

# Undeserved Mercy - 1 Samuel 24

**Good morning, Church!** It's so good to be with you today. I'm Pastor Todd Johnson - Executive Pastor here at Brandywine, and I'm excited to open God's Word together this morning.

**Pray** – *“Father, open our hearts today. Teach us through David’s story how to extend mercy even when it’s hard. May we be transformed by Your Word and the Gospel that gives us LIFE this morning. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.”*

Today we are continuing our **Life of David** sermon series where we have been gleaning life lesson from the book of I Samuel.

This morning, we are going to be talking about **extending mercy** in difficult situations and so to get that concept going in our minds. **How many of you have ever had a boss or a person in position of authority that just drove you crazy?** This might be a person from your past, or a person from your present, or perhaps this person is sitting next to you right now 😊.

These are situations in which you felt like they were treating you unfairly, or maybe they overlooked you in some regard, maybe you felt like they just didn't like you for some reason.

Now, how many of you, if given the perfect opportunity, would have at least been *tempted* to get a little revenge? Or at least we have fantasized about settling the score. Let's be real—most of us would at least think about it.

## *Illustration:*

*A few years ago, our Ministry Leadership Team was at an all-day Church leaders conference down at Journey Church in Newark. And for some reason Pastor Matthew thought he needed to get revenge against me. Me! For the record, I have only ever helped Matthew, he would have no reason for revenge. But Matthew woke up that morning and he chose violence. And so, while I am getting my breakfast at the conference, he decides he's going to hide my keys from me as a prank.*

*And so, after breakfast as everyone is heading into the main session, I am realizing I don't have my keys with me. And I begin to look for them, and*

*they are nowhere to be found. Several of the staff members of Journey Church are assisting me, were digging through the trash, pulling sofa cushions, one of them even climbed into a dumpster to look through more trash bags. I call my wife at work to let her know she's probably going to have to meet me there after work with the extra key.*

*About an hour into this ordeal, I go sit back down in the main session of the conference room defeated and bewildered that my keys could magically disappear. And just then Matthew reaches over with a big smile on his face, "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, I stole your keys." [with a big grin] I wasn't happy.*

*He forgot he stole my keys, and didn't realize I had been outside the conference room with the Journey staff tearing the place apart looking for them.*

*I would be lying if I denied that the next hour of my thoughts circled around revenge fantasies about how to prank him back, but in the end, **I chose mercy**. Actually, I purchased an apple air tag (tracking device) and put it on my key chain as Matthew McNutt deterrent.*

Well, that's a funny story that illustrates the internal drive we have as human beings to get back at one another, but often our desire to get back at someone isn't confined to a small prank. Often, we can feel justified, even emboldened to take retribution into our own hands without ever considering **if God** sees it the same way.

Today we are going to look at a **moment in David's life** where he has the opportunity to take revenge on Saul who had been hunting him down like an animal. But what we are going to see in our text is that David chose the path of **undeserved mercy**. And from this story God is going to teach us about **extending mercy in our own lives—even when it's undeserved**.

To ensure we are all on the same page here, let's define mercy from a biblical perspective. **Mercy in the Bible can be defined as, God's compassionate forgiveness and kindness toward those who do not deserve it. It is not merely withholding punishment; it is actively extending grace, love, and help to the undeserving.**

And so, what's key to remember here, is that in order for it to qualify as, Mercy the person must be undeserving.

With that in mind turn with me to **1 Samuel 24** as we set the stage.

## **David Spares Saul's Life – (1 Samuel 24:1-22)**

At this point in the narrative David is a fugitive. Even though he has been **anointed as Israel's next king** (chapter 16), King **Saul is still on the throne** and is violently jealous of David. Saul has made it his mission to **hunt David down** and kill him.

In the preceding chapters David and Saul have been playing a cat and mouse game. With David trying to avoid Saul's aggression, while Saul bulldozes through anyone that gets in the way of his pursuit.

And so, as chapter 24 opens Saul has just returned from a campaign against the Philistines and he hears that David is in the wilderness of Engedi, and so Saul and his **3,000 elite soldiers** go to chase David through the desert. Now, during this chase Saul needs a break and so he steps into a cave to relieve himself [as men do in these situations]. **But what Saul doesn't know is that David and his men are hiding in that very same cave!**

### **What are the odds?!?!?**

David's men whisper to him, "*David! This is your chance! God has delivered your enemy into your hands.*" Can you imagine the tension in that dark cave? David quietly moves forward, dagger in hand, his men holding their breath. **And then...he doesn't do it.** Instead of killing Saul, he cuts off a piece of Saul's robe and lets him walk away.

What!!! Why, would David not take this amazing opportunity?!?!?

Because **David refused to take revenge into his own hands.** He respects the fact that Saul is still *God's anointed king* at this moment. And when Saul leaves the cave, David calls out to him, saying...[Read] **I**

**Samuel 24: 10, 11 - 10 This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD's anointed.' 11 See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate**

***that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.***

At hearing this, **Saul is moved to tears...** I Samuel 24:17, 18 - 17 ***“You are more righteous than I,” he said. “You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. 18 You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the Lord delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me.***

**What an incredible act of mercy.** This was David’s **chance to take what was already promised to him**, and yet he chose to trust God’s timing rather than force his way onto the throne.

Saul sensing the weight of the moment confesses in verse 20, ***“Now I know for certain you will be king, and the Kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand.”***

You see, even Saul recognized that the righteousness in David’s decision was a sign of God’s anointing. Saul was simply doing what felt natural to him, running on his instincts, hunting down the person that he thought was trying to take his throne. David on the other hand was living out of a completely different paradigm, seeking God’s will above his own.

And Church if we are going to be people of **Mercy** we are going to need to elevate God’s perspective on this topic, and minimize how we feel, or what we see others do.

And I say that because you and I will not naturally be inclined to give others good things that they don’t deserve.

We are wired [sin nature] to repay evil for evil. Which is why **if there was a big summer blockbuster movie** that hits the cinemas this summer and at the climax of the movie the villain wanders into the cave that the hero is hiding in and instead of taking out the villain he shows him mercy, people will be throwing their popcorn at the screens.

Because again, we love seeing evil being repaid for evil, **MERCY is a GOSPEL attribute that must be learned by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.** And so, let’s do that, [let’s practically learn for our own sake] because I think there are at least **3 take aways** from I Samuel 24 in regards to extending **Mercy** in our lives...the first is...

## **Honor the Authority God Has Placed Over You (Even When It's Hard)**

David referred to Saul as “**my master**” and “**the Lord’s anointed**” even though Saul was unjust. David could have said, “*Saul lost his right to respect when he started chucking spears at my head!*” But instead, David recognized and trusted that **God had placed Saul in authority, and God alone would remove him.**

Romans 13:1 says, “*There is no authority except that which God has established.*” Church this means the boss, leader, teacher, or even the government leader you struggle with is *not there by accident.*

**Maybe you have a leader in your life who isn’t acting justly. How do you respond?** Do you gossip about them? Do you rebel? Do you show Disrespect? Do you hide their keys 😊?

Or do you trust that **God is sovereign**, and HE can remove them in HIS time?

*Illustration:*

*Pastor and Author Alan Redpath has a great quote about trusting God even when it's hard.*

*“There is nothing, no circumstance, no trouble, no testing, that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ, right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment, but as I refuse to become panicky, as I lift up my eyes to him and accept it as coming from the throne of God for some great purpose of blessing to my own heart, no sorrow will ever disturb me, no trial will ever disarm me, no circumstance will cause me to fret, for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is.” Alan Redpath*

You see what Pastor Alan is getting at is what David also knew. God isn’t unaware of our trials, and the people he uses to try us. Rather God uses the testing ‘for some great purpose of blessing to my own heart.’

David saw the opportunity to kill Saul as a testing. Would he take the easy way out [killing the Lord's anointed], or would he continue to honor the man who was trying to kill him and wait on the Lord's timing?

Now clearly this situation David was in is pretty extreme, you're probably not going to have to make a life and death decision like David is here, but make no mistake, very soon you will have to make a decision for how to apply this truth. How you will honor the authority that God has placed over you, even if the authority is bad!

And the only way to survive that decision is to trust God for the results. And again, I love the last words in that Alan Redpath quote, "No circumstance will cause me fret, for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is."

And this brings us to the next truth that we glean from our text, and the Life of David.

### **Choose Mercy Over Revenge**

David had **the perfect chance for revenge**. No one would have blamed him. If I Samuel chapter 24 had ended with Saul dead in a cave and David triumphant, I think most people wouldn't have batted an eye.

But here is the problem with that.... **mercy is stronger than revenge**.

Romans 12:19 tells us, "*do not avenge yourselves; instead leave room for God's wrath.*" Mercy says, "*I will not repay evil with evil. I will trust God to handle justice.*"

Church let's go inward and be honest for a moment. **Mercy isn't easy**. Some of you have been deeply hurt. Maybe a friend betrayed you, or you have an estranged relationship with a family member. Some of you are dealing with complicated marriage dynamics, or you're struggling to be merciful to a parent who has wronged you.

**What would it look like for you to extend undeserved mercy?** Maybe that means letting go of bitterness, choosing not to speak badly about someone, or even **praying** for their good.

You see we often let ourselves off the hook and fail to extend mercy in radical ways because radical mercy isn't abundant in our world. This is why I love to read stories of those who have extended mercy in amazing ways. I think knowing these stories emboldens my faith, because it's one thing to talk about living out the gospel, but it's another thing when the Gospel of Jesus Christ comes alive in someone's life.

**Illustration:**

*The man pictured here is named Gordan Wilson.*

*On **November 8, 1987**, during a **Remembrance Day ceremony in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland**, an **IRA bomb** exploded, killing **eleven** people, including **Gordon Wilson's 20-year-old daughter, Marie**. Gordon was trapped under the rubble of the building with Marie, where he said her last words to him were, "Daddy, I love you very much."*

*Despite his immense grief, Gordon Wilson stunned the world by immediately, publicly forgiving the bombers. In a famous BBC interview, he said:*

*"I have lost my daughter, and we shall miss her. But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She's dead. She's in heaven, and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night."*

Rather than seeking revenge, Wilson dedicated his life to **peace and reconciliation**. He continued in his life working to end the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. His mercy reflected what we see in the **Gospel of Matthew 5:44**: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

His story remains one of the most powerful examples of **Christian forgiveness** because in the world in which we live you do not easily forgive those who kill the ones you love. In our world you seek revenge to make yourself feel better...so we think. What Gordon knew is that revenge wouldn't make him feel better at all, it would only hurt himself.

As my wife Kaely so eloquently says, *"Revenge only hurts the one who revenges."*



So true. You see revenge is a lower, more basic instinct. Revenge is like surviving on a fast-food diet, it feels good at first but there will be **problems ahead**.

Revenge is on the wide path [*that most people travel*] that leads to destruction, while **Mercy** is the narrow path that leads to life [*and not as many choose this path*].

Church may we be a people, a congregation, a community of believers who **choose Mercy over revenge**. And as we do we authenticate our faith and point to Jesus.

This sermon, this text, these concepts challenge me hard personally because I am a very justice-oriented person. I view the world through a lens of right and wrong...and what this can bring up in me is a sense that I should be the judge, I should make the wrong right. And while God does give us a legal system and laws to restrain evil...which is a blessing to us all. I find that I need to trust more in a **Just God** who will ultimately set things straight in the end.

**And you see this is what David gets right in our text.** He believes that it isn't his right to dethrone Saul, even though it seems like a divine appointment, Saul taking a pit stop in that cave. No. What David sees in that cave is rather than seizing the opportunity for revenge, he put his faith in **God's justice**, saying in verse 12, "**May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you**" (1 Samuel 24:12). He refused to take revenge on his own but left it to God.

David remembered Deuteronomy 32:35 - **It is mine to avenge; I will repay.**

Church we need to remember that we serve a **Just God**, and what that means is that in the end **nobody's getting away with anything**.

You see when we believe and understand that we will be able to trust Him to repay. And I have a feeling that God will be much better at avenging evil than we ever could be.

And this leads us to our 3<sup>rd</sup> and final lesson that we can take from I Samuel 24 and that is that we should...



## **Reflect the Mercy of Christ**

David's mercy **points us to Jesus.**

David showed mercy by choosing not to harm Saul, his enemy. But Jesus took this concept even further: **He willingly laid down His life for His enemies—us [humanity]!**

Romans 5:8 declares:

**"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

This means that when we were most unworthy—when we had done nothing to deserve forgiveness—Jesus extended mercy by dying for our sins.

David's mercy spared a guilty man's life, but Jesus' mercy brought eternal life to guilty sinners. While David held back his hand from judgment, Jesus **stretched out His hands on the cross** to bear the judgment we deserved.

Think about this Church, if Jesus could forgive us in such a costly way, how can we withhold forgiveness to others?

Jesus Himself made this connection in **Matthew 6:14-15:**

**"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."**

This verse exposes the heart of the believer, when we are stingy with our forgiveness, we highlight the fact that our faith is shallow. However, when we adopt a posture to forgive those who have wronged us, we highlight the fact that we understand how much we have been forgiven by our merciful God.

David's mercy toward Saul is a model of how we are called to treat those who wrong us. Just as David refused to take vengeance into his own hands, we are called to **release bitterness and trust God to bring justice** in His perfect way and timing.

**Illustration:**

Victoria Ruvolo, a woman from upstate, New York, was selected as the **"Most Inspiring Person of the Year"** by Beliefnet, because the testimony of her life delivered so strongly on this very point. **Releasing bitterness and trusting God to bring justice.**

Victoria was driving to her niece's voice recital when she passed another car driven by 19-year-old Ryan Cushing. Cushing was riding with five other teens and had just used a stolen credit card to go on a spending spree. One of their purchases was a frozen turkey, which Cushing decided to toss into oncoming traffic. **The 20-pound projectile smashed through Victoria's windshield, crushing her face.**

Amazingly, Victoria survived, although she spent 10 hours in an operating room while doctors repaired her face. When she finally went home, she was on a tracheotomy tube and endured several months of painful rehabilitation.

What makes this story amazing is that Victoria attended Cushing's sentencing and **asked his judge for leniency**. Part of her statement read:

"Despite all the fear and the pain, I have learned from this horrific experience, and I have much to be thankful for.... Each day when I wake up, I thank God simply because I'm alive. I sincerely hope you have also learned from this awful experience, Ryan. There is no room for vengeance in my life, and I do not believe a long, hard prison term would do you, me, or society any good."

Cushing, who wept and expressed remorse for his action, was sentenced to six months in jail. He could have gotten a 25-year prison sentence if Victoria, his victim, had not intervened.

Victoria added: "I truly hope that by demonstrating compassion and leniency I have encouraged you to seek an honorable life. If my generosity will help you mature into a responsible, honest man whose graciousness is a source of pride to your loved ones and your community, then I will be truly gratified, and my suffering will not have been in vain.... Ryan, prove me right."

Church if Victoria's story doesn't mirror the gospel, I don't know what does! Instead of seeking vengeance on the one who harmed her instead she

pleaded to the court for Ryan's leniency. And this is exactly what Jesus did for us **ALL** on the cross.

He was the one innocent. We were the ones chucking turkeys out of a moving car.

We deserved punishment...but if we trust in the finished work of Jesus in the cross...we receive **Mercy**.

Remember how we defined biblical **Mercy** at the beginning...  
**compassionate forgiveness and kindness toward those who do not deserve it. It is not merely withholding punishment; it is actively extending grace, love, and help to the undeserving.**

David's story gives us a clear challenge friends: **Who do we need to show mercy to?**

Because no doubt every single one of us [*including myself*] can apply what we have learned from God's word TODAY. But we must be willing. We must believe that extending **Mercy** will land us in a better place than holding onto judgement...anger...jealousy...fear...or whatever else is keeping you from stepping deeper into a merciful posture.

As we close let's review our 3 points from our text.

1. **Honor the authority God has placed over you** – even when it's hard. Trust God's sovereignty.
2. **Choose mercy over revenge** – don't hold onto bitterness; let God be the judge.
3. **Reflect Christ's mercy** – if you have been forgiven, extend that forgiveness to others.

**Church family, Who is your "Saul"?** Who has wronged you, and you know God is calling you to release that anger? Maybe it's a parent, a friend, a boss, or even yourself. **Will you choose mercy today?**

And if you are here this morning and you have not trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, make that decision today, so that you can choose a life of Mercy in His name.

What trusting in Jesus means is that you are making the decision to allow him to be the Lord of your life, you are submitting to His will for your life.

You are confessing that you believe that He is Lord, and that God raised him from the dead. And that you want to live a new life that honors Him.

Friend if you are here today and you want to make that decision, please come down at the end of our service to receive prayer.

**Pray:**