the ladder reached up to heaven and on the ladder angels were ascending and descending upon that ladder. When the Lord Jesus, in John chapter 1, is related to this, as the apostle writes that first chapter of John, it's evident that he regards the ladder as reflective of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In other words, if you'll study the use of the Old Testament in John chapter 1, you will see that the ladder the apostle sees is typical of our Lord, who is the one who stands between heaven and earth as the mediator.

Jacob did not understand all of this at the time, no doubt, but nevertheless, the ladder was there and then God began to speak to Jacob. And some of the promises that were repeated to him are the great promises on which the process of the word of God is built. In Genesis chapter 28, for example, some of those promises are these. After he says he dreamed and behold Moses writes, “He saw the ladder set up on the earth, the top reached to heaven, and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie, I will give to you and your seed. Also your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, you shall spread abroad in the west and the east, to the north and to the south, and in you and in your seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Now, notice this marvelous promise. “Behold, I am with you.” How different from the baals. The baals were gods of individual cities. And if you didn't live in the particular city, you might not have a god. But this is a God who reveals himself as so much greater than the baals, that wherever one goes, he is there. “Behold, I am with

you.” You may be out of the land, but I’m not a god of the land. I’m a God of all the lands. “And wherever you go, I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and he said, how contemporary this is, one of our favorite words that people like to say, the children say it in the commercials and adults say it and in the sports world it’s said and Jacob, when he awakened out of his fear said, “How awesome, awesome is this place!” You see, it’s not new at all. It’s in the first book of the Bible. “How awesome is this place!” The holiness and the significance of it had gripped Jacob.

Now, when we think about the God of Bethel, we think about them. This is the God of Bethel who seeks us when we are not seeking him. For Jacob was not seeking God. He was running from Esau. That was the thing that he was interested in. He’s the one who takes the initiative in our salvation. The one of whom it is written that he answers before we call, the one who heals our backslidings, the one who has told us that if the wicked forsakes his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and returns unto the Lord then he will have mercy upon him and abundantly pardon. That was the God who came to Jacob that night, before Jacob ever came to God. This is what God has been doing, down through the centuries. God came to Abram, told him to get out of the country. To Moses in the burning bush and revealed himself as the great “I am.” To Isaiah when he went up to worship in the temple, he saw the Lord God. And to Jeremiah, he said, “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee.” As you read the studies and study the life of David, you’ll see over and over again, the hand of this great “I am.”

Now, our chapter may be divided into three parts, because this is a sermon. And so, we have David’s deliverance of Keilah, in the first five verses. We have David’s

deliverance from Keilah and the men of that little town in verse 6 through verse 13. And then we have David's domiciling in the wilderness of Ziph in verses 14 through 29.

One can note, as you look at David's life at this point, that the declension into which he fell, described in chapter 21 has now largely passed. Not completely, it never does but, nevertheless, David is now a person who is seeking the Lord God, the prophet has spoken to him in chapter 22 in verse 5, and David is become characterized by obedience. He's an inquirer now, and over and over again, he inquires, that is, he's committing his way into the hands of the Lord.

So the danger at Keilah was the Philistines who'd come to rob the threshing floors, to gain the harvest, and so, he appeals to the Lord, he inquires of the Lord, and the Lord answered him in a sigh and said, “Go down to Keilah and deliver Keilah from the hand of the Philistines. I will deliver the Philistines into your hand.” And so after two inquiries, because his own men were afraid, they were looking back and they were looking forward and they didn't want to be caught in this vise. He went down and the result was that by God's help, he struck the Philistines a mighty blow and not only that, but as God often does, he gives us more than we ask, he obtained their livestock. He delivered Keilah from the Philistines who did not, therefore, lose their harvest. And, in addition, he succeeded in obtaining the livestock, which the Philistines had brought into the land of Judah in order to steal the harvest. So the cattle is a kind of an added blessing for David, for his faithful asking of the Lord for directions. But he has struggles with Saul, for Saul has a C.I.A. as he. And fortunately David has something that Saul does not have. He has the priest with the ephod. And, consequently, he in his contact with the Lord God has a way to find God's direction in his life.

Now, I wish I had an ephod like this that had something, evidently, supernatural about it. But, really, I have something better don't I? I have the Holy Spirit permanently indwelling me, as a result of faith in Jesus Christ. So we don't need an ephod. You might lose the ephod over in the attic or something like that and then you couldn't get guidance

or it might wear out. But the Holy Spirit is better than an ephod. But David had the ephod now, as a result of the priest coming and being with him. So the question now is, is David going to be supported by the people of Keilah, whose harvest he has saved? Saul has heard that he had gone down to Keilah and that was a city that was surrounded by gates and bars. And he thought that now he has them within the city and he can encircle it, and then it would just be a matter of time before he would defeat David and his six hundred men.

So when David knew that Saul plotted against him, he called for Abiathar the priest and for the ephod. And he asks, “Lord God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down as your servant has heard?” And the answers are given by the Lord God. So God gives the answer; he gives it in the reverse way, he says, “He will come down.” And so David is particularly interested in the people of Keilah. He suspects, evidently, that they will be deceitful. And anybody who knows the heart of man should expect that there might be a problem there. And so he asks, “Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?” And the Lord said, “He will deliver you.” And, incidentally, you can see the way in which Saul would love to make God’s providences meet his particular need.

In verse 7 he says, “God has delivered him into my hands.” Wait a minute Saul! God has delivered him into your hand? In other words, Saul seeks with the language of divine providence to suggest that David has gone into the little town of Keilah and God’s providence is on his side, and so, he would make God’s providence serve his unworthy aims. And, incidentally, he celebrates his victory too quickly. As a matter of fact, he celebrates his victory before he’s won it because he says, “God has delivered” not “God will deliver” “God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town which has gates and bars.”

I think it was John Flavel who once said, “By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. By the fear of man they run themselves into evil.”

Now, David’s petition is very interesting. First of all, he very wisely appeals to the covenant God. Notice the 10th verse. David said, “O Lord God of Israel,” “O Yahweh, God of Israel,” covenant keeping God, the God of the promises, reminding him of the promises that he has made to him. Incidentally, my Christian friend, when you get down by the side of your bed, one of the greatest blessings in life is to remind the Lord of the blessings that he has promised you as one who belongs to him. And David doesn’t just do it once. He does it twice. He says in the 11th verse, “Will Saul come down as your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell your servant.” Some great lessons on prayer here. And, incidentally, what a lesson on the heart of man. These are the men in Keilah in Judah, David’s country, these are the men who have been delivered and saved, as the text says, “Saved by David.” And these are the men who betray him. Isn’t that interesting? Such is the heart of man. And so the Philistines have an ally. Saul has an ally, and the ally is those who have been blessed through David.

You know, there are some interesting lessons here. One of the interesting lessons is the lesson of human responsibility. In other words, the text of Scripture again plainly does not teach what men call stark fatalism. We read in verse 12, “Then David said, “Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?” And the Lord said, “They will deliver you.” So what would you do in a case like that? You have the word from the Lord that the people of Keilah are going to deliver you. “They will deliver you.” So, what will you do? Well, you might do like some friends who don’t understand altogether the sovereignty of God. Well, there’s nothing we can do. It’s certain to come to pass. The Lord will deliver, so he has said, us into the hands of Keilah. So we’ll just sit and wait for the defeat that is coming.

That’s very interesting. Human responsibility is something that is just as certain as divine providence. And so when David hears the ephod or the Lord through the ephod

and the priests say, “They will deliver you,” he said, human responsibility teaches me, I better get out of here as soon as possible. And so, he did.

Now, that tells me something else about divine providence, or shall I put it this way, not simply divine providence, it does tell us something about that, of course, too, but it tells us something about divine foreordination, as well, and especially it tells us something about the omniscience of God.

Now, when we think of the omniscience of God, we say, God knows everything. He knows everything in the past, the present and the future. There is nothing that escapes his attention; he is omniscient. But there is something else included in omniscience, and that is the knowledge of contingencies, the knowledge of possibilities. He not only knows everything, past, present and future but he knows everything past, present, and future that could take place, were certain situations to exist.

So here, he knows even the possibilities and this was a possibility. If David didn’t do something then “They will deliver you.” So David understood the omniscience of God in the way in which he should be understood and he also understood human responsibility. And so, he left. How important it is to have a knowledge of the word of God and the theology of the word of God. It saved his life.

So he departed from Keilah and now he goes into the wilderness of Ziph. Ziph is a term derived from the Hebrew word that means to refine. And thus, one could think of Ziph as a refining place. And here, David’s faith is further refined. In verse 14, David stayed in strong holds in the wilderness and remained in the mountains and the wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand. This is the same Saul who said before, “Ah, he’s gone into Keilah and he’s now into one of these walled up cities, and now, God has delivered him into my hand.” God has the final word. God did not deliver him into his hand.

Incidentally, have you noticed the language of Saul? It’s the language of evangelicals. Do you know what it is? It’s the language of piety. People who sit in

evangelical churches long enough begin to talk like evangelicals; they may not be evangelicals, but they talk like evangelicals. I’m praying for that. And they have never uttered a petition to God in the earnestness that prayer should be offered. But they say, “I’m praying about that” or “I have prayed about that” or “We ought to pray about that.” And all of the other things that mark the language of piety, which belongs to those in evangelicalism, Saul’s got it all down. “The Lord has delivered them into my hand.” In a moment he will say, “Blessed are you of the Lord. You have compassion on me. Please go and find out for sure where David is, so I can go and slay him.”

I imagine we’d receive him into the fellowship. He speaks the language. He’s one of us. He’s got the same kind of accent we have. Not Texas, mind you, but still we don’t lay down the rule they have to come from Texas and say, naught and right, like we say it. [Laughter] But, at any rate, he has the language of the evangelical. Some fellow.

I think there’s another interesting thing here. David’s in the strong hold and so what’s Saul doing? He’s trying to slay him. That reminds me of something in the New Testament. That reminds me of the way the Apostle Paul, in Galatians chapter 4, arguing the point that we are justified by grace through faith, apart from works, draws an illustration from the Old Testament with Ishmael and Isaac. And he describes the difference between the two. Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman; Isaac, the son of the free, one the legal, one the grace son.

And finally, in verse 29 he says, as he reflects upon the fact that Ishmael used to shoot arrows and Isaac, he says, “But as he who was born according to the flesh, then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so is it now.” And here are the fulfillments further of that; the one from the flesh persecuting the one of the Spirit. It’s always true. It will never stop. As long as we are in the flesh, the world about us or the world of those who do not know our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will never be happy with those who do believe in him. Never forget that! Never forget it! Remember it! And always bear it in mind!

When you're dealing with individuals, require something more than fair words or even religious phrases, before you'd form a judgment of another or commit yourself into their hands. Please remember that! Promises are easily made and easily broken by most people, and include who know the language of evangelicalism. The people who use the term of evangelical so glibly upon their lips often have no fear of God in their hearts. Don't forget that, my Christian friend.

Now, Jonathan visits. What was Jonathan? Was he a believing man? A truly believing man? Well, I like to think that he was, something of him is very vacillating. Why did he not come and join David, has been asked? But let's treat him as if he were a believing man and he did come down and he encouraged David in God.

Many of you in this audience, I recognize you, you are very much into sports, you know the Cowboys are playing this afternoon in Dallas. You know about the playoffs. You know about the college games that transpired yesterday and some of you are happy and some are upset. And all supporters of TCU are in awe. [Laughter] So the sports writers said about the players, themselves, after they finished demolishing Arkansas said, “We stand in awe.” Awesome victory.

Now, if you know, I've been talking with Martha about this, but clichés in sports fall like rain in Rangoon. [Laughter] If it rains in Rangoon, I'm not sure. I can just imagine if Jonathan were into sports, he would come to David and say, “Look, David, you know, [more laughter] the name of the game, you know, is trusting God, you know. You know, that's what it's all about, you know. Trust in God, believing the word. The trouble with you, David, you know, you're not on the same page with God, you know.” These are words taken from the J.J. Boys, in case you're wondering where they come from. “David, you know, what you need is to go with the flow, you know.”

Now, we turn to Jonathan, he's not into sports, he's into divine things. And so, we read in verse 16, “He strengthened his hand in God.” And wait, furthermore, he knows

more than just strengthening in the hand in God. Listen to what he says. “Don’t fear for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel.”

He knows the great promises that God has given. He knows the sovereign God’s unbreakable, unchangeable promises. “And I shall be next to you.” He doesn’t know everything. He hopes that. But he knows about the messianic promises. And then he says something very interesting. He says, “Even Saul knows this.” Now, you can see, how Saul’s wicked persecuting of David, with the glib words of piety upon his lips, how sinful that is. So the covenant is renewed between the two, with Yahweh as the witness and the guarantor of it, by the two friendly men.

The remainder of the chapter tells of the deliverance from Saul and the Ziphites, around the mountain near the wilderness. The deceit of the Ziphites is parallel with the unctuous religious phrases from Saul. David is among the Ziphites and they think over the situation. David and his men are around here. We don’t know what they’re going to do. We’re a little afraid of them. But the person we really want to be in with is the one in authority. And Saul is the king. So let’s go up and promise to deliver David into the hands of Saul, and he’ll surely reward us with some loans from the savings and loan.

[Laughter]

You know, it is so characteristic of our human nature. We want to get in with those in authority, so it might help us. The deceit of the Ziphities is another insight into the nature of man.

Charnock once said, “An hypocrite may well be termed a religious atheist, an atheist masked with religion.” William Gurnall said, “The hypocrite sets his watch, not by the sun, that is, the Bible, but by the town-clock; what most do, that he will do. *Vox populi* is his *vox Dei*.” The voice of the people is the voice of God. That’s the voice of the media, today, incidentally. The voice of the people so often turns out to be the voice of God. Thomas Adams said, “The hypocrite is like the Sicilian Aetna, flaming at the

mouth when it has snow at its feet. Their mouths talk hotly, but their feet walk coldly.”
Such is Saul.

Now, I'd like for you in the few moments that we have, to turn with me to Psalm 54. We read in the introduction to this psalm, these words “A contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, “Is David not hiding with us?” Now, we've talked about those superscriptions. They may not be inspired, but they often appear, as one reads the psalm, to have been written in the period of time about which we may be talking. And in this case, this one appears to have been written about the same time. Some of the same words are used. And, therefore, it's perhaps probable that this was written at the time at a later time in which he reflects over this time. He even uses the term “delivered” in verse 7. “For he has delivered me out of all my trouble.” But, it provides an insightful revelation of God's word on deliverance, found in Psalm 54.

I'll just briefly go through the psalm and ask you to note three things and then we'll look back at the last verses of 1 Samuel 23. I'll try to do it in five minutes. The only refuge for David is the Name. “Save me, O God, by Your Name, And vindicate me by Your strength.” The Name is of course the term that is used for all of the attributes and the essence of the Lord God. It's what God is and who he is. So by his Name, holy, righteous, just, merciful, loving, filled with loving kindness: these are the things that make up his name. And so David says, “Save me, by Your Name.” Exhibit your nature in my salvation. “Vindicate me by Your strength.” God is his helper.

But they have not set God before them. The only door is prayer, he states in verses 2 and 3. “Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth.” I can see him by the side of the cliff on the other side from Saul's men, turning his heart to God and saying, “Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers.” That word stranger is in some of the manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, there is a term that means insolent that is found here. Perhaps “For the insolent have risen up against me,”

but strangers those men were to the grace and loving kindness of God. “And oppressors have sought after my life; They have not set God before them.”

Mr. Spurgeon once said, “As long as God hath an open ear, we cannot be shut up in trouble. All other weapons may be useless, but all-prayer is ever more available. No enemy can spike this gun.” That was what David had. He had prayer. And nothing Saul and his men could do could prevent him from praying and receiving from the Lord God the answer to his prayers.

O, my Christian friend, in your trials, use what God has given you as your strength and support. And the only issue possible then is success. It may not be precisely what you want, but it will be success in the long run. And you’ll look back and say, “God answered my prayer,” as David does. He says, “He will repay my enemies for their evil. Cut them off in Your truth. I will freely sacrifice to You. I will praise Your Name, O LORD,” And notice he writes in the past tense here at the end. He’s writing the psalm after the experiences have taken place and he’s come through them successfully. He says, “For He has delivered me out of all trouble, And my eye has seen its desire upon its enemies.”

Now, just for one moment, when David was behind that mountain or behind that large cliff, and he offered that prayer to the Lord God, things were hopeless evidently. He was being surrounded by Saul’s greater force, as far as the natural eye was concerned, David had come to the end of what Saul considered, his rebellion. And so, consequently, I can easily see how he offered up that prayer, “Save me by Your Name.” And God saved him. But notice how he does it. And so often he does it this way. He does it in his sovereign providence, by an unlikely thing.

Notice, the 27th verse, “But a messenger came to Saul.” But a messenger. Incidentally, the Hebrew term for messenger is *mal’ak* which means an angel. I’m not suggesting, of course, this is an angel. It was a messenger. That term does duty for both of those. But you can almost say it was an angelic messenger in the sense that God is

responsible for this. And so a messenger came to Saul at that precise moment when everything seemed to be lost. And the message was, “Hurry, and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land.” It’s not “the Philistines are planning to invade the land.” They have invaded it. And so, Saul, immediately, must leave. And the messenger that came was like the Pillar of Cloud and the Pillar of Fire and the Rock was the Rock of Escape for David as he looked to the Lord God. What a magnificent little account of God’s providential dealing with him.

You might not expect this from Ralph Waldo Emerson, but Mr. Emerson once said, “All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.” That, I believe, is what we, too, may do. Everything that we have seen to this point has taught us that we may trust the Creator and our Redeemer for all that lies ahead.

I invite you, if you have never believed in our Lord, Jesus Christ, to realize that you do not have such a Redeemer, who stands for you. May God, in his marvelous grace, so touch your heart, that if you do not believe in him and have not believed in him to this point, that you may bow your head at this very moment, lift up your voice to the Lord God, acknowledge your need. You belong to the deceitful Ziphites, and the deceitful citizens of Keilah, who illustrate so faithfully the nature of man apart from God, appeal to him to deliver you, on the basis of His Name and his grace and mercy manifested in the sacrifice of Christ, and he will deliver you.

Let’s stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for the faithful rendering up of petitions to Thee by the king, anointed by the Lord God, to rule over Israel. O God, help us to learn from the life of David, so that we in our day, in our century, may find the kind of deliverance that he experienced. If there are here those who do not know our Lord, we ask especially that Thou wilt touch their hearts and turn them to Christ who died for sinners.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

