

“Would You Have Done What David Did?”

Would you have done what David did? In most situations, if I would ask that question, I would expect people to think about David and Goliath. They would be trying to put themselves in the sandals of young David as he walked out against the giant. They would wonder whether they would have had the courage and the faith to take only five smooth stones and a sling against a decorated warrior. They would ask themselves, “Would I have trusted God in the same way that David did so that I could have battled the giant Goliath and been victorious?”

There are other events in the life of David that likewise invite the same question: “Would you have done what David did?” If the David and Goliath account wasn’t the first you thought of, maybe it was the account of David and Bathsheba. This low point of David’s life found him committing adultery and murder, hiding these sins for as long as he could until God sent his prophet to call David to repentance. And as we read this account, it is wise for us to think about questions like: would I have allowed lustful thoughts to dwell in my head? Would I have abused power if it meant I could act on my sexual desires? How far would I have gone to cover up my sinfulness? Would I have done what David did?

Of course, today I am not asking that question in a vacuum. You have already heard yet another account from the life of David. This one falls in between the two that I have mentioned, and I believe it is safe to say that this one is much less famous or infamous. And yet as we consider it, especially alongside our other Scripture lessons today, it invites us to ask ourselves, “Would I have done what David did?”

You heard the account as our First Lesson this morning, and we won’t go into every detail of that lengthy reading, but think about it and its context with me. David was anointed to be king even before his battle with the giant Goliath. Following that battle, David became quite famous. He was the hero. And Saul, who was king at the time became very jealous. He didn’t like all of the attention that David was getting. He didn’t like being second in the hearts and minds of the people as far as being the protector of the kingdom. And eventually, Saul’s anger became a violent rage. He tried to kill David with his spear, and even when David escaped, he would not give up on the idea of putting an end to David.

David did what he and the men with him thought necessary: he fled. He tried to hide from Saul in foreign lands. David stayed on the run so that Saul would not track him down. But from time to time, Saul and his men did find David. One of these occasions is the starting point for our sermon text today. When Saul is informed of David’s latest hiding place, he goes to find him. Saul takes three thousand of his soldiers with him to continue his pursuit of David.

That night, David went to check out the camp of Saul and his men. Once he had seen it, he decided to go down into the camp along with his supporter Abishai. The two of them went into the camp and found everyone sleeping. David and Abishai were able to walk right up to King Saul where he was sleeping beside his spear. Abishai thought what many of David’s supporters would have no doubt thought: this was the opportunity that David needed. This was the opportunity that God had provided to save David from Saul once and for all. The spear that was stuck in the ground right near his head could be grabbed and thrust right into the sleeping king. And he would never cause trouble for David again.

It sounds like a sensible plan, doesn’t it? It sounds like exactly what someone on the run from his enemy, someone who fears for his life, is looking for. Saul was out to attack David. David wasn’t out to attack Saul. And all of a sudden, David had an opportunity to solve his problem.

It sounds like the sort of solution that we like to find for our problems. When things get difficult, don’t we look for whatever it is that would best take care of the issues? When our enemies threaten to harm our bodies or our reputations, don’t we try to find whatever means it is that will put an end to their plans? And I don’t mean to suggest that anyone is necessarily trying to actually kill us. We’re not in David’s situation at all, but the way that we act in less dangerous situations probably tells us a bit about how we would have handled a more dangerous situation like this one.

David handled it differently. He realized and recognized that God had made Saul king. Even though God had anointed David to be the next king, he hadn't given David or anyone else the right to end Saul's reign by ending his life. The sleeping king, in spite of his actions against David, was still the king. He was still chosen by God and anointed by him to serve in this way. And David would not lower himself to the level of Saul attacking him. He would not go through with this easy way out plan. And why do you suppose that was the case?

Clearly, there was a difference between Saul, who was out to kill David and David, who made the determination not to kill Saul. And it becomes clear from the Bible's account that Saul was so viciously attacking David for the same reason that God had rejected Saul as king, that God had determined that his reign would come to an end. This reason was that Saul had stopped listening to God. Saul had decided that as king, he was the ultimate authority and that even God's instruction would not come above his power. In other words, Saul was an unbeliever.

David, on the other hand, believed what God said to him. He believed that God would make him the king. He believed that God would use him in this way. He believed that God would one day send a Savior to rescue David from the hell his sins deserved, that he would keep all of his promises. And so David lived his life in a way that reflected his faith. He respected the king that God had already put in place. He honored the life, the time of grace, that God had given to Saul. He showed genuine love and concern even to the one who had made himself David's enemy. Is it any wonder that as David put his faith into action that his attitude was that which Paul described to the Romans in our second lesson (Romans 12:9-21) and that which Jesus held before his disciples in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-48)?

For us, too, the question "would you do what David did?" is not about finding a way to earn our own salvation. That would be impossible, because that question too often reveals only our shortcomings and sinfulness. Think of how many times you and I have reacted to our enemies with anger. When someone tarnishes our reputation, don't we try to retaliate instead of honoring the eighth commandment? When someone fights with us, don't we want to fight back? If we are honest with ourselves, we realize that we don't often do what David did. We don't often treat our enemies with love.

But listen again to the way that David described his decision: **"As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "the Lord himself will strike [Saul]; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed."** In other words, David trusted that God would handle things. His confidence that God would keep his Word led him to leave things in God's hands. David didn't need to save himself from Saul, because God would do that. So David stole away with Saul's spear and water jug. David would use them to show Saul that he was not out to threaten or harm him. Would you do what David did? He dealt with his enemies in love and trusted that God would handle things.

And so David stands as an example for us. God has sent a Savior in Jesus to take away our sins, to forgive us for all the times that we have sought revenge or tried to get even with our enemies. He has paid the price for all our mistreatment of others, and all the times that we have been no better or no more loving than the pagan world around us. And he has called us to believe that purely because of God's love, we have been forgiven and our salvation is secure.

And that confidence enables us to follow the example of David, and the instructions given by Jesus and by his servant Paul. Why not, instead of retaliating against enemies, pray for them? Why not keep quiet instead of harming someone's reputation, even when they harm yours? Why not look at all your life as an opportunity to show God's love to others and to pray that God would use your witness to bring others closer to him?

I don't know if you would have done what David did, and we cannot truly put ourselves in that situation. But in our daily lives and situations we can act in the same spirit. We can trust God to care for us fully and love others, even our enemies, because that is how he would have us show our love for him.

The text: 1 Samuel 26:1–25 (NIV84)

The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, “Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?”

² So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with his three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search there for David. ³ Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah facing Jeshimon, but David stayed in the desert. When he saw that Saul had followed him there, ⁴ he sent out scouts and learned that Saul had definitely arrived.

⁵ Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him.

⁶ David then asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab’s brother, “Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?”

“I’ll go with you,” said Abishai.

⁷ So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

⁸ Abishai said to David, “Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won’t strike him twice.”

⁹ But David said to Abishai, “Don’t destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless? ¹⁰ As surely as the Lord lives,” he said, “the Lord himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. ¹¹ But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let’s go.”

¹² So David took the spear and water jug near Saul’s head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the Lord had put them into a deep sleep.

¹³ Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the hill some distance away; there was a wide space between them. ¹⁴ He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, “Aren’t you going to answer me, Abner?”

Abner replied, “Who are you who calls to the king?”

¹⁵ David said, “You’re a man, aren’t you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn’t you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. ¹⁶ What you have done is not good. As surely as the Lord lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the Lord’s anointed. Look around you. Where are the king’s spear and water jug that were near his head?”

¹⁷ Saul recognized David’s voice and said, “Is that your voice, David my son?”

David replied, “Yes it is, my lord the king.” ¹⁸ And he added, “Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of? ¹⁹ Now let my lord the king listen to his servant’s words. If the Lord has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the Lord! They have now driven me from my share in the Lord’s inheritance and have said, ‘Go, serve other gods.’ ²⁰ Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the Lord. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea—as one hunts a partridge in the mountains.”

²¹ Then Saul said, “I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly.”

²² “Here is the king’s spear,” David answered. “Let one of your young men come over and get it. ²³ The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed. ²⁴ As surely as I valued your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble.”

²⁵ Then Saul said to David, “May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph.”

So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.