

Life in the In-Between: Preparing for coming Glory
1 Samuel 23

“For He has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies”
Psalm 54:7

Introduction: Life in the *in-between* is hard. The time between two extremes, being neither here nor there, comes with unique strain. The long trip, long engagement, or waiting through a terminal diagnosis can feel like forever, where resolution feels distant and uncatchable. We’ve been studying through this part of 1 Samuel where David found himself in the **in-between**: he was anointed king (1 Sam. 16:13) but would not actually BECOME king for years, having to wait for the death of Saul to become the acting king (2 Sam. 2:4). In these years of waiting, life was a mixture of joy (defeating Goliath) and pain (having his father-in-law king try to kill him), of serving and waiting, of fearing for life and constantly on the run. The future king and decorated soldier would face the prospect of death every day, would be sold out by his own people, would not ever know who to trust, and did not know when it would end. Life in the **in-between** had all the makings of unstable, uncertain, fearful, frustrated, and depressing time, and it would almost seem justified given the circumstances.

In a similar way, we are living in a time of **in-between**. If you are here this morning and know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, it means that you have come to believe that you are a sinner in light of the holiness of God, have fallen short of the glory of God and are in abject need of salvation. By grace you believe that Jesus, being wholly God and perfectly holy, died on the cross, bearing the wrath that God had stored up because of your sin, and poured it out on Christ, satisfying His requirement. In believing, you joyfully repent of your sin, turning from it to follow Jesus, recognizing Him as Lord of your life and yielding your whole life to Him in obedience. This is the new birth that God brings through His Spirit and the work of Jesus. This starts us on a new course and gives us the hope of a **better future**, one where we will be with Christ forever, with new bodies and no sin nature, serving Him forever. The time of coming to Christ and waiting for our future promises puts us in the **in-between**, and like David, we find this place hard.

Living in a broken, fallen, sinful world means life lived to its fullest in Christ will STILL be full of trials, pain, and suffering. We face the inevitable consequences of certain decisions we made in the past, some that will painfully last the entirety of our life on this earth. We face circumstances that are out of our control, where people around us do things to hurt us, or cause sorrow. We face suffering for righteousness, and trials that God proactively gives to grow us. We face physical pain, uncertain immediate futures, and degenerating minds and bodies. There is a tension between what we **know** what God will do in the future and what we face in the present.

There are **two key things to remember in order to thrive in the in-between**: 1) This is a time of living with a purpose, but it is also a **time of preparation!** God was preparing David in the years of running from Saul for his life on the throne, so each day was an opportunity to trust and lean on the Lord, which would serve him well as a king. For us, we know that God is doing the same thing for us today, preparing us for the glory to come:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal”*

2) **God has given us resources and access to thrive in the in-between.** What we will see in the life of David is how he navigated this in-between time with the knowledge, trust, and confidence in who God is and what He does in order to get through everyday trials and pain. The same resources are available to us today. So as we study this chapter, we look to the same God who sovereignly protects, providentially delivers, and graciously provides.

Prepared through Divine Provision (1-14)

*Now they told David, “Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the **threshing floors.**” 2 Therefore **David inquired of the Lord**, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?” And the Lord said to David, “Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah.” 3 But David’s men said to him, “Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more than if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?” 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.” 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.*

Fear is a tried and tested method to get results by controlling people. I have relatives that spent over 7 years in N. Korea, a place where everyone who walks the streets is reminded of who is in charge. There are statues, buttons, billboards, and even little red books that everyone must carry around to remember that they are being watched at all times. Because corruption is the norm, whenever people would begin to feel safe and open, you would hear of a government official who was killed, and since he was networked with hundreds of others, the ripple effects would leave everyone uneasy, they would get back in line, and the effectiveness of fearful rule was re-established.

Saul ruled by fear. Because he was hell-bent on killing David, he was willing to kill anyone that stood in his way. He had **85 priests killed at Nob** for no legitimate reason, along with their families, including young children and babies. Any king willing to kill his people on a whim is one to be feared, and it had that effect on everyone, including David (see 1 Sam. 22:23; 23:2; 23:17). But in the midst of this tragedy, we see God providing for David as he was being prepared for kingly rule.

First, God provided David with an opportunity to serve **in the midst** of the tension of running for his life. As David was hiding in caves, word came that the people of Keilah were being robbed by marauders from the Philistines. Though the town was fortified with bars and gates, a threshing floor would have been a large, open circle on the ground *outside* of the city where the wind would be used to separate the wheat from the chaff. They would have been exposed, left without a crop for consumption or selling in the market. This should have been Saul’s responsibility, but the people had lost faith that he’d have the means or desire to help. It’s **instructive** for us to remember that in the midst of our trials, pain, or frustration personally, the best remedy is often to get the focus off of ourselves and serve others. The deception our enemy would love us to believe is that *we have it worse than anyone else, that someone should come and help us, and that we cannot possibly help anyone else in the midst of our plight.* True service is not convenient, but a true labor of love, and imperative to live with joy in the *in-between*.

Second, God provided David with a **prophet** (see 1 Sam. 22:5 – the prophet Gad), who would speak on behalf of God to man, and a surviving **priest** in Abiathar, who could speak on behalf of man to God. God had not provided a prophet for Saul and he then killed all the priests, cutting off the opportunity to hear from or inquire of the Lord. As the message came to David in the cave, he did what every leader should do: **he inquired of the LORD** (v. 2, 4). When God told David to go ahead and attack the Philistines, his men responded like the disciples to Jesus when He proposed going back to Jerusalem: **they were afraid – and now you want to go into the hornets’ nest!?!** Instead of railing against the weak souled response of his men, he instead inquired of the LORD again, and this time God gave a stronger message, saying **He would give the Philistines into their hands.**

But David was not done in his need to know God’s will. The text says Abiathar had come down to him with a **linen ephod**, a priestly garment that would have hung over his shoulders and chest (see picture). Inside the ephod would have been the **Urim and Thummim** (Exodus 28:6-8; 30-31), similarly to what we saw in 1 Samuel 14:41. These two stones would allow the priest or king to ask “yes” or “no” questions of the LORD, and the response would be ascertained by what rock was pulled out. After David defeated the Philistines, one would think he’d be greeted as a hero, but instead it became clear that the people of Keilah feared Saul, so **sold David out, sending a message to Saul to come and get him.** Through the Urim and Thummim, David knew it was time to flee, and he was able to get away into the wilderness and stay hidden.

Now, we might say, “We don’t have that kind of magic 8 ball to get ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers from God, so how are we supposed to understand His will?!?! **First**, we have something **better than David**, since we have a **high priest in Jesus** who invites us to “*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.*” (Heb. 4:16). He gave us access through His blood so we can approach him without a human priest or a couple of stones. **Second**, He has disclosed His will to us, and made clear what He desires from us: He wants us to be **saved** (2 Pet. 3:9; Matt. 18:11, 1 Tim. 2:4), **sanctified** (1 Thess. 4:3), **filled with the Spirit** (Eph. 5:18), **thankful** (1 Thess. 5:18), **submissive** (1 Pet. 2:13), and willing to **suffer** (1 Pet. 3:17, 4:19; 2 Tim. 3:12). He has given us His Word to understand what the Bible both *commands and prohibits*, what is *wise and beneficial*, and how our liberty affects others. In other words, God’s will and leading will never run counter to His Word. Notice that Saul thought that “**God had given David into his hand**” (v. 7), but this was NOT the will of God, since it was opposed to what God had already declared. He operated out of **worldly wisdom** (see James 3:13-18), not **wisdom from above**.

Finally, God has provided His **sovereign care** for us. “**And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand** (v. 14). We entrust ourselves to God, who will always accomplish His will and plan for our life, even if that plan is far different than what we had in mind. Though David was wrongfully sold out by his countrymen, He could bank on God, who always does what is right and best. But though we know this, we also need reassurance from other relationships as well. That is what God provided next for David, and what He provides us as well.

Prepared through Loving Presence (15-18)

David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. 16 And Jonathan, Saul’s son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. 17 And he said to him, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.” 18 And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

David and Jonathan had already solidified their love, care, and friendship with each other. They had a friendship of **quality over quantity**, since they practically could not be with each other. In fact, this would be the last time these dear friends would see each other, as Jonathan would fall by the sword of the Philistines. But when David was at his lowest, God provided a friend who was closer than a brother (Prov. 17:17, 18:24). Jonathan once again risked his life to cross over to his friend as his father desperately sought to kill him. In so doing, Jonathan gave us a great picture of the power of friendship in the **in-between**:

1. **Presence matters** – David knew that Jonathan cared about him, but sometimes we need to see each other face to face for true encouragement. Sometimes just *being there* is more important than anything that could be said. When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane before Calvary, He desired to have His disciples WITH Him, though they could not stay awake for an hour. Jonathan did not overstay his welcome in any way, but knew that his being there would give a boost and encouragement that David would need in his time of tension and danger.
2. **Truth matters** – But Jonathan did not simply weep or listen to David, though I'm sure that was part of his time. Notice that he **strengthened his hand in God** (v. 16). What does that mean? The text tells us. He told David the truth and reiterated the promises of God to him. Were these **new truths to David**? By no means. But he instilled hope again by **reminding** David what he already knew, that God was committed to him being king, so he did not have to be afraid and Saul WOULD NOT get him. This reminds us that TRUE FRIENDS not only empathize, but **speak the truth in love**, not in pithy or token ways, but in deep, shared, and convictional ways. This requires us to be **thoughtful, gracious, and discerning** in the moment, knowing when to speak, when to listen, when to weep, and when to leave.
3. **Commitment matters** – The text says they “made a covenant” or literally “cut a covenant”, meaning they most likely sacrificed an animal to declare their commitment to each other. David knew he could count on Jonathan when he had his own countrymen betray him and his men cower in fear. A true friend will run toward you when times are the toughest and when others run away. A true friend will speak the truth when others try to pacify or soft pedal. Here's a question to ask yourself. **Who's on your list of friends like this, that you'd call in a pinch or would be there in a minute?** Or to ask another way, **how many lists are you on, of people who would call you?**
4. **A Better friend matters** – God provides us with human friends, but we have a much better friend who has promised to never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5, quoting Josh. 1:5). He is a friend who demonstrated His love for us by laying down His life for us (John 15:13). It's the friend that **Jonathan Edwards** called out for on his deathbed, “*Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing friend.*” We have a friend in Jesus who knows our deepest struggles and needs and has the means of grace to help us. As Paul stood trial he said, “*At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! 17 But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me...*” (2 Tim. 4:16-17a). When we walk with Jesus Christ, we have the best friend who prays for us (Heb. 7:25) and understands our plight in the **in-between**, saying to boldly come to Him as He gives grace. This is essential to know and cling to in the tension of life.

Prepared by Daily Providence (19-29)

*Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? 20 **Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand.**"*

If getting sold out by the people of Keilah stung, what the Ziphites did next was a downright slap in the face from a relative when you were expecting a hug. The Ziphites outdid their brothers to the west as they **proactively** sought out Saul to tell him that David was hiding in their land. Perhaps they were trying to curry favor with the maniacal despot or simply staying ahead of the curve, this was a dire blow to David's prospects. In fact, the way the text lays out it seems like this was going to be the last ride of David and his mighty men. Listen to how the text describes the scene in **23:24-26**:

*Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. 25 And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 26 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...***

What would happen? God would deliver, and we learn three distinct aspects of His deliverance:

1. **We trust and depend on God's PROVIDENTIAL CARE** – David was not saved by a miracle but by the unseen but active hand of God, who called Saul away to deal with the Philistines raiding the land! What some would chalk up to "luck" or "coincidence", it was clear that God was orchestrating events perfectly. In fact, David was the savior against the Philistines in the beginning of the chapter and now God used the Philistines to save David at the end. God will accomplish His purposes in His ways, even using those who are enemies or oppose Him to do all that He desires.
2. **We learn to trust God as our HELPER** – As a result of this episode, David wrote **Psalm 54**, specifically about the Ziphites treachery. In light of the fact that strangers and ruthless men who sought his life, he wrote:

*Behold, God is my **helper**; the Lord is the **upholder of my life**.*

*He will return the **evil to my enemies**; in your faithfulness put an end to them.*

*With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; **I will give thanks to your name, O LORD**, for it is good.*

*For he has **delivered** me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.*

Notice these words of trust: *helper, upholder, deliverer*. David trusted that God would deliver him, and He did. But ALSO notice that God delivered him on that day, but there would be many more days of tension to come. Just as Jesus taught us to pray that God would provide *daily bread* (Luke 11:3) and provided for Israel *manna* each day (Ex. 16:35), God delivered David that day. That meant EACH DAY David had to depend on the Lord's hand for everything, which is the safest and strongest place to be.

3. **We learn that God delivers ultimately** – This is exceptional. Often we want to be out of tension, out of the in-between, and live comfortable lives NOW. But our focus is on the wrong thing. Look at what Paul said while in prison, waiting for **deliverance**:

*Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that **through your prayers** and the **help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ** this will turn out for **my deliverance**, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** 22 If I am to **live in the flesh**, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. **My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.** 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, **I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,** 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.*

How did Paul view deliverance? Through the lens of his life IN CHRIST! Deliverance was not OUT of tension, but within it. If he was going to stay on this earth, it was to work for the progress and joy of the people he loved. *Why could he have that perspective?* Because his ultimate deliverance was to **be with Christ, which was the ultimate gain.** When that is our perspective, we can thrive in the in-between, knowing that our greatest triumph is to come. If it is God's will for us to suffer now or even take us home earlier than we thought, it is for our ultimate good and gain, since that is what He is ultimately preparing us for!!!