

I love the story of David, and this morning we find ourselves in a really interesting bit of his earlier life.

But if we're not careful, we can be tempted to skip straight to the character David and how good he is. But actually, I think if we begin looking at the Saul, we get a much better contrast of the two men, and there are perhaps warnings in his story as well as the way we should act found in David's narrative.

I think Saul's story demonstrates just how far we go wrong when we our hearts turn away from God's purposes and we start serving our own ends. He's become obsessive about getting rid of David.

His heart became hard a long time back in the story, when he became aware that David would become king. This very fact shone a very bright spotlight on his own failings and insecurities at King. Saul had started well, but his heart had turned away from God and become concerned with maintaining his own status.

The thought of someone else coming in and being successful just did not sit well with him. If you read the previous chapter, Jonathan – Saul's son – seemingly has no problem with the idea that it would be David as king. But even this admission from Saul's own son – his successor – is not enough for the jealous king. He wants to hold onto his own kingdom for as long as possible and is determined to do his best to avoid that which God is saying will happen. Not a great place to be.

And it's gotten out of control. We see in this passage that there are perhaps other things he should be worrying about. The philistines are constantly raiding the land, and let's face it, a king must have other things to do rather than worry about one man.

But instead, Saul, consumed by his emotion, take's three thousand men to find and defeat David.

Now we see in the reading that David had some men with him, but anyone who's actually been to En Gedi – the place where David was hiding – anyone who has been there will tell you that you can't hide many people there. Certainly, nowhere near the numbers Saul is taking to defeat the men in this place! You would not be able to march an army of that size up to the caves where David was hiding.

And yet Saul takes a whole army for the sake of one man. It's quite the waste of resources!

And this is the warning in this morning's reading. When we've lost sight of God purposes and our insecurities begin to rule our actions, we can be in danger of reacting disproportionately to the situations we find ourselves in.

Now I'm not for one second going to suggest that any of you has access to your own army! But how often have many of us in arguments or in anger sought our own gain in our relationships?! There can be those times when it's so tempting to let bitterness in and rule our responses to those around us who have found more favour.

I saw this a lot when I was in music bands in my younger years. If one group found favour for no apparent reason and another didn't despite thinking they should, you could guarantee that there would soon be disproportionate comments flying around.

And in today's world, social media has become such a powerful tool for us to connect, but also a weapon that can be wielded to devastating consequences. For instance, I've seen Twitter used to drum up the support of thousands of people to tear down people over issues that are inconsequential. We can be tempted to let our hearts do all the ruling before engaging our heads.

And that's what David's followers urge the future king to do. They are all there pressuring David into getting rid of Saul – they think the Lord has given the cruel king into the hands of David to be rid of him!

Here in the gloom of a dark cave, the unsuspecting Saul is stood – you might say 'caught with his trousers down!'

And the thought must have crossed David's mind that he has been presented a chance to rid himself of a man who has caused him a great deal of hardship.

En Gedi would have been a tough place to hide out in for a long time. Just up the hillside from the dead sea, it's incredibly hot and dry there. It's the only oasis of drinkable water supply for miles.

Psalm 42 is attributed to David's time in hiding there, and when the author writes 'As the deer pants' he really means it. En Gedi has a unique species of deer, and when they get thirsty they make a horrid sound. It's a sound of utter desperation for water. This place is hard.

And the man responsible for David being in this situation is right in front of him. Ready to be taken out.

But David is not like Saul. His heart is still focused on God and the way God wants him to do things. Instead of letting the emotion of the situation get to him, he uses his brain. He does what he thinks is righteous in God's sight and spares Saul's life – even though many among David's ranks, and perhaps even David himself – would have been tempted to think that he was deserving of death.

But David's heart is for God's purposes and not his own gain. I love the fact the David is distraught at the very fact he's had to even harm Saul's cloak! He's not touched the man himself, but cutting his clothes is more than enough to upset him! That's the difference between the two men. One obsessed with causing harm, the other upset that he's even had to touch the clothes of the other! And furthermore, he retains his humility rather than rub it in Saul's face.

You could misread this passage and think that David is taunting Saul by waving the piece of cloak at him. But he is not. He is doing it in a display of humility. He bows before Saul and

calls him 'My Lord and My King!', he bows before him and asks why he believes the stories that he will cause Saul harm.

It's a stark reminder for Saul of just how far he's gone. The penny drops, and he is beside himself with grief over his actions.

So what are the takeaways from this morning's reading?

Well firstly, It's important that we remember to set God before us and to be obedient to his word and purposes. It's too easy for us to try and build our own kingdoms and ways forward. Saul had the opportunity to actually build and invest in David for the future of the Kingdom of Israel, and instead, because of his selfish desire to hold onto power, ended up fighting against both David, and ultimately God. Are we putting God first in our lives?

Secondly, and in relation to the first point, we need to avoid the easy way out. Leading a life of following God is costly. David didn't just have a chance to remove an enemy, he had a chance to return to a normal way of life. It would have been so easy for him to have struck Saul down there and then. That's not what God wanted. David did what Saul couldn't do – he was obedient. But we must always remember that sometimes obedience comes at a cost to ourselves. Jesus himself said that those who wished to follow him needed to count up the cost of doing so. Being a follower of Jesus means that sometimes we will have to let go of our pride for the sake of the bigger picture. David knew this.

Thirdly, Humility is important. There's the last scene in this reading that speaks of David's humility. But credit where it's due, and actually, in this passage, Saul as well shows a degree of humility. He sees the error of his ways and he admits it. How many of us in Saul's position would have taken one look at David and sent the whole army up after him and his men! I would have been tempted! But Saul hears God in the situation and realises just how far off track he is. Saul would ultimately continue down a dark path, but I do love the fact that we see a glimpse of the man he could have been. Some translations don't have David saying 'my Lord and King', but actually 'My father'. David looked up to this man and there was a time where Saul loved David as a son. There's a moment in the story here, where both men share a humble moment, where perhaps they both realise what could have been. Humility makes that moment possible and that's why it's important.

This morning's story calls us to be obedient, to choose the costly life and to be humble. Perhaps this week is a good time to start thinking about those things.