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1 SAMUEL 23:19-29

1 Samuel Series

In preparation for opening God's word today, I'd like us to pray and prepare our hearts for what God might say to us.

[PRAYER] In reverence, Father, we come before you. We open our hearts to you and put aside the cares and concerns that we have. We know that this is a sacred moment in which when we open your word, whether it's at home or whether it's here, that you desire to communicate to us in a powerful way. So we ask, Lord, that you would do that. Give us a greater understanding of who you are that would impact who we are and how we live this week. Lord, we want you to be honored in our lives and sometimes we don't exactly know how that can take place. So reveal some truths to us that we can apply in our hearts today. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

In our study of David, we are looking at his life. We're taking it kind of slow because there are some valuable things that we're learning as we look at his life. Those things have to do with the common things that we experience in our lives as well. So David is really wrestling with a lot of issues in his heart that causes us to wrestle with similar things in our lives.

David's a real guy. He gets up in the morning now in this part of the story and he's taking care of 600 men and their families. He has responsibilities like you and I do. Every morning he gets up with responsibilities. Whether you're going to school or you're going to a job or you're staying home and doing whatever you're doing, we all have responsibilities.

Then he also experiences some challenges with his life situation. He has some anxiety that he has to address in his life, anxiety that has to do with the king. King Saul is trying to attack him. So he's kind of looking over his shoulder. I think we do that in our lives. We're looking over our shoulders sometimes over the impending things that might be happening – the medical issue, or getting the grades that we need at school, or a financial challenge of paying our bills. So we've got that kind of pressure that exists in our lives as well. The interesting thing about David here is that he loves God and he wants to serve God in the midst of the challenges. I really like his heart. That's why we're taking this passage in slow motion to gain as much as we can from each of the different principles that are there and apply them to our own lives.

I know God personally. I would love to introduce Him to you. If you don't know God personally I would love to share Him with you so you can get to know Him personally. But even though I know Him personally, I don't know what He's doing sometimes. It's hard for me to figure out what God's doing. I want to fit into those plans that God is doing. So I plan my life and I make decisions, but sometimes I don't know what God is doing. But I still have to make choices

tomorrow. I still have to decide what I'm going to do. So today I think we're going to learn some very important things about God that will help us to be able to do that in our own lives.

If you'll turn with me to 1 Samuel 23, starting in verse 19 we're going to see this story unfold. Now the story, as we've taken it up to this point, David is running from Saul and he's gone and hidden himself down in this wilderness area.

Now we pick up the story in verse 19. *The Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon? Now, Your Majesty, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for giving him into your hands."*

Here's a map of the area. You can see in this area here the wilderness of Ziph and wilderness of Maon. That's where our story is going to take place today, right in that southern part of Israel.

These people, the Ziphites, were living in the same place where David is from. They should have been his companions, his comrades, so to speak. They should have been people that were loyal to him. But it says they go down and they're trying to play politics with Saul. For whatever reason, I don't understand exactly, we're not told in the passage why they're doing this, but they're betraying David. They're saying, "Hey Saul, we'll show you where he is. We'll help you find him."

I would suggest that betrayal is one of the most difficult experiences we have in life. Maybe you've been betrayed by someone. If you haven't, you likely will be. So young people, you just have to know in school situations sometimes people will betray you. Betrayal is a common experience. It's painful in our lives.

So I want to remind you of a very important statement and that is this: Some of the greatest human joy and pain that we'll experience are in the midst of human relationships. You will experience tremendous pain in human relationships, but it's also the place where you can experience tremendous joy. So I want to suggest to you this: You may be betrayed or you may have been betrayed in your life and the temptation then is to pull out of relationships and say, "I'm not going to get involved in a relationship again. I don't want to get hurt. Relationships are too painful." So there's a temptation to pull out of a relationship in a way that isolates us. You want to be careful of that. Although relationships can be very painful, they also offer tremendous joy in our lives.

David is a guy who is learning. God is working on his heart, trying to build his heart and strengthen his heart. In the midst of this situation he's going to be betrayed. Psalm 54 is all about this betrayal. So if you have the time to look at that, there's six verses in Psalm 54 that are strategic in how he's evaluating this betrayal that he is experiencing.

Well these guys are playing politics, so they say to the king, "Hey, we'll point him out to you. We'll help you find him so you can discover who he is and what he's doing." So they're going after him and they're going to help.

Notice how Saul replies to these people. *Saul replied, "The Lord bless you for your concern for me."* I just want to pause there before we continue his statement because in this phrase notice what Saul is doing. He's calling on the name of God and pretending that God is on his side. It couldn't be further from the truth because Saul, remember, has abandoned God. God has given Saul instructions. Saul couldn't follow instructions, so Saul has pulled himself away from God. He's just finished killing eighty-five priests. He is no closer to God than the pagan person is. He's far away from God at this point, yet he's using these words with these people – *The Lord bless you for your concern for me*. He's playing the God card, as it were.

I think that's dangerous. In fact I can find myself sometimes falling into the same problem of Saul where I see something happening in my life that seems to be good and contributes to my ideas of what I want to do in life and I can somehow think God is blessing me in life. But we have to realize that sometimes we might be going in the wrong direction and some good might come along or someone might agree with us and we're going in the wrong direction. That's not justification because someone agrees with us.

Saul says, "*The Lord bless you for your concern for me,*" as if somehow he's trying to validate what he's about to do, to go and attack David. He's trying to even maybe manipulate the situation here and it's a problem.

Let's look at the rest of his comment. He says – "*Go and get more information. Find out where David usually goes and who has seen him there. They tell me he is very crafty. Find out about all the hiding places he uses and come back to me with definite information. Then I will go with you; if he is in the area, I will track him down among all the clans of Judah.*"

I suspect here that Saul is a little bit skeptical. So notice he's asking for definite information down at the bottom. "Find out where David is, who's seen him there, where are his hiding places. I want specific information," is what he's saying to these Ziphites.

So in the next passage it says that they're going to head out. *So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon.* I'm going to show you some pictures of the Arabah in just a moment. The Arabah is a classification of terrain. So he's in this desert area of Arabah south of Jeshimon. *Saul and his men began the search, and when David was told about it, he went down to the rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went into the Desert of Maon to pursue David.* So now Saul is pursuing David in all of these areas.

I just want to show you what the Arabah looks like. The Arabah is an arid kind of desert looking place. This is a modern picture of the Arabah. But I want you to see both the desert floor here and the mountains in the background because the story we're about to see takes place in the mountains. So if you were actually to go into those mountains you would find all of these kinds of places. I want you to see it's very easy to hide in these kinds of places. This is just an example of one of the little passages that I don't even know if you can pass through there. But you can see this is in the Arabah. Here's a larger one where people can hide and so on. So it's very rocky, dry. There's water in the area, but it's a good place to hide.

I want to stop at this particular rock, mountain because I think it illustrates the story well. I'm not sure this is the actual mountain, but it is a mountain that exists in the Arabah. In the midst of that, it kind of gives us the idea of what's going on in the story. As the story goes on now, we're going to get into some very specific details. It's like now we're going to zoom in to the challenges on the playing field. This isn't like up in the box office where we're looking down. This is down on the playing field and you're going to get to see play-by-play details.

The reality is in our lives we have to deal with the details in our experience. Every day we have to get up and deal with this problem. Or every day we have to go to work and deal with that problem. Or we go to school and experience this issue. It's the details of life that are often challenging and I want you to see them in this passage as we go forward.

It says – *Saul was going along one side of the mountain.* Here's where the music comes up in the drama if you're watching a movie because this is the climax where the crisis is about to happen. *Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land." Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth, which means the place of departing or the place of escape. That's what they named it. And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi.*

I want you to see the close call that took place for David here. Now there's no place in the passage where God is mentioned about Him doing anything here. But we know that God is very involved in this situation because there are no coincidences, there is no luck, there is no chance in life. God is in charge of what is happening and there's this escape that takes place because certain things all happen at the same time. The invisible hand of God is at work in the midst of this whole story so that we can understand or so we can see what's going on in the life of David.

I suppose that each of us could share a story when there was this kind of near escape where a car came by you didn't see and you just missed the car because the angels were around the car protecting you. Or there was some other kind of situation where there was almost a disaster that took place, but you were averted from that in some way. I want you to know that God is not a God of coincidence. He has a plan. But since I'm up here, I get to tell my story.

So I'll tell you one story. When I read this I was thinking, "Oh yeah, I remember that story." In the last church that we were in, we moved into a building and we had some expenses and challenges. As I managed the finances at the church I keep a cushion of funds just to make sure we have money in case there's a challenge. So I had kept that cushion of funds, but it was draining and we were in a place where we were having a problem financially at the church. We don't tend to make pleas for money at Calvary Chapel. We don't typically share those kinds of things, but I was wrestling with it and it was bothering me.

It was really bothering me on this particular Sunday because I knew we had a problem and we had to do something in this next week. So I was just praying that when the offering was taken that the offering would be larger than usual. So that Sunday after church the offering was the

same as usual. For which I was grateful, but I didn't know what we were going to do on that Sunday.

The way our office works is that people go out and get the mail Monday through Friday from the office and they bring it in. But on Saturday nobody does that. I go out and get the mail myself on Saturday and bring it in. The office for my church is in my home. So I realized on Sunday I hadn't gone out and got the mail. So I went out and got the mail and brought it in.

When I opened up the mail there was a check for the church in there for \$20,000. I've never seen a gift to the church for \$20,000. When I opened the envelope and saw the check for \$20,000, I was just speechless because of where we were financially. This wasn't just a gift given. This was a gift given at the right time in the right moment. It not only brought the other three or four thousand, which isn't a lot of money, but that's what we needed that month, but it also replenished the account that we needed. I was just so blown away that at the right moment and the right instance God provided that money.

There were obviously a lot of things that led up to that. Somebody died and these people received an inheritance. They tithed off of that money and they gave \$20,000 to that church at the time we needed it. They didn't know anything about this. But it came at just that time.

If you look at this particular story, there are a lot of things that had to happen just at the right time in order for this event to take place. The Philistines had to attack at the right time, in enough time for the messenger sent from the capitol to go and inform the king. That messenger had to find directions or find out where is the king. I don't even know where he is, but has to get to him and he has to come to him and talk to him right at the right time so that he'll break off the pursuit of David. If any of those things would have gone wrong, it wouldn't have worked. If the Philistines wouldn't have attacked, if the messenger would have got lost or got sick or decided he didn't want to go the extra mile on that day, if any of those things would have gone wrong, then David would have been captured and bad things would have happened. Wow. It's just so powerful to recognize God's hand in this.

So I want to make a statement about God now that I think will impact us and help us to be able to address our life challenges every week. I want you to know that God is in charge. We call it the sovereignty of God. God is in charge. He's in charge of good and He's in charge of evil. He's in charge of nature, the wind and the rain. He's in charge of success. He's in charge of failure. He's in charge of your car. He's in charge of your house. He's in charge of your boss. He's in charge of your teachers. He's in charge of your spouse. He's in charge of the mortgage CEO. When you're trying to get your mortgage, He's in charge of the heart of that person. God is in charge of everything. He is in charge. When He is in charge that really is an important understanding.

Young people listen to this, when you realize that God is in charge that changes how you live and how you act in this way. God has a plan. He's in charge of His plan and that plan is going to work whether you participate in it or not. So let's say there's someone unsaved that you know and you say, "I'm not going to go share the gospel with that person." Does that mean that person won't get saved? No. God will send someone else to care for that person. God has a plan. His plan will be worked out in the midst of that.

Now you have to understand when we think about the sovereignty of God or that God is in charge, we end up with two problems that we at least have to wrestle with.

The first problem is well if He's in charge, what does that mean for me? Do I have the freedom to act, or has He controlled me in the midst of that? Or better yet, the other statement we make is, well what difference does it make if I pray? What difference does it make if I do anything if God is in charge? Very important theological question that you as young people need to address and answer in your own heart so you know how to live.

The reality is this. Our brains are this big and God's brain (if He has a brain, I don't know how to describe His brain) is as big as this whole room. We cannot imagine that we could have free will, that is the choice to do this or that, if God is in charge of it all and has already determined what's going to happen. So we have a hard time understanding this. I want you to know that God can comprehend that, even though we can't. We are limited in our understanding, but here's what the Bible teaches. Not only do we have the freedom to make decisions, but God holds us accountable for those decisions that we make.

Here's what God does. Somehow in His immensity He is able to take our choices that we make and bring them into His plan. So yes, He has a plan that's going to be worked out in life. We have a choice as to whether we're going to contribute to that. But our responsibility is to work hard, to pray hard like David. He's working hard, he's praying hard. Our job is to do all that we can do and God uses the things that we offer to accomplish His kingdom program. It's very important lesson that we must understand.

So let me describe it this way. Here's God's plan. It's going to happen, it's in action. When I get up tomorrow morning I don't exactly know what God's plan is, so I develop my plan. So as I'm working my plan, sometimes I'm right in line with God and I go, "Whoa, that's cool, God. I'm doing what you want and it's working." There's other times I get up and I have this ideas of what's going to happen today and it's not working with God's plan and the answer is no, or it didn't work, or bad news comes or something.

And now we have this very important problem. Here's God's plan, here's my plan that's not really in line with God's and I don't really like it. So I can then experience emotions like anxiety – uh oh, what's going to happen. Or anger. I get interrupted from my plan and I get mad or something. Or even worse, I think, is this feeling of disappointment. I'm disappointed. I thought I was going in the right direction, but it's not working out. What God wants to do is align our plan with His so that we're moving in the right direction. So the key or the most important thing is to take our emotions that are wrapped up in our plan and not put them there.

Yes, we make plans. We have to make plans. We have to make choices. But the question is where are we going to put our emotions. Because when we put our emotions into our plan, that's when we get disappointed or we get angry or we get anxious. We must put our emotions into God's plan that we sometimes don't know.

Jesus modeled this when He prayed in the garden. “Lord, I’m about to face the cross. Please, if it’s your will, will you take this cup away from me? I don’t want to go to the cross. But not my will but yours be done.” That is the kind of attitude we live in every day of our lives. We align our plan with God’s plan and when it doesn’t work, when our plan is not exactly what we thought it was going to be, then we need to move it over into God’s plan. We have ideas. We have our Plan A of what we’re going to do in life. Sometimes our Plan A is not God’s plan, and so it needs to change.

In order to illustrate this, I want to tell you a story about how my wife and I met. In fact last night we had a number of couples over and single people and one of the questions we asked the couples was how did you meet? It’s really interesting when you ask that question of people to find out how they came to know each other or get to know each other. It’s a lot of fun to hear that. But I’m going to tell you the story about my wife and me.

My wife, Carrie, graduated from college and when she graduated from college (she really loves the Lord) she and her friend Dolly had determined that they would go on a mission trip to Europe. Because they had graduated from college, this was a great opportunity and it seemed like a neat experience, a way for them to further their growth in the Lord and so on. Well Dolly and Carrie both applied, but Dolly applied first and Carrie applied after that and missed the deadline. So Dolly was accepted and Carrie was not. Plan A did not work. So she had to choose another plan, which in this case was go back and live in her parents’ home. Her parents were not believers. She had to go back there and live and get a summer job. Now that wasn’t Plan B. That was like Plan L or M or somewhere way down in the picture. It wasn’t even in the options for her, but that was what she had to do.

So she came back and lived at home. Five blocks away her home was Trinity Baptist Church. So she went back to the church and checked in and started attending there.

Well it just so happened that earlier that year (I say just so happened, but you know what I mean) I had started attending that church and was working in the church ministry and was really excited about ministry. I petitioned the board that they would maybe allow me to run a summer day camp program. So at eighteen years old I petitioned the board and I asked them if they would allow me to run this whole program. They gave me permission to do it. I laid out a whole business plan, a ministry plan, and they challenged me and we worked through the whole thing and they gave me permission to do this.

The problem was I needed someone else to work with me because in the program we would work from morning until late afternoon so that working parents could drop their kids off. They would have Vacation Bible School activities during the day. We would tell them Bible stories and we would have games and crafts and so on. The crafts was the problem. I’m really not an artsy person.

But Carrie now is coming to the church and she hears that there’s this job being offered for someone to work. Carrie’s degree is in fine arts. She’s the crafty artsy person. So in the course of things, we came together and for that whole summer we worked together in this day camp

program. God used that experience greatly. Now the story continues for another thirty-eight years, which brings us to today, but I won't bore you with all of that right now.

The point I want to share with you is that Carrie's Plan A was not God's plan for her. In the midst of that circumstance or going down to Plan L or whatever, God brought her to a place where she and I were able to come together to meet each other and get married.

I share that with you because God does that and we don't know. We have our Plan A and we get disappointed or angry or anxious about our Plan A when it doesn't go the way we expected. I'm talking about in the morning you get up and you start going somewhere and you can't find your keys. That's your Plan A, find your keys. I'm talking about minor things that cause us to get angry or to get anxious. God would have us to understand that He has a plan and we want to invest our emotions into that plan.

I said there were two problems when it comes to this understanding of the fact that God is in charge. One of them is the problem of freedom of will. I have tried to address that God knows it and brings it into His plan so that it is something we can exercise freely.

The second problem is the problem of evil. Now we don't have a lot of time to talk about the problem of evil, but let me just summarize the solution when it comes to God's plan. Here's the question – how can a loving, good God allow evil in our world? I'm just going to bring you some factors in here. I don't have all the answers to this and it's something we wrestle with, especially on a personal level sometimes when we're experiencing personal pain in our lives. How could God who loves me allow this to happen? I don't want to minimize this, but I want to give you some truths to hang your hat on as you go through and try to understand this so you don't feel this overwhelming injustice of God.

Number one, we have to understand that evil doesn't originate with God. He's not the author of evil. But it's a byproduct of the fact that God has given people free will. That free will that He has given us allows us to choose good and to choose evil. Otherwise God would have made just robots that choose good and everything would be good. We wouldn't have evil. But the fact that He gives us free will to choose Him means that there's another choice, and that is evil.

Now that evil can cause problems for each of us. Because the people closest to you may do evil things or wrong things. So children get abused. Maybe you grow up in a home where your parents mistreated you. Or maybe you grew up in a situation where a spouse mistreated you or betrayed you. It's in the midst of those sinful, painful situations that we must wrestle with God's plan and what's going on here. These are hard things for us to understand. The important thing is that God is not the author of evil. Sometimes the author of evil is someone we know. But sometimes the author of evil is someone we don't even know. Years ago sin took place in our world and it's broken our world. So we have all kinds of things like disease that wasn't the part of any particular person, but this disease has now affected us because we live in a fallen world.

One factor is that evil is present in our world, but the other factor we must understand is that God has a plan for redemption, God has a plan for resurrection. He takes these deaths that we experience, as Josh talked about last week, and in the midst of that He literally brings that

resurrection power, He brings deliverance. Sometimes the deliverance isn't in our timing or the way that we'd like. But He provides those things.

The reality is that there are some people who die under the persecution of their faith. But the challenge that we have to realize is that God has this bigger plan that isn't about us feeling good all the time. But His bigger plan is about glorifying Himself and bringing people to Jesus and help people come to know Him in a more powerful and personal way. Sometimes it's through the painful experience that we have and then being able to demonstrate godliness in the midst of that pain that people are able to see the message. We see the small picture sometimes and we're disappointed or upset about the small things that we see. We've got to realize that God has a much bigger picture involved. He sees much bigger than we do and He's got a bigger plan that we do not understand sometimes.

I'm sure that David wrestled with all of this as he's running away from Saul. Not just in this experience, but other times as well. What is God doing in this situation? But God has this ability to continue to trust God and to believe in what He's doing and to appreciate Him.

There are times that we look at our lives and we say, "I don't understand this," but then later on we look back and we see, as we saw in the story of Joseph as Joseph goes and looks at the life situations where he was sold into slavery, mistreated. A totally unjust situation. Here's a verse that I missed, but I want to share it with you. *We may throw the dice, but the Lord determines how it falls.* Everything we consider random is not random before God. But this verse by Joseph says – *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.* God is in the business of working His plan, bringing glory to Himself. We see the small part; God sees the bigger picture.

So I want to illustrate this by telling you a baseball story. I enjoy baseball. I want to tell you about Jack who was a pretty good player in high school. When he joined the college team, he was eager to show off his skills or shine, as it were. So he hit the ball, got onto first base and when he was on first base he knew he could steal because he's a really fast guy. But the coach had a rule: Do not steal unless you get the sign. So he's waiting, he's watching. There goes the first strike going by. He's saying to himself, "I don't think the coach believes that I can do this. I don't think the coach thinks that I can run faster, but I'm watching the pitcher and I'm watching the catcher and I know I can do this."

So Jack decides on the next pitch he's going to go, whether the coach says it or not. So he gets ready and as soon as the pitcher throws the ball, he takes off running as fast as he can. He slides into second just before the ball and he's safe. He dusts himself off and he's kind of proud of the fact that he made it, kind of vindicating himself that he does know how to run the bases. He can steal the base. Maybe the coach doesn't believe in him, but he can do the job.

Well it turns out they lost that inning and then lost the game. The coach wanted to meet with Jack afterwards. He says, "Jack, I want to tell you why I don't allow people to steal unless I give the sign. This was a good example in this game. See, when you stole second you left first base open and one of our best hitters got up and they intentionally walked him, as you saw. He didn't get a chance to hit the ball. Maybe it would have hit you in in the case of that, but he walked.

They intentionally walked him. And then my next batter that came up, he's not good against this pitcher, so I had to pull him and put in a pinch hitter that weakened my whole offense at that point, creating a problem for us in the game. That may be why we lost the game." You see Jack was looking at the pitcher and the catcher, but the coach was looking at the whole game.

I would suggest that God is looking at the whole game and sometimes we're just looking at the pitcher and the catcher in our lives. We've got to understand that when we've got our plan going, when we've got our ideas that are going in our lives, we've got to tie those in to what God is doing.

So the questions we want to ask God are not, "God, can you solve this problem for me?" I don't think those prayers are wrong. But "God, how can I fit into your plan today? Would you reveal to me how you want me to respond to my kids, how you want me to respond to my parents? Lord, would you show me someone that's hurting that I can help today? What can I do today that fits into your plan? Lord, I want your plan to be the goal of my life. Lord, as I develop plans and I work hard, I'm going to try to serve you. But there are points when that's not going to work and I'll do the wrong thing. I want you to bring me back into your plan so that I'm moving in that direction with you." See, when we trust the Lord and allow Him to work in our lives then powerful things happen.

Maybe you're here today and you are not part of this plan of God because you're living your own life here. I want you to know the way you get to be part of that is by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. He's not the distant Father. He's close by. You can get to know Him in a personal way. That doesn't mean that you'll always know what to do, but over the course of your life as you're walking (it's called a walk of faith), God will reveal Himself to you and He'll bring you into the course of that plan and God will bless you in some powerful ways. Does that mean good things will always happen? No. But it means that in the midst of the challenges you can experience the peace that God provides, the hope that He wants you to have. That's where the power comes that allows us to live.

As a Christian we have so many more resources than the person who's not a Christian. So if you're not a believer today, I want to invite you to become a Christian and take advantage of the tremendous resources that God provides to live our lives every day. It's a gift that God gives. He calls it salvation and it starts by recognizing we have a weakness. We have sin in our lives and we need to accept our Savior, Jesus Christ, into our hearts. That is powerful. God has a plan; we want to be part of it.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] We are challenged at times, Father, because we have strong desires and emotions when things don't go the way that we hoped. So we're asking now that you would give us your grace to uninvest those emotions from those plans and to trust you more fully in our lives. Show us what that means every day and reveal your will to us. We know that there's tremendous joy that comes when we follow you, so we ask that you would lead us and direct us and guide us in the midst of all of that. As we think now and pause, we ask that you would do a ministry in our hearts. Cause us to consider you and what you would have for us today. In Jesus' name, amen.