

27. The True Taste of Revenge

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Have you ever felt the urge to take revenge? It seems so sweet and satisfying. Your boss takes full credit for the project you slaved over. Your business partner sets you up to bear the brunt of his shady dealings. Your so-called friend betrays a confidence and spreads lies about you. Your spouse runs off with someone.

And now your appetite for revenge is whetted. In your mind's eye, you imagine your offenders suffering as you have suffered, languishing in the same pit of misery that they've shoved you into. You fantasize that they call to you for help. But why should you care? With a shrug and satisfied smirk, you turn away, casually denying them the hand that they denied you. You know what they say, "I don't get mad, I get even."

Ah, to savor the sweet juices of revenge! Is that what it is? Is revenge truly sweet? Let's find a few facts about revenge:

1) How we justify it

Because revenge is such an unpleasant word, we frequently dress it up with a couple of more acceptable terms. First, instead of sayings "I'm going to get you!" we say, "I'm just standing up for my rights." This thinking naturally leads to a second label for revenge, "justified retaliation." In our minds, settling the score becomes a moral obligation. We feel justified in taking the law into our own hands and dealing out our own justice.

2) How God defines it

However we justify it, God calls it revenge. And it belongs to Him.

Romans 12:17-19 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

3) The Revenge Process

Revenge may be sweet temporarily, but it sours the soul. It starts with an injury. Someone attacks us or steals something precious to us. Silently, we churn with anger and look for vulnerability, a hole in our offenders' armor through which we can thrust our imaginary dagger.

God's prohibition against revenge does not mean that we shouldn't defend ourselves as individuals or as a nation. Nor does it restrict us from seeking justice through the legal system. The issue has to do with personal vendettas and taking the law into our own hands.

In 1 Samuel 24, David has the perfect opportunity to avenge himself against Saul. The temptation to get even was strong, especially in light of Saul's record of mistreatment in chapters 22 and 23.

A. WHAT AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET EVEN

1 Samuel 24:1-7 Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, "Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi." 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild

Goats. 3 So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) 4 Then the men of David said to him, "This is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.' " And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. 5 Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe. 6 And he said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." 7 So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way.

What is your interpretation of this?

The sheepfolds indicate that this was a large cave, large enough to shelter a flock of sheep, but we don't know how many of David's men were hiding in that particular cave at this time.

The Bible is a real Book, dealing with real people, living real lives, we aren't surprised to see it describing Saul's attention to his physical needs. In NIV, NASB, LB, they all translate as, *"He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave."* Saul went into the cave to go poopoo. KJV translates, *"Saul went in to cover his feet."* How polite King Jimmy is!

David caught Saul his pants down, literally. For the first time since he has attacked David, Saul is vulnerable.

This was no coincidence but arranged by God to test David, to train David, and display the godly heart of David. Remember, temptation without opportunity is nothing.

We can imagine David, after listening to this counsel from his men, and with his sword, creeping quickly towards Saul, covered by the darkness of the cave. The Lord kept Saul from hearing David's approach. David's men are excited. Their lives as fugitives are about to be over, and they will soon be installed as friends and associates of the new king of Israel.

But as David came close to Saul, he didn't bring his sword crashing down on Saul's neck or thrust it through his back. Many would only be troubled that they did not take the opportunity to kill Saul. David only cut off the corner of Saul's robe, yet his heart troubled him. Because the robe was a symbol of Saul's royal authority.

David knew it was disobedient of him to kill Saul, because God put Saul in a position of authority, and it was God's job to take care of Saul, not David's. David wanted the promise to be fulfilled, but he refused to try and fulfill God's promise through his own disobedience.

Listen, just because we have an opportunity to do something we want, it doesn't mean that it is from the Lord. When we have a promise from God, somehow we think we are justified in sinning to pursue that promise. Sin is a sin. This is always wrong.

Few things are more infectious than a godly lifestyle. The people you rub shoulders with every day need that kind of challenge. Not prudish. Not preachy. Just spot-on clean living. Honest-to-goodness, bone-deep, nonhypocritical integrity. Authentic obedience to God.

David persuaded the men because, ultimately, he had absolute confidence in God. He wrestled with his guilt, hung his life on a righteous principle, and then stood fast in absolute confidence in God to make the situation right, even in the face of the opposition. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. David put his confidence in that.

Here are 3 things we must notice from what we just learned:

1) Since man is depraved, expect to be mistreated.

2) Since mistreatment is inevitable, anticipate feelings of revenge.

Matthew 7:12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Rare is the individual who will not retaliate, or at least not want to.

3) Since the desire for revenge is predictable, refuse to fight in the flesh.

That explains how David came out on top. His men said, "Go get him, David." He almost did, I'm convinced. But when he came near the king, he got cold feet and just cut off a piece of robe instead of plunging his knife in Saul's back. Then he made it right.

If you are resentful of the way someone has treated you, if you are holding it against that person, hoping you can retaliate at least or get even, you need to ask God to free you from that bondage. How? Forgiveness! Claim God's power to forgive through Jesus Christ. Begin by asking His forgiveness for excusing and cultivating that deep root of bitterness within your own heart. Ask Him to expose it in all its ugliness and put it to death. Jesus Christ, who went through hell for you, can give you the power you need to overcome the worst kind of condition in your life.

B. THE TIME TO FACE THE TRUTH

1 Samuel 24:8-15 David also arose afterward, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down. 9 And David said to Saul: "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Indeed David seeks your harm'? 10 Look, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' 11 Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. 12 Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you. 14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea? 15 Therefore let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand."

What do you get out of this?

When David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed down, he showed great trust in God. Because he made himself completely vulnerable to Saul. Saul could have killed him very easily at that moment, but David trusted that if he did what was right before God, God would protect him and fulfill the promise.

David knew very well that Saul's fear of David came from Saul himself, and not from anyone else. But David puts the blame on nameless others so that it is easier for Saul to say, "They were wrong" instead of "I was wrong." Even in confronting Saul, David is covering Saul's sin!

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

This principle of "not-striking-out-against-God's-anointed-leaders" is good and important, but sometimes has been misused.

The phrase "touch-not-the-Lord's-anointed" is in vogue among some Christians and leaders. And often, to them, it means this: "You should never speak against a pastor or a leader. He is above your criticism or rebuke." Hogwash! Sometimes it is used even to prevent a biblical evaluation of a man's teaching.

David recognized that Saul was the Lord's anointed and refused to harm him, what David would not do is kill Saul. But he did humbly confront Saul with his sin and hope to God that Saul would change his heart. But it is entirely wrong for people to use the idea of "touch-not-the-Lord's-anointed" to insulate a leader from all evaluation or accountability.

In 1 Samuel 15:27-28, the prophet Samuel rebuked Saul for his hard-hearted disobedience to God. In his distress, Saul tried to stop Samuel from leaving and grabbed his robe, and a portion of the prophet's robe tore away. While Saul was holding the torn piece of Samuel's robe, Samuel said to him: "*The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.*" Now, when David confronts Saul with the torn robe, Saul must be reminded of this incident, and God's message to him was loud and clear.

C. SAUL'S REMORSE

1 Samuel 24:16-22 So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 Then he said to David: "You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. 18 And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the Lord delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. 19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. 20 And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 21 Therefore swear now to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house." 22 So David swore to Saul. And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

David's honest words of confrontation softened the tough-hearted Saul.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

What a miserable picture Saul is in! Saul feels remorseful about what he did to David, but he didn't repent. In other words, he is still in his willful sin because he is in true repentance, he would give up his throne to David according to the Lord's will.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) If you're plotting revenge, however small and insignificant you may think it to be, surrender it now.
- 2) Just because a door was opened that seems to make sense to us, it doesn't mean God wants us to walk in.
- 3) When we realize that we were wrong in the sight of the Lord, it is absolutely important that we must do the right thing with God after our repentance.