

Eastwood Baptist (AM, 19/8/18) **“YOU ARE MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN I”**  
(1 Samuel 18-26)

**Introduction** Have you ever been in serious conflict with another person, or group of people? If not, be thankful for this. But if you have, how did you behave? And how did the other person or group behave? Was the conflict resolved because you both behaved well? Or did the conflict persist, and even perhaps escalate, because at least one of you behaved badly? This morning we are going to look at the persistent conflict between Saul and David, and the contrast between the behaviour of the two men. The story of this conflict covers several chapters, so I am going to begin with a brief overview of these chapters, then I am going to focus on one exemplary chapter (Chapter 24).

**Conflict and Contrast** (Overview) Saul was impressed by David’s killing of Goliath, and sent him on military missions, and rewarded his success with promotion within his army. But soon David’s very success became the source of conflict. His popularity exceeded that of Saul, so that the Israelites sang, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.” Saul, with good reason, began to see David as a potential threat to his throne. His son Jonathan did not share his concern, even though the greatest threat was probably to his succession rather than Saul’s present reign. Indeed, he became David’s close, loyal and generous friend. I suspect that this made Saul feel even worse. Saul’s hostility toward David grew, and became more settled and more obvious. At first he sought to bring about David’s death by indirect means, offering David the hand of his daughter in marriage provided he killed one hundred Philistines. The narrator says plainly that “Saul’s plan was to have David fall by the hand of the Philistines.” But his plan failed badly. David killed two hundred Philistines, and Saul was forced to allow David to marry his daughter Michal. Saul’s hostility became more open. He declared his desire for David’s death, and before long he sent men out to kill David. Repeated failure didn’t deter him, and Saul persistently sought to have David killed. He even slaughtered eighty-five priests who had helped David. So how did David respond? Initially he simply continued to serve Saul well. When, however, Saul’s growing hostility put his life in danger he ran from Saul, but didn’t attempt to strike back against him. On two occasions he was in a position to take Saul’s life, but chose not to do so. We are now going to look at the first of these two occasions.

**David Spares Saul’s Life** (24:1-7) This incident begins as Saul pursues David with hostile intent. **Read 24:1-2.** Saul’s intention is clear – you don’t take a force of three thousand men to conduct a peaceful negotiation. But this large force doesn’t prove to be effective either in protecting Saul or capturing David. **Read 24:3-4.** David has the opportunity to kill or capture Saul. His men offer a persuasive argument in favour of taking this opportunity. They are clearly right in calling Saul

David's enemy, and it is natural to expect David to seize any opportunity to triumph over his enemy, a man who clearly wants to kill him. In addition, they interpret this opportunity as one provided by God, an interpretation which David must have been tempted to accept. But David rejects the view of his men, and only cuts off a corner of Saul's robe. This will become evidence that David has spared Saul's life, but it may also be meant (by the narrator, if not David) to recall the earlier incident when Saul accidentally tore Samuel's robe, and Samuel interpreted this as prophetic of God's tearing the kingdom away from Saul. This part of the story concludes in the next few verses. **Read 24:5-7.** It would have been understandable if David had regretted missing his opportunity to kill Saul. But instead he regrets cutting off the corner of his robe. And we see why he did not take the opportunity to kill him. It is not that David is a tender-hearted man. If we read on into Chapter 27 we will see how ruthless he is toward non-Israelites at a time when he has sought sanctuary with the Philistine king of Gath. He raids them and wipes out whole communities, so that he can safely deceive the Philistines, making them think that he has raided his own people. It is not mercy that leads David to spare Saul, but his reverence for God, expressed through reverence for God's anointed king, even when that king is his enemy.

**David Confronts Saul** (24:8-15) David has spared Saul's life, but he does not spare his feelings. He calls out to Saul from the cave, addressing him as "my lord the king", and bowing down to him. He declares that he is innocent of any intention of harming Saul, and tells him that he has just spared him because he is the LORD's anointed. He holds up the piece of Saul's robe as evidence that he could have killed him, but chose not to do so. He declares that it is Saul, who has pursued David with murderous intent, who is in the wrong. It would be too much to say that David forgives Saul. Rather he declares that he will not act against Saul, and calls upon God to judge between them. **Read 24:12, 15.** I think that the reader is expected to reflect on David's words in the light of later events in this book, remembering that God does eventually vindicate David.

**Saul's Response to David** (24:16-22) Indeed, there is a sense in which David is vindicated immediately by what Saul says in response to him. **Read 24:16-20.** Saul speaks the truth, even admitting that he is in the wrong, and even calling down upon David God's blessing for what he has done. Unlike God, however, we cannot look at Saul's heart to determine whether he has repented of his previous actions and changed his intentions toward David. But there are some indications that we should not take Saul's words at face value. First, there is what he says next. **Read 24:21-22.** It looks as though Saul's greatest concern is not the wrong which he has done to David, but the welfare of his family and the preservation of his own name. Then there is Chapter 26. If there has been any change of heart toward David, it doesn't last. In Chapter 26 Saul receives news of David's whereabouts, and again pursues him with a force

of three thousand men. Once again, Saul's own life is only preserved because David spares him.

**Conclusion** So what can we take from today's stories about David and Saul? We might learn something about respecting those in authority, and especially about honouring those whom God has called to leadership, although only Jesus Christ should be called "the Lord's Anointed" under the New Covenant. But we can also make a broader application. We can look at Saul and David, and ask ourselves what matters most to us, especially in situations of conflict or other difficult situations. Does honouring God come first, even when this is not convenient? Are we willing to follow the teaching and example of Jesus, and seek the good even of those who behave badly toward us? Or are we like Saul in putting ourselves and our families ahead of everything else? Let us be followers of Jesus Christ, who put our allegiance to him first, who seek to act as our Lord would have us act, even when this is hard to do.