

Finding Strength in the LORD

1Samuel 23:1-29

It seems fair to characterize the life of the apostle Paul as one of extremes.

As a younger man he passionately committed himself to a Jewish religious group called the Pharisees.

As part of that group he devoted himself to keeping the over six hundred commands of the Mosaic Law.

For a Pharisee that meant much more than the commands given by Moses, it meant following the added regulations and traditions established by highly regarded religious leaders.

It was a life of extremely diligent list keeping.

Paul, looking back on those days, describes himself as 'faultless' in keeping the list.

His passion for such things brought him into conflict with Jesus and His followers.

Jesus rightly taught that the external rule keeping of the Pharisees was against what the Bible actually teaches and so He had no problem acting against it many times in His ministry.

That is one of the reasons the religious leaders hated Him and wanted Him dead.

They thought they had succeeded in putting an end to the teaching of Jesus when He died and if He had stayed dead they would have been right.

But on the first day of the week following Jesus' death, Almighty God breathed life back into His body and He left death behind.

That historical fact gave courage to his followers and they began preaching and doing miracles in Jesus' name which angered many of the Pharisees including Paul.

He hated the name of Jesus and His church. He delighted in the death of Christians and was happy to put them in jail.

That is until he met the risen LORD himself.

When that happened Paul does a complete 180, he goes from hating Christ and His Church to loving Jesus and traveling as a missionary to build the Church in as many places as he could.

With that change came a great deal of hardship. He went from persecuting the church with passion to suffering for Jesus with an even greater desire.

Among other things he was beaten many times, stoned, and imprisoned regularly.

One of those occasions took place when he had come to Jerusalem to bring a gift and meet with the church there.

He was in the temple courts and wrongly accused which led to a mob trying to beat him to death.

Thankfully, his life is saved by the Romans but on account of the riot he is held as a prisoner.

Even though that was a familiar situation I can't help but think he was a little discouraged.

In think that because the LORD Jesus Himself, we are told in Acts 23:11, comes and says to Him, "Take courage!" and tells him that he will be going to Rome to preach the gospel there.

And that is exactly what happens because the LORD gives him the strength necessary to the task.

Now, if the apostle Paul, a man with so much zeal for Jesus, needed to be strengthened by the LORD, how much more do we need the same?

I know that most of us have not and may never face trials like Paul, but even so if we are to persevere in our faith and therefore be saved in eternity, we will need to "Find Strength in the LORD."

[As we continue our series in the book of **1Samuel** this morning we find David, the future king of Israel, in a series of circumstance where he needs strength. Turn once again in your bibles to **1Samuel 23:1-29** and resolve in your heart and mind to pay close attention to these lessons about finding strength in the LORD. Lesson number one is this...]

Point #1 – Those who seek God's direction find strength. (Verses 1-6)

When we truly desire to know the LORD for the glory of Who He is in and of Himself and find satisfaction for our souls in what He wants for our lives He will give us what we need to do what is right.

As we have seen many times in this book the Philistines once again attack the Israelites.

This time they attack a town called "Keilah" and are stealing from their 'threshing floors' according to verse 1.

The threshing floor is where the usable grain from the harvest was separated from the stock and according to some commentaries was often used to store the harvested grain.

Imagine doing all that work to plant, grow, harvest, and separate the grain only to have it stolen.

It's a bad situation and they need help.

Since it is the job of the king to defend his people, you would think they would go to Saul for help, but for reasons we are not told the news comes to David instead.

Look with me at what David does in **verses 1-4**.

There are all kinds of good reasons for David to do nothing here.

While he has been anointed as the next king, he is living in the wilderness rather than seated upon the throne.

He could have said, "It's not my job."

It's also a risky move as his men point out to him. If they leave where they are Saul will have a chance to attack them.

What does he do? He inquires of the LORD.

God commands him to go to Keilah.

The key phrase is in verse 4 when the LORD tells David that He will give the Philistines into David's hand.

That is an expression meaning God will put these enemies of His people under that power of David.

That's exactly what happens.

David goes fights against the Philistines and wins yet another victory over them saving the city.

Why does he win? Because he is doing what God commands him and God causes his strength to be sufficient to the task.

How does he receive God's command? He inquires of the LORD.

[Knowing God's commands does for our spiritual strength what food does for our physical bodies. How many of you read the labels on food packages? One of the main things a food label tells you is the number of calories you are about to consume. Calories are a measure of energy. Our bodies convert food into energy or strength.]

That is how the bible describes itself in more than one place.

God's word is called bread, honey, milk, solid food etc...

Jesus calls obedience to the LORD food in John 4:34.

Some people may object and say, "Yes, but David had the prophet Gad and the priest Abiathar to inquire of the LORD and we don't have that."

I would say we have far more than David. We have the completed Word of God in the Bible and it is sufficient for all of life.

To reject that, I believe, is to show contempt for the glorious work of the Holy Spirit.

[Listen, He gives us everything thing we need to love and serve Him wherever we may be found. His written word is our primary means to know Him and grow in our love and devotion to the LORD Jesus. In we truly seek Him in these pages we will find strength. Lesson number two...]

Point #2 – Life can still be hard in the strength of the LORD. (Verses 7-13)

Sometimes making godly decisions can put us in difficult places and that is a common thing for the people of God.

What David's men feared in verse 3 happens in verses 7-8.

Notice a major difference between David and Saul here. Where David inquires of the LORD Saul presumes God's will.

'Keilah' ironically means "fortress". It's ironic because of their apparent vulnerability to the Philistines.

It likely has that name because of its city walls and gates which Saul thinks will trap David.

David again seeks the LORD through Abiathar the priest in verse 9 commanding him to "bring the ephod."

This ephod is likely that of Exodus 28 a garment of the high priest.

Incorporated into the Ephod was the breast piece and in the breast piece was something called Urim and Thummim which were used by the high priest to make decisions for the people by asking yes or no questions of the LORD.

We see the questions he asked in **verses 10-12.**

We have already seen Saul's willingness to destroy an entire town on account of David. Will he do it again? Yes he will.

Will the people give David up to save their own necks? Yes they will.

How do you like that? David and his men just risked their lives to save these people and they would easily abandon him.

That hardly seems right does it?

Why does the LORD have David come and rescue these people when they would turn their backs on him in what seems to be an instant?

If the LORD gave David the strength to fight the Philistines and win, why does the situation turn on a dime and put him at risk?

Remember David has been anointed the next king over God's people.

One of the main roles of the king was to be God's representative to the people.

God asked of David here what He himself does all the time.

The LORD is pointing us especially to Jesus in this.

[Remember the night before Jesus died? Remember He told the disciples that they would all fall away? What did they say when He told them that? They all said "I will never do that." What happens a little later on in the Garden when they came to arrest Jesus? They all left. Did Jesus walk away? Does He say, "They abandoned me so I will abandon them?" He had the power to walk away, but the eternal sovereign will to love His people, to rescue them even though none of us deserve it. How did He do it? According to the strength of Almighty God.]

Jesus knew the strength of God to a greater degree than any human being who has ever lived.

Does that mean His life and work were always easy? Far from it.

It is the same here with David and it is the same with you and me as well.

Being a Christian is a hard road at times.

Why does God make it that way? According to 1Peter it is to reveal the genuine nature of our faith.

[Do you know what it is like brothers and sisters to turn the other cheek? That is no easy thing to do? Do you know what it is like to serve ungrateful people? Do you know what it is like to pray for those who persecute you? All of us have opportunity to live those things out to one degree or another. It's hard and we are not perfect, but it is through difficult things like this that the reality of being born again by the power of God is experienced in our lives. Here is lesson number three...]

Point #3 – Encouragement from godly friends helps us to find strength. (Verses 14-18)

It is a very difficult thing to have good theology in our heads and have that work its way into our hearts. Having someone else who loves the LORD and cares about us can help reinforce in our hearts what we know to be true in our brains.

Since David had left Keilah Saul did not go there, but he did continue his pursuit and verses 14-18 describe the situation for us.

“Day after day” it says here that “Saul searched” for David, “but God did not give David into his hands.”

The impression of that description is one of a relentless pursuit.

Saul just will not give up trying to capture and kill the son of Jesse.

While I do not believe David ever came to a place of complete despair in those days, it seems clear from the psalms he has written about that period in his life that he had moments of real discouragement.

Somehow his best friend Jonathan, who is also Saul's son, finds David.

When he finds his friend it says at the end of verse 16 that he “helped him find strength in God.”

That is incredibly important!

He does not try to sugar coat the situation, he says nothing here about the odds being in David's favor, he makes no attempt to build up David's self-esteem by telling him he is the better warrior, or anything like that.

What does he do? He encourages his friend in the LORD.

Look again at **verse 17**.

Why should David be unafraid? He is a whisker away from being dead.

How does Jonathan know that Saul will “not lay a hand” on David?

It looks like he is closing in?

How can he say these things to his friend? He can say these things because he says to David, “You will be king over Israel!”

I believe he says that because somehow he came to learn of Samuel’s anointing of David that happened back in chapter 16.

In other words he is encouraging his friend based on the certain promises of Almighty God.

Unlike his father, Jonathan is happy to embrace what God has decreed and sees himself as David’s right hand man in the kingdom to come.

That part God had not promised, but it shows Jonathan’s confidence and delight in God’s certain plan to make David king.

In order to encourage his friend Jonathan is pointing David to Who the LORD is and His irrefutable commitments.

It is so good to have friends like that. It is good to hear from friends like that because we need it probably more often than we realize.

[It’s sort of like seeing a picture of delicious food. Summer time is almost here, how many people enjoy and nice hamburger off the BBQ. If you see a picture of one do you not think, “That looks good!”? Now imagine you are out in your neighborhood for a walk and you smell someone barbequing! It is a whole different kind of experience from seeing it in a picture isn’t it? It is a different kind of reminder that we like burgers off the BBQ.]

That picture is a good way to think about the encouragement of a godly friend.

Godly encouragement doesn’t need to necessarily offer us new information to be encouraging.

David certainly knows in his head all the things that Jonathan says, but to have a friend who believes it with great conviction come alongside him and remind him helps the information to migrate from his head to his heart and therefore strengthen him in the middle of a tough situation.

Not only is it important for us to want friends to encourage us in this way, but it is important for us to be friends who encourage others in this way.

[Let us strive for something better than trite phrases that ignore reality. There is no need to say things like, “Everything will be ok”, “God works in mysterious ways”, “There is a reason for everything”, and alike. Sometimes we need to just be quiet and when it is time to speak let us point each other to the eternal promises of God in our risen saviour Jesus Christ never making light of trial but rather making much of our LORD. That brings us to one more lesson this morning. It is this...]

Point #4 – Only God’s strength can rescue us from evil. (Verses 19-29)

Every bible believing Christian should know that everything comes from God and, therefore, we are utterly dependent creatures and can only be saved and sustained by the power of the LORD.

Up to this point David had been able to steer clear of Saul, but verses 19-21 make matters a bit worse.

Commentator Carl Keil points out that the “Hill of Ziph” stood about one hundred feet high and from it the Ziphites could look over a great deal of the surrounding area.

They were able to see David move from place to place and they decide to take the side of Saul and moreover want to be the ones who get the credit for David’s capture.

The way this reads it appears to be a completely political move on their part. They believe they can tip the scales and benefit from getting in Saul’s good graces.

Again Saul’s self-focus comes to the surface and is totally delighted that these people are willing to spy out his enemy for him.

It is hard to run and hide when people are telling the person chasing you everywhere you go.

It is not long before Saul and his men (probably around 2-3000) are right on the heels of David and his men (now around 600).

The chase happens around a mountain and Saul is closing the gap according to the end of verse 26.

No doubt Saul is very confident in his numbers and believes he is about to win.

The Lord could have put an end to this in any number of ways. Fire from heaven, a horse’s broken leg, a heart attack to the king bent on evil, and alike.

He could have allowed Saul to catch up to David and given David the victory in battle.

He does this instead (**Verse 26b-29**).

In just the nick of time word comes of an attack and Saul leaves David to go deal with the Philistines.

Why does the messenger show up just then? Why is Saul convinced of the need to go?

Because the LORD is directing everything that is happening.

Saul is not struck down dead that day because God is gracious.

David is not captured by Saul that day because God is determined to put David on the throne.

Why cut it so close? To remind David that he is fragile and weak and it is only by the strength of the living God that he will prevail over his enemies.

[I have noticed that many children enjoy standing up on a chair or a counter so that they are a little bit taller than their mom or dad or another grownup. More often than not they like to say so too! They say, "I'm taller than you!" It's fun and usually good for a smile but everyone knows that the only reason the child is higher than the adult is because of whatever they are standing on. How high they are completely depends on something other than themselves.]

How foolish humans beings often are to forget that!

Yes it is good to work hard, yes it is good to pursue wisdom, it is good to develop strength and ability, but we are always standing on the chair of God's grace.

Our hope in prevailing against sin, death, and hell is not our own strength and goodness.

We are far too weak to stand against such things.

Our hope is that we are held fast by the mighty hand of God on account of having Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

It is Jesus' divine strength that enabled Him to endure the cross and to bear the weight of our sin.

It is the incomparable power of God that raised Him from the dead.

We had no part in that. We can simply believe and have our sin taken away, we can believe and have Jesus' perfection placed upon us, we can believe in the power of the cross and the empty tomb, and be saved from death.

Every single one of us needs to find strength in life brothers and sisters.

We find it by seeking direction in God's perfect and holy word.

We can find it even when life is hard, perhaps that is especially true when life is hard.

We find it through godly friends who encourage us in the Lord.

And if we are wise we will realize we need to find our strength in the LORD because that is truly our only hope to be delivered from every evil.

May we find strength today by finding it in the LORD.