



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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1 SAMUEL 24:1-7

1 Samuel Series

[PRAYER] Lord, we know that in our world today there's a movement toward getting good self-esteem or self-worth or something like that, but we know that real self-esteem and self-worth comes from our relationship with you because you impute value to us. You give us value because we were created by you. You created each one of us unique with gifts and abilities and personality that is unique, but you also imputed value because you sent Jesus Christ to die for us. Just this huge, huge gift. The gift itself just raises the awareness level of our own value before you. So I pray, Lord, that you would allow us to embrace that idea of your value of us so that we can lift our head up high in the course of the week and not be downtrodden or discouraged by what other people might think or what other people are saying or by even our own failures. That we can come before you and rejoice because of what you are doing and you continue to do in us. So Lord, thank you for valuing us. Thank you for giving us your word. As we open it now, we ask that you would be honored and that you would teach us something very important for our life today. In Jesus' name, amen.

You can open your Bibles to 1 Samuel 24. We're studying the life of David and as we go through the life of David I'm imagining we're kind of spinning through his life in slow motion. As we do, we kind of touch on some theology here and there. I'm particularly interested in David because he is called a man after God's own heart. So I want to know answers to these kinds of questions. What did David know about God? What did he focus on about God's character? What made him a man after God's own heart? What can I learn from David as he's going through?

In the stories about David's life we spin up against different theology ideas. Theology isn't just something we put inside this ivory tower, but it's something very practical. When we understand our theology then it can affect our lives in very practical ways.

Last week we talked about God's sovereignty and how God has this immense plan that embraces all the things that we do. Sometimes we have our little plans. We get up in the morning and we want to be part of God's plan, and sometimes we are. But sometimes we're acting on our own and we don't even realize it. So things happen to move us back into God's plan. We want to be part of God's plan and what God is doing.

Now as we continue the story today, we're going to see another theological truth that we're going to come into contact with. A very important one that I think helps David stay in touch with God's big plan. We all need this. We're going to walk away today with a greater understanding. Last week it was a greater understanding of God. Today we're going to get a greater understanding of ourselves and we're going to look at what's going on inside of us. God has

placed some things inside of us that keep moving us back to His plan. There are these little indicators – oh, you need to do this, you need to do this – to move us into that direction.

So let's look at our passage of scripture today starting in 1 Samuel 24. Remember last we left off the story right at that time where Saul was about to capture David, but David escaped because the circumstances that were going on meant that the Philistines were attacking somewhere. A messenger came and reported that to Saul, so Saul broke off the pursuit of David and he went after the Philistines to protect the country from them. So David and his men were protected. It's just a beautiful picture of God being in control of even the minute details of our lives.

Picking up the story now in chapter 24 – *After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Craggs of the Wild Goats.*

Let me show you where En Gedi is on the map. Right down here. Now this is En Gedi by the Dead Sea. If we were to go up here we would see here we have Qumran. That's another name you'll probably be familiar with (Qumran Scrolls and so on). And then down here we have Sauda. Those are pretty significant names or places that you're going to want to know about.

Now sometimes when we're studying the story, looking at the geography is important. The geography sometimes contributes to the story itself and so we want to look at some of that geography. In this particular story that is the case. If we look at the place of En Gedi, it's like this big oasis. In fact modern day today there's a wildlife preserve there in this area. This is what it looks like. I want you to note the mountainous area in the back. It's very arid and dry. No trees or anything there. But there's an oasis and in fact there are in some places some waterfalls. This is a waterfall in En Gedi and the name of this waterfall today is David's Waterfall. So it's been named after him. David spent some time here, obviously, as in our story today.

These are hyraxes. This is a little animal in Israel and in fact if you want to do some research in what the Bible has to say about hyrax, you might jot down Proverbs 30:26 because the Bible says learn from the hyrax because *he's not strong or powerful, but he hides among the crags or caves.* In other words, what we can learn is you don't have to be strong and mighty, but wisdom is really important when you're trying to go forward. So we can learn from the hyrax. They live up there.

I want you to see the cave in the background because we're going to be talking about a cave today. These are pictures taken of wild goats today living in this particular area of En Gedi. I want you to see in the background it's very dry and arid. The goats are beautiful goats. The horns on them are amazing. These are the wild goats that have lived there for many, many years, obviously even in the time of David. These goats are all in this area. This is the place where David has gone down to this arid area that has this oasis down there. But there are also a number of caves. Those caves become significant places where Saul is going to be hunting for David.

Here are some caves. These caves are higher up in elevation. They are not right on the pass. So you would have to go up to get into these caves. But the idea here is that there are lots of caves. It's almost like this whole mountain here is hollow. I know it can't be. But the caves open up to

huge areas inside where people can hide. In this case that's what David is doing with his men. They are hiding inside of these caves. That's En Gedi. I just want you to see the area where we're going to be studying today.

Now regarding Saul, if we continue on in verse 3, it says that Saul *came to the sheep pens along the way* (so he's near these sheep pens that must have been down in the valley somewhere near these caved areas); *a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself*. He went to the bathroom. That's the idea there. He wants to get some privacy, so he goes into the cave to do that.

Surprise, surprise but in that same cave (it must have been the same cave) *David and his men were far back in the cave*. We don't know if all 600 of his men were back there, or if it was just a few of his guys were back in there. But David was back there with some of his men. So this isn't as private as Saul thought it was. Saul goes into the cave to do his business. He takes off his robe and puts it to the side and he goes back in the cave for some privacy. It's in the midst of that part of the story that what we see takes place here.

This is a picture of modern day going into those caves and you can see that they kind of open up. This is looking out into the sun from inside of the cave.

The passage says – *David's men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.*

Now it's interesting to me, first of all, like I said last week, here's some people who are claiming to know God's will. They're proclaiming that to David who is very sensitive and wants to hear God's will. I just want to again remind us and warn us that we need to be careful about people who think they know what God is saying and try to tell us that. Especially when it's based on circumstances and not based on God's word. In this case it looks like circumstances have arranged themselves so that David could kill Saul.

Now something is going on in David's heart and here's where we're going to move into the lesson I think we're going to learn for ourselves. Inside of David you must imagine that he is running for his life, he has a desire to be king, he wishes that Saul wouldn't be attacking him, and so on. He's getting advice from these guys, but he also believes something in his heart. His belief is that I shouldn't touch Saul. Saul is God's anointed. That's what he believes inside of his heart. But he goes up and *he crept up unnoticed* so Saul didn't know where he was. He came up unnoticed *and cut off a corner of Saul's robe*.

I want you to see how he responded to that internally. Because what happens to David internally in that moment is something that happens to us and something we can learn from. *Afterward* (after he had cut off a corner of his robe), *David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe*.

Now the word *conscience* is the word I want to look at today. Because God has put a conscience inside of us. That conscience is a part of what makes us who we are and how God designed us.

This week I bought a grill to take the place of my old grill. My old grill in my house was one of those big grills with a big door on it and a burner on the side. I really liked that grill partly because it was big. But the problem was it took forever to heat up and my wife and I don't need a big grill. So we're heating up this whole grill just to cook up a few hamburgers or something. So my new grill I wanted to buy, I bought one for \$99. It's a small grill that has smaller space and I had to put it together myself. It took two hours to put it together myself. I don't think the people who wrote the directions ever put one together. But I had directions for putting this thing together, so by the end of the two hours I had a grill, used it, and I had my grill that only cost me 100 bucks. So I'm thrilled with my grill.

But the point is I had to follow the instructions. I want to say today that God has designed you in a particular way and you have a conscience. If you can understand what the Bible says about that, then good things can happen for you and you can take advantage of the way He's created. Because the conscience will help you move into God's plan, God's will when we get off track.

Now the word *conscience-stricken* is the word in the NIV, but I want you to know in the Hebrew Bible we do not have in the Old Testament a word for *conscience*. So I brought up the other translations. In the ESV it says *his heart struck him*. In the New International Standard Bible it says *his conscience bothered him*. In the King James Version it says *his heart smote him*. The literal translation is *his heart smote him*. That's what it means. But when you actually translate that to understand what it means, he felt guilty about it. His conscience bothered him is the idea, or he was conscience-stricken. So I like that idea that's brought in here.

I just want you to know that the word has to do with the heart. So I want to help you understand a little bit more about the heart and the conscience because I think I will help you to understand the instruction manual and what God wants to do inside your heart and your conscience today. The heart is this place that God has put inside of us where internal motivation takes place.

When I'm working with parents, I help parents work with their children and I'm trying to help children be internally motivated. Can they be internally motivated in certain ways? Yes they can. But internal motivation comes from the heart. It comes from desires and emotions and beliefs and convictions and passions and determinations. Those drive a person forward to do something internally. But just because something comes from the heart doesn't make it good. You might be internally motivated to punch your brother because he took your CD. That's internal motivation. That doesn't mean it's good. And so God has put something inside of the heart to keep the heart going in the right direction.

That's what I want you to see here because these two things, the conscience and room for the Holy Spirit, are the things that guide the heart so that it goes in the right direction. We're internally motivated to do this, that, and the other thing. But sometimes we're doing things that aren't in line with God's plan. So the conscience and the Holy Spirit are designed to bring us back into line with what God would have for us.

The opposite of internal motivation is external motivation. So if you're working on a paper for school, you might do it so you get the grade. That's external motivation. Or you might clean your room so that you could please your mother. That's external motivation. Internal motivation is something much more powerful. It's what makes us more different than animals. Animals are motivated by outside motivation, but we're motivated internally. God has placed this conscience in our hearts to keep us going in the right direction.

So in the New Testament we have the word *conscience* used thirty times. There is a biblical term in Greek for *conscience* and it's used thirty times mostly by Paul. So I want to take you a little bit out of David's life into Paul's life and understand a little more about what Paul has to say about the conscience and how it applies to our lives. This isn't Paul, but this is Hebrews. There is a verse that uses the word *conscience*. *Let us draw near to God* (and that is our goal: we want to draw near to God and to His plan) *with a sincere heart* (like David who had a heart that was a heart after God's own heart) *and with full assurance that faith brings having our heart sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience*. The heart is being sprinkled in the passage there is talking about salvation.

So here's what happens. When you get saved, that is when you ask Jesus Christ to run your life and control you, something transforms within you in regards to the conscience. God gives you a clean conscience. He sprinkles the heart in order to cleanse the conscience. This is one of the verses, by the way, that indicates the relationship between the heart and the conscience. But the point here is salvation does something to the conscience.

If you're here today and you've not asked Jesus Christ into your life as a young person or as an adult, you want to do that because when you do God does a number of things. This isn't about just following a list of rules that God gives to us. This is about something God transforms inside of the heart. He transforms the conscience. He does something to it and He cleanses it. That's why some people when they get saved they say something like this: "I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders." That's what a clean conscience does.

So I would suggest that the original purpose that God placed the conscience inside the heart is to draw us to salvation, to recognize our need for a Savior and want to run to Him and say, "I need something outside of myself."

When Paul starts writing about the conscience though in Acts 24:16, he is now talking about salvation. Because the conscience has a purpose beyond salvation in our daily lives. So Paul as he's writing says this – *So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man*.

Let me point out several things from this verse. First of all, the goal of a clear conscience was something that Paul was working on. Having a clear conscience is worth working on. It can be with God and man. It's probably easier to have it with God because we ask for forgiveness and He forgives us. I try to get a clear conscience with man and sometimes they don't forgive us and so we're frustrated with that.

Yet he says (and I like that third word) *I strive*. It's work. It takes work to do the right thing. It takes work when you've done the wrong thing to get back on track. It takes work. And so Paul is drawing attention to that. I would suggest He's reminding us that it would take work in our lives. If you're going to be a person after God's own heart like David was in the Holy Testament, then you're going to be this person who's striving to have a clear conscience in your life. Just like Paul did.

We can't think that the conscience is the standard for our moral choices. The conscience is not the standard. The Bible is our standard. In fact the conscience is always looking for a standard and if the person is not a Christian, that person still has a conscience, but their standard is just the greatest good or what makes people happy or something like that. So that's how they make moral choices.

But as Christians we look at 1 Corinthians 4:4. Paul says – *My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me*. Just because you have a clear conscience doesn't mean that you're innocent. So there's some work that has to be done because the conscience is looking for a standard.

Let's look at it this way. I'm asking the question, does the Bible change behavior? I've asked this question of you before, so you may know the answer to this question. Maybe. The answer is maybe, because of this: The Bible has to go through the heart in order for it to change behavior. It doesn't just change behavior. But when it goes through the heart it changes behavior because it feeds the conscience what it needs to make the right choice, to do the right thing.

So in Psalm 119:11 it say – *I have hidden your word in my heart so that it will change my behavior so that I might not sin against you*. I want you to see the relationship between God's word and the heart, especially as it relates to the conscience, because the conscience is looking for a standard. You need a standard and I need a standard and that standard is God's word.

I think that the conscience is a rather challenging place for us to work. I know it has to do with moral decisions like don't lie or don't cheat. Those kinds of things are conscience related. So if you feel guilty if you steal something or you lie, that's the conscience at work.

But I would suggest that the conscience also works in non-moral things. Like, young person, if you have a report that's due in two weeks, you could rely on external motivation, which is the pressure of life. Wait till two days before and start working on your paper and then you say, "When the pressure comes then I work harder." The person who says that (we call that procrastination, by the way), when a person procrastinates like that, here's what they're saying: I'm not internally motivated. I have to be motivated by external pressure to get things done.

I want to suggest there's another way to live and that is to exercise this conscience to make it stronger so that you feel a sense of obligation to start working on the paper today, not two weeks from now. The solution for procrastination is a strong conscience and good character. The two of them working together allow you to get things done. The conscience doesn't clean a room. The conscience doesn't get a report done. It's the character that does. But it's the conscience that says things like "I need to" and "I should." Those are good things that we end up saying to ourselves.

When you think about the conscience, you got to understand that the conscience also malfunctions sometimes. Sometimes the conscience prompts you to want to care for someone. You just feel guilty that that person is hurting or you don't want to offend them, so what you might do is water down the truth. The conscience then is malfunctioning because it's saying love people, love people. Don't worry about the truth. Love people, love people. So the conscience then malfunctions and creates a problem.

Maybe another thing we do is emphasize the truth so much so we don't love people. "I'm going to let that person know that he's doing the wrong thing because that's why I have to do. Because that's the right thing to do to tell them." The conscience is prompting you, you see. So some people would go and tell you the right thing, but they won't do it in a loving way. The conscience then is malfunctioning because it isn't balanced with the scriptures that will provide that balance that takes place.

Another way that the conscience malfunctions is that you make a small mistake or you do something wrong and you start beating yourself up about it. Then it's just the smallest offenses that can drag you down. There's a way to deal with offenses. God has designed guilt in our lives to prompt us to repentance. Guilt is a good word. Repentance is a positive word (it means change). So guilt prompts us to change. It's a good thing. But some people get plagued with their guilt and then they view themselves as unworthy. They view themselves as bad people. So the conscience then is malfunctioning and giving a message that's incorrect. I would suggest that many of us need some training in this area because the conscience is doing something that's not helpful for us and it needs to be educated, trained, and so on.

I think this is one of the things that makes David so successful in his life. He is a guy that had a heart that was following after God.

Now you may be asking the question, is Scott making a bigger deal out of this (the conscience) than the Bible is? I just want to take you to one more set of scriptures. They're in 1 Timothy because Paul is trying to communicate to Timothy a very important message. That message is this. Just notice the conscience is used all three times. He says – *The purpose of this command is love from a pure heart* and that is going to come from two things. Notice what the two things are because they're going to be repeated three times. One – *from a good conscience and from a sincere faith*.

What Paul is saying to Timothy is Timothy, you're a young pastor here. I'm trying to help you get your life together. I want you to be successful in what you're doing and you need these two things. You need a good conscience. You need a sincere faith. Those are going to be like lights guiding you through the harbor so that you can go through and do the right thing. *Good conscience and a sincere faith* – two valuable things that we need to be exercising and working on in our lives.

Now if we go to another passage in the same chapter, he uses the two lights in the harbor illustration here in 1 Timothy 1:19 by saying this: *Holding onto two things, faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have shipwrecked with regard to the faith*.

So here's the thing. If you're not doing well in those two areas about moral and spiritual development in your life, then your heart doesn't have what it needs to make right decisions and then your heart can go astray. We know that the heart can go astray and that it can start acting on its own and doing the wrong thing. Then your heart isn't following after God. So it's very important to be exercising these two things in your life.

I'm going to look at another verse, 1 Samuel 24:6-7. Let me read this to you. *David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.* Here's what he's saying to himself. I want you hear the message going on in his heart because that is what's ringing inside of him. *He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord." With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.*

We're going to look next time when I'm with you at how David uses this understanding of the conscience to challenge Saul in a successful way. We're going to have another study about the conscience in two weeks and we're going to look at how He does that. But I want you to see that David was wrestling with something very important in his heart here and the conscience was at work in a strategic way in his life.

In 1 Timothy 3:9, that's the other passage in 1 Timothy I wanted to show you, and that is talking about Christian leadership there to Timothy. Timothy, you need to get some leaders. Here's two things that are going to mark these leaders. Notice this. Two things are going to mark the leaders. *They must keep hold of deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.* Here we are again, those two things. It's starting to become really important to God, at least as we're looking at God's word, how important the clear conscience and the strong faith are for the heart.

So I want to suggest to you three applications today that may help you as you're trying to evaluate how you're going to take Jesus home. What are you going to do as a result of this understanding that will help you to have a heart that's David's heart, a heart like Paul. Paul had a sincere heart and wanted others to have that. How can you do that? I want to suggest three things.

One – study God's word, read God's word. There's an app called Read Scripture. A number of us are going through the Bible through this year. If you look at the app Read Scripture it will give you the passages you can read every day. Pick it up where we are now and start reading now. There are videos that introduce every book of the Bible. You want to get to know God's word better because as you do it's going to work itself into your heart in a way that will form your conscience, strengthen your conscience to be what God wants it to be. The first thing is to read God's word.

The second thing is to practice your faith. Practice your faith. See, faith involves a risk of some kind. Whether it's the faith to sit in the chair or the faith to walk across a difficult bridge. The idea is that faith involves a risk. So I would encourage you to do something like be generous. It's risky, isn't it, to give away some money when you could be spending it on something else? Or I

would encourage you to let it go. Maybe there's something that you're holding onto and it's causing you to be upset. Faith may mean for you to let that thing go. Exercising your faith, practicing your faith will strengthen your heart and develop some valuable things inside.

The third thing I would suggest is this: Do the right thing. Not the thing that costs the least money. Not the thing that costs the least effort. Not the thing that will please the most people or offend the least people. Do the right thing. Because the right thing sometimes costs more money. The right thing often takes more time. The right thing is often a struggle for people to deal with in their lives. Do the right thing. Because when you start doing the right thing then its value that you have now of doing what's right or righteous becomes so important for you. And then you start looking for ways to do that and you're strengthening and exercising the conscience. It doesn't just come by doing the right thing. It comes by relying on the standard of God's word.

We must do all of those things together. But as we practice doing what's right God is able to do something deeper inside of our hearts. He's able to help us develop a stronger conscience, which will help us in so many different areas. It helps us balance truth and love and helps us not procrastinate. It helps us be able to do all kinds of things that are non-moral things as well as the moral things that God wants us to do because they are right and righteous. Sometimes in our culture we're tempted to sacrifice what's right because we don't want to make waves. A strong conscience will drive us forward and will help that heart to have the passion to go forward to do what's right.

If you remember in the New Testament, Saul was the guy who was persecuting Christians because inside of his heart he believed that they were a disruption to the Jewish faith and needed to be eradicated. So he felt very good about killing Christians until Jesus stopped him on the road and said, "*Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?*" His name was changed to Paul. In the midst of that he kept his same passion, but now to proclaim the gospel out here instead of killing Christians.

God wants to do something, I think, radically in our lives and sometimes we believe we're going in the right direction, but God wants to change us so that we're fitting alongside of His plan. He uses the conscience, He uses the Holy Spirit in our lives to move us in that direction if the conscience is trained. I think the conscience can be dangerous if it's not trained. We want it to be trained with God's word. We want to exercise it and practice it, and God will do some great things.

In the end we are going to realize that we need God more and more in our lives. I know that's why you're here. You need God. And by coming to a church service like this, you're able to experience Him, get inspired, get some new perspective on life, go out of here different because God changes us. We need God in everything that we do. Don't we? Amen.

Let's stand together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I want to ask now that you would speak to each of our hearts. It's in moments like this that sometimes you reveal something that needs to be addressed. You put your finger on it and ask for change because maybe we're experiencing guilt in the conscience or

maybe we're recognizing a fault or a failure that we need to work on. Lord, I pray that you would provide conviction and also encouragement to our hearts. That you love us, you value us, that you want us to make changes that are changes for our good and for your glory. So Lord, I ask that you would speak to us in these next few minutes as we sing, that you would be honored in our hearts. Give us a greater conviction to do what's right in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.