

INTO WHOSE HANDS

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



Catalog No. 20151025
1 Samuel 23:1–24:22
12th Message
Paul Taylor
October 25, 2015

1 Samuel 23:1–24:22

Everybody wants to get to the top. Our culture is consumed with getting to the next level, climbing the ladder, and achieving our dream. This is the elusive pursuit of success. We are, many of us, ambitious people.

There is perhaps no better illustration of naked ambition in our modern media than the brilliant political drama, *House of Cards*. This TV show follows Frank Underwood, who starts out as a member of Congress in the House of Representatives. As each season progresses, he manages to rise higher and higher in the political system.

The second season of the TV show opens with Frank describing his philosophy of success. He refers to a young woman, Ms. Barnes, who got in his way during the first season. Read what Frank has to say about how to make it in this world.

“For those of us climbing to the top of the food chain, there can be no mercy. There is but one rule: hunt or be hunted.”

This is the message that surrounds us. If you want to succeed, that may come at the cost of someone else. And that’s just how the world works.

We are about two months into our ten month journey through the life of David that we’re calling A Life of Passion. This story is one of the most incredible stories. It’s like *House of Cards*, ancient Near East edition. We’ve been watching David from when he started as a young shepherd boy as he moves toward becoming the king of Israel.

At this point David has been anointed king by the prophet Samuel, but Saul is still acting as the current king. Except that Saul isn’t really acting like a king at all. Mostly, he’s enraged by jealousy and trying to hunt David down to kill him. David is a fugitive, on the run from Saul.

This morning we are looking at 1 Samuel 23 and 24—two very full chapters with a total of three different stories. Each of these stories show David reacting in different ways to this unique position that he is in. We

have seen in previous stories that David is an ambitious young man. He wants to be king. Badly. He knows that it is in his future. But his current circumstances are a far cry from sitting on a throne. David feels the tension of wanting to be somewhere in life but not yet being there.

Many of us feel that same tension. We are ambitious. We want to be somewhere else, somewhere farther along. Perhaps you think you’re not ambitious because you don’t care about career advancement. But “making it” can be about many different things. Your plans; your agenda; your maturity; your relationships; the way you want your life to play out or your family to be or your friends to act around you.

Maybe you don’t want to be president, but many of us have ideas of how we want things to happen.

In the stories this morning, David shows us an incredible example of how to live in that tension. It is very different from the advice of Frank Underwood. This is part of the highlight reel of David’s life. It is David at his best—some of the most honorable and admirable decisions.

There is a unique phrase that connects these stories. In each of them, we see the phrase “*into his hands*” or “*into my hands*.” First, God gives victory into David’s hands. Then God refuses to give David into the hands of Saul. Finally, God turns it around and gives Saul into David’s hands.

The question that keeps getting asked is whose hands are worthy for the responsibility that God entrusts to them. For David and Saul, it’s an issue of the kingdom. Where should the kingship lie?

I have to apologize in advance, but I need to geek out a bit on the Bible. I figure that if there’s anywhere it’s okay to geek out a little bit, this is the place.

I have a tool on my computer that allows me to do statistical searches on the Bible. It turns out there are no two consecutive chapters where the phrase “into [his] hands” occurs more frequently in the entire Old Testament. This phrase represents 1.5% of the words in these chapters. There are a few single chapters where

they occur more frequently. In one, they are over 2.5% of the words. I'll tell you about that chapter a little bit later.

But these stories are all about the responsibility that is placed in our hands. They are about what we want to have in our hands, what we currently have in our hands, and how to handle the difference.

What do we do when we want to be somewhere but we're not there yet? Let's see what David does and see what we can learn from his example.

Be Who You Want to Become

The first story opens with a crisis. One of Israel's cities is being attacked by a foreign power. Here is 1 Samuel 23:1, "Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors."

This is why Israel wanted a king. These are the kinds of situations that a king is supposed to address. A city is under attack when something valuable is at its most vulnerable. This is when you need a king.

But the king is nowhere in sight. Saul is the king, but he is not told of the problem. David is. They want David to solve this problem. So David does what the king of Israel is supposed to do in a situation like this. Charge forward and save the day?

Actually, no. The king of Israel is supposed to turn to the God of Israel for guidance. David actually does this twice because his men are so scared they need reassurance. The second question and answer is recorded in **1 Samuel 23:4:**

Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand."

And here is our first occurrence of the theme phrase. God promises to David that he will give the Philistines "*into his hand*." The people have come to David with a problem. He has asked God for advice. God has answered. The story has a happy ending.

1 Samuel 23:5:

And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

David saved the city of Keilah. This is what a king does. The king saves his people from danger.

This is a very significant story because we see David acting like a king. In fact, it's almost a perfect textbook example of how a king is supposed to behave: A problem comes up; the people let him know about it; he asks God for help; God promises him the help he needs; everything works out, and David saves the day.

Think about what is going on. God has anointed David as the king, but he isn't actually the king yet. But here is David, before he officially has the responsibility as king, acting more like a king than the man wearing the crown. David puts himself and his men at risk for the sake of protecting the vulnerable people of Israel. And God gives him success. God puts some of the responsibility of kingship into David's hands before he is actually the king.

This is a really helpful example if you want to be somewhere in life but you aren't there yet. You can fulfill a lot of the responsibilities of a role even before you have the actual role. You can start to act like the person that you want to become. You can be who you want to become.

This is actually one of the main criteria that the elders at PBC use when they are discerning who might be a good fit to become an elder. We ask the question, "Who is already acting like an elder in our midst?" The title and the official role is not the most important thing. The meetings are certainly not the most important thing. It's a posture toward this community. Who is already doing that? Who seems like an elder without the title?

You can actually do this in many areas of life. If you want to have more responsibility at work, start acting more responsibly. Look for areas in which you can take initiative. Support the rest of your colleagues in their efforts. If you want the role of a leader, then start by empowering the people around you.

If you want to be married, start acting like someone who can care for a spouse. If you want to be a parent, start acting like someone who can care for children. If you want to be part of a community, start building a community for others.

God gave the Philistines into David's hands. He gave him an opportunity to act like a king before he actually became the official king. What opportunities has God put in your hands? What doors has God opened? Maybe there isn't the title or the recognition or the official role. But how can you contribute in a similar way?

How can you be who you want to become?

Look for God's Protection

David was acting more like a king than Saul at this point. But the man who is supposed to be king doesn't like it. He hears that David is in Keilah and sees it as an opportunity to trap him.

1 Samuel 23:7:

Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars."

Saul thinks that David is going to be trapped in Keilah and he can catch him there. He thinks that God has given David into his hands. He thinks that God is on his side and has finally delivered David "*into his hands*."

David hears about this and worries that it might be true. He asks God a difficult question and receives a painful answer in 1 Samuel 23:12, "Then David said, 'Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?' And the Lord said, 'They will surrender you.'"

David has just saved the city of Keilah from the Philistines. Now he wants to know whether his men will stand up for him or turn him over to Saul. God lets David know that they will not protect him. This must have come as quite a blow to David. He had acted like their king. But now, when it comes down to it, his men are going to betray him to the real king, who was nowhere to be found when they were in trouble. That stings.

Honestly, this is often what happens when you act like the person you want to become. You don't get a parade in your honor. People don't line up to thank you. Sometimes you get betrayed or criticized or your motives are questioned. You go out of your way for someone else and then they do not stick up for you. It hurts, but it can be part of the deal. Don't be surprised when it happens.

David realizes that these people will betray him, so he runs and hides.

1 Samuel 23:14:

And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.

Every day Saul was trying to find David. But God did not give him into his hand. God protected David from the hand of Saul. The citizens of Keilah were going to turn him over. But God does not turn David over to Saul.

In the next story, this same scene plays out in a similar way with a different set of people. David is hiding in the wilderness of Ziph, so the Ziphites decide that they had better turn David in. They tell Saul where David is and Saul tries to hunt him down. Saul trapped David by surrounding him on the side of a mountain. This scene is the Old Testament equivalent of a high speed car chase. This is 1 Samuel's version of *Fast and Furious*².

1 Samuel 23:26-29:

Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land." So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.

David is saved because Saul does something entirely out of character: he acts like a king and goes to fight the Philistines. It's a shocking turn of events. He had abandoned his kingly responsibilities in order to pursue David. So why, now that he finally has him, does he change his mind?

Because God intervened. In some miraculous way, God intervened. Saul thinks that God has given David "*into his hands*." But the text says that God doesn't do that. God didn't give David into Saul's hand.

Sometimes we fall into the hands of evildoers. Whether it's annoying—like a boss who is difficult to work for—or devastating—like becoming a victim of abuse or assault—there are times when it seems like God gives us into the hands of others. David will feel like that frequently.

But not here. In this story, God protects David. In this story, God does not give him over.

What about you? Have you experienced that? Some time when God protected you or provided for you in a surprising way? Maybe it came on the heels of a betrayal

like it did for David? Or maybe you were just about to lose hope? But God does provide. Look for it.

Two weeks ago, Andy Burnham, our recovery pastor was asking for prayer for Our Brother's Home—a transitional housing arrangement for men coming out of recovery. They were within a week of running out of money. I heard Andy ask for prayer in several different settings and saw his emails and posts on Facebook.

Then several days later, I ran into Andy with as big of a smile as I have even seen. He said, "Good news! Someone just made a \$10,000 donation to Our Brothers Home." At least for the time being, God had protected this vital ministry. It turns out the donor had been feeling led to give \$10,000 to this ministry, but hadn't acted on it yet. Then a check came that was for \$10,000 more than expected. So there it was. God had confirmed it.

I have been planning to tell this story for a week. But then this past week, the story got even better. A FedEx package arrived in the mail for Andy with another donation toward Our Brother's Home. This time for \$40,000. This incredible ministry went from being a week away from not being able to pay the rent to thinking about whether God is leading them to expand.

God protects us. Sometimes he comes through. Sometimes at the last minute, when it seems as if Saul is about to close in, we are saved. It can be unexplainable and surprising. But God does rescue.

Hold Your Hopes With Open Hands

At least for the time being, David was rescued, but he was still on the run. Think about the emotions he is going through. Anxiety about protecting Keilah. Confidence in God. Gratitude for the victory. Shock at the betrayal. Fear as he ran from Saul. Panic as it looked like he might be captured. Relief when Saul abandons the hunt. And still he can't rest.

Life is full of ups and downs. Then something crazy happens. This would be a great story to write an internet clickbait headline for: "David hides from murderous king in a cave and you'll never guess what happens next!"

1 Samuel 24:2-4a:

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself.

Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'"

Saul is chasing David with a five to one advantage. David hides in a cave. And Saul decides to come into the cave to "relieve himself." In case you are confused, this is supposed to be funny. I know it seems weird that the Bible makes potty jokes, but this is intended to be a bit of humor. It's a slice of comic relief in the middle of some really intense stuff going on.

David's men rejoice at this incredible opportunity. They say that God has given Saul into David's hand. David is waiting to become king. This is his chance. God gave the Philistines into David's hand. Then he refused to give David into Saul's hands. Now he has given Saul into David's hand. It all makes sense. This is where it could end.

But it doesn't. David does something odd. Here's verse 4b-6,

Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed."

He cuts off a corner of the robe. This probably has to do with what Samuel said to Saul in 1 Samuel 16:28, "the LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day." Cutting the royal robe is a reminder of what has been torn from Saul.

But then David feels guilty even about this purely symbolic act. It's an incredible scene. What we see of David's character here is simply stunning. David is treating Saul like the king. He is respecting the Saul's position even though Saul himself has been ignoring his responsibilities. David's patience and integrity here are amazing.

In this scenario, I think I might have killed Saul. I know Frank Underwood would have. There are only two options: hunt or be hunted. David is being hunted, but the hunter has been delivered into his hands. And he spares him. I can hear Frank Underwood in his Southern drawl sneering at David's stupidity and lack of sense. I think I would have been convinced by the eagerness of my men.

David shows incredible patience and integrity. But this decision is also very clever. David is showing undeserved respect for the LORD's anointed. His actions honor the integrity of that role. But who is the LORD's anointed? It's not actually Saul. It's David himself.

Think about the lesson that he is teaching his six hundred men. You don't touch the LORD's anointed. Even if you think that man is making terrible decisions. Even if you think that God has chosen someone else. Even if you know that God has chosen you. You don't touch the LORD's anointed. That will serve David well years down the road when he is recognized as the LORD's anointed himself.

David is honorable and savvy. A commentator noticed, "David exhibits a rare goodness combined with shrewd political sense, both of which Saul conspicuously lacks."³ David is good and shrewd. But the surprises continue.

After Saul leaves the cave, David comes out and reveals himself. He tells Saul what he has done. It is a very risky move. Saul is hunting him. Saul could easily take this chance to kill him. But David draws a sharp comparison between himself and the king and invokes the name of God as judge.

1 Samuel 24:14-15:

After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

The result of David's speech is just as surprising as his choice not to kill Saul. Read what happens in **1 Samuel 24:16-17:**

As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil."

We think we have seen it all until now. Saul is broken by David's words. He weeps. He admits that David is more righteous. And then he says this in verse 20, "And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand."

What has just happened? God did give Saul into David's hands, but David did not act on it. He acted like a king by protecting the city of Keilah from the Philistines. And in a strange way, he acted like a king again when God gave Saul into his hand and he spared his life. In fact, even his enemy has now come to the conclusion that he deserves to be king. That is amazing.

I think I admire David more for this decision than anything else in his life. I am stunned by this picture of David. David is ambitious. He wants to be king. Here is an opportunity to make it happen. But he doesn't take it. Even his own men want him to do it. But he doesn't. He is patient. He does not force his plans.

Think of it this way: God gave Saul into David's hands. But David left his hands open. He could have crushed Saul. He could have made sure he became king. But he didn't. He held it loosely. He held Saul with open hands.

This is an example that we can follow. Think about your own ambition, your plans, what you hope could happen. How can you hold that loosely? If God puts something in your hands, can you keep your hands open? Can you hold your hopes with open hands?

I said earlier that there is one chapter in the Bible where this phrase "*into the hands*" occurs as over 2.5% of the words. It is Genesis 39, where another story is told of an ambitious young man who faces some serious setbacks.

It is the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt. His first master, Potiphar trusted him so much that he put everything in his household "*into his hands*." Eventually, Potiphar's wife fell for the handsome servant and she tried to seduce him. He protested saying that everything except her was put "*into his hands*" and when he screams, she runs off, leaving her gown "*in his hands*."

This, of course, gets him thrown in jail. But it isn't long before even the jailer is impressed by Joseph. Soon, everything in the jail is put "into Joseph's hands." The chapter ends with the statement, "whatever [Joseph] did, the LORD made it succeed."

Another story of an ambitious young man who will eventually hold a high political position, who is tempted and has to wait a long time for God's plan to come to fruition.

I'm an ideas person. I have lots of ideas. Some of them are probably good. But it can be hard for me to let them go sometimes. There are so many things that could be done. So much to accomplish. So much to experience. I've been learning to hold my ideas with open hands for a while now.

What is in your hands? What are your hopes? What is your ambition? Can you hold it with open hands? Can you be patient? Can you avoid the temptation to rush things or make it on your own?

Remember that holding plans with open hands doesn't guarantee they will happen. But it does make it easier for you if they don't. Sometimes you learn to wait. Sometimes you learn to let go. What do you need to hold with open hands?

Is Your Life in God's Hands?

We've seen a lot of things being put into someone's hands this morning. God delivered the Philistines over into the hands of David. He gave him success. God refused to deliver David into the hands of Saul. He gave David protection. God put Saul into David's hands, but David left his hands open in honor of God's anointing.

I would like to remind us of one other usage of this phrase. When Jesus hung on the cross, he quoted a phrase from Psalm 31. That quote is captured in Luke 23:46, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

At the end of it all, Jesus gave his life over into the hands of the father. He trusted God even to the point of death; even to the point of the worst possible thing happening. He delivered himself into the hands of the father, knowing that he could trust God with his life.

[Read Psalm 31]

I think that this lies behind all three stories of David this morning as well. The most impressive part of David's character is his relationship with God. He has put himself into the hands of God, his father. And that's what lies behind all these other examples.

This is why God gives him success over the Philistines. This is why God protects him from Saul. This is why David is able to pass on the incredible opportunity to take Saul out. David knows that his life is in God's hands.

Do you know that? Is your life in God's hands?

Are you able to rest in that knowledge? Maybe you've never trusted God at all. If that's the case then now is the time to put your life in the hands of God. Trust that

Jesus is your king—the LORD's anointed in your life. He died to save you from your sins. Believe in him. Put your life in his hands and be saved.

Or maybe you have faith, but you just find it hard to let go. It is difficult to put your life in God's hands and keep yours open. You want to make things happen, take charge, do things your way. Putting your life in the hands of God allows you hold what he gives you with open hands.

Put your ambitions, your hopes, and your plans in God's hands. Let him take care of them.

Conclusion

Most of us want certain things to happen in our lives. We have hopes and plans. We are ambitious, whether in the typical sense or in other ways. And while we may not be as explicit about it as Frank Underwood, we tend to do whatever is in our power to make our plans come to pass.

This morning, David has shown us a new way to be ambitious. We have considered ways that we can be like the people we want to become. We have been reminded to look for ways that God protects us along the journey. And we have been inspired to hold our hopes loosely with open hands as we wait for God's plan to unfold.

David is formed by these experiences in the wilderness. Knowing that his life is ultimately in God's hands shapes him into the man he becomes. But it isn't always pretty. Next week, we'll see a very different side of David. We'll watch David being narrowly saved from making an angry and violent mistake.

What is your ambition? What has God given into your hands? Where do you think things are going? Can you avoid the temptation to push things ahead? And most importantly, can you put all of that into God's hands this morning? Put your hopes into the hands of God. Leave them there and see what happens.

Endnotes

¹Prod. David Fincher, et. al. *House of Cards*. Media Rights Capital, et. al. 2014. *IMdb*. Web.

²*Fast and Furious* franchise. Universal Pictures. 2001-2015.

³Borgman, Peter. *David, Saul, & God: Rediscovering Ancient Story*. Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008.

