

1 Samuel 24:1-15  
A King, A Cave, and a Moment for Honoring  
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell  
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This morning, we're continuing a series of messages this stewardship season entitled *Generations: Blessing and Honoring*. In it, we're looking at just a couple of the many stories from Scripture in which one generation honors the previous, and the other blesses the following generation. One of the values we have here at Wabash Presbyterian is a commitment to intergenerational worship and discipleship.

The text this morning is one you might initially wonder why it's there. I mean, is this one of those TMI stories – Saul, taking a pit stop in a cave that happened to be where David and his men were hiding out? But in fact, what we see is a beautiful example from the life of David in which a young man acts in such a way that pays deep honor and respect to his father-in-law the King.

To bring you up to speed on what's going on at this point in 1 Samuel, God's people the Israelites demanded from God a King for themselves. Even the Israelites wanted to keep up with the Joneses, or more accurately the *Jonesusitis*. So God anoints a man named Saul, tall and handsome, domineering, the type of person you would think would be a king.

But after a series of a few bad decisions by Saul that compromise Israel's relationship to Yahweh, along comes a young boy named David. David is a brilliant warrior, fearless in battle, a great military leader, he can do no wrong, people love David, he is Israel's golden boy. He was so well loved that people would write songs about David. David was to be King.

Everything was going David's way, with the exception of one big problem: King Saul—whose daughter David ends up marrying—is not so keen on the fact that people are now giving their allegiance to David over him. Over time, Saul grows pathologically jealous of David, to the point that one day he gets fed up and hurls his spear at David, and now David has to flee for his life. Because of Saul, his father-in-law, David now has to leave everything he once had, his wife, his family, his best friend Jonathan, his home, and David sets out into the wilderness to run for his life. All because Saul was unable to see through his bitterness—everyone around him saw what God was doing, but Saul.

That's where we pick up today's text in 1 Samuel 24. The first thing we learn is that David is in the Wilderness of Engedi. The wilderness is an important place in the Bible. In the Godly Play stories we teach our children we say: "The desert is a dangerous place. You don't go into the desert unless you absolutely have to." But at the very same time we also tell that the place where people come very close to God, and God comes very close to people is in the desert.

The wilderness is not tame. It's not domesticated. The wilderness is wildness. When we strip away the many layers of safety and security in life, it is amazing how much clarity we experience in the deserts of life.

Psychologists tell us that it often takes a person losing or having everything taken away from them to see their need for change and be able to take the necessary steps toward that change.

For David, the wilderness was part of his leadership training program. One author puts it this way: “In the David wilderness story we see a young man hated and hunted like an animal, his very humanity profaned, forced to decide between a life of blasphemy and a life of prayer.” In the wilderness, David chooses prayer.

The text continues by telling us that in his pursuit of David, Saul needed a pit stop, and in a cave near the sheepfold by the side of the road, Saul ducks in to drain the tank. Just so happens that in his blindness, as his eyes were adjusting to the darkness that surrounded him, Saul didn't realize that the very cave he chose was the cave in which David and his men were hiding out...from him.

David has been on the run for a long time, hiding out in caves and fleeing for his life from his increasingly unhinged father-in-law. Here in 1 Samuel 24, there is an odd window of opportunity. Imagine how tempting it must have been for David. It would have been so easy, no fuss, no muss, just eliminate the problem and life could resume the path it was going: David succeeding Saul, taking his place as God's anointed King over Israel. This, it seemed, was the perfect opportunity to put an end to this running.

But remember, David is in the desert, and the desert is a dangerous place. You don't go into the desert unless you absolutely have to. Perhaps this was the ultimate test of David's moxy as a leader. In what ways would David the King wield the power that was given to him? You see, for David, the desert was the place of intense character formation, Godly character formation.

It was because of the desert, and its simplicity and beauty, that David saw Saul in his vulnerability, in his complete helplessness in this moment, ungirded, unarmed, uncovered. David saw him as just another precious creature whom God lovingly created. Without the perspective of the desert, he may not have seen his adversary that way.

Instead in this moment, David sneaks along the wall to within inches of Saul, and quietly removes a corner of his garment with his knife, and then he retreats back with his men. A moment later, Saul finishes his business, puts on his clothes, and leaves the cave to go back and be with his men. Then, when Saul is safely on the other side of the canyon, this is what David says:

**“My Lord the King!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance (he showed him honor). David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of those who say, David seeks to do you harm? This very day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into my hand in the cave, and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, ‘I will not raise my hand against my lord; for he is the Lord’s anointed.’ See, my father, see the corner of your cloak in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the corner of your cloak, and did not kill you, you may know for certain that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you are hunting me to take my life.”**

Then if you skip down to verse 16, just past where we finished reading today, you will hear Saul say to David: **“Is that your voice, my son David?” Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept.**

In a wonderful little book entitled *Leap Over a Wall*, Eugene Peterson says this of this scene: “All the ingredients for a scene of coarse vulgarity are here: the king on his ‘throne’ exposed. But David, though earthy, was not vulgar. He turned the scene into an act of generous honor, a sacred moment, a witness to an improbably and incredible reverence for life.”

But I think about what an incredible reversal this was. David, who got his start by doing what? Killing a Philistine. A Philistine whose name was what? Goliath. Killing Philistines was David’s specialty, it was his spiritual gift. They even wrote a song about it: “Saul killed his thousands, David killed his ten thousands.” David had made a name for himself by killing his enemies, this is what he does. So the shocking thing about this scene is that the one person he has the most motivation to kill, his father-in-law, who had done everything in his capacity to make David’s life miserable, is now delivered into the hands of David and instead of killing him, David kneels down with his face to the ground and he pays him honor.

David, what are you thinking?

It’s a defining moment for this young man, even more significant I would say than that battlefield moment with Goliath. Because it’s here in the wilderness, in a cave, with his back against the wall, with the opportunity to eliminate his enemy, that we see the heart of David. In this moment, David shows us something core to a person with a heart for God. David teaches us about honor. David teaches us about what it means to show honor to those who have authority over our lives.

As a moment of admission, my generation has done a pretty good job of forgetting the concept of honor—it’s kind of hard when the other name used to describe your generation is “entitled.” Honor not just for our parents, or our relatives, but for anyone who has authority and leadership in our lives. Somewhere along the way, we’ve confused honor with respect and we’ve come to believe that honor is something we can withhold based on likeability or performance. But that’s not biblical honor. Respect is not the same thing as honor. When you open the Bible, you see that honor is weight, it is significance, it is value. When we honor someone, we humbly recognize that God has placed that person in our lives for a unique purpose for a particular time. While respect can be earned, honor is something that can be freely given from a heart that is yielded to God.

This is why we’re spending this Stewardship Season in this series. It’s my hope that in our church, with the people God has assembled here together in this place, that we can be a people in Wabash who restore the virtue of honor, not just for our mothers and our fathers, but for our leaders.

David kneels down, and with his face to the ground, he pays honor to Saul. And what is so powerful in this story is that David inspires honor in others by giving it to someone who didn’t earn it from him, and who—with his actions—definitely didn’t deserve it. But because David

was fully resigned to God, he had the freedom to bestow this honor to the man who was still God's anointed. David recognized that Saul was still king over him, he gave David his daughter, he was his father-in-law, and David refused to dishonor that place in his life, no matter how poorly he was treated. Imagine the courage it must have taken, and imagine the response of Saul receiving this honor that he didn't deserve. It's such an overwhelming moment that Saul bursts into tears and weeps: "David, my son."

David honors Saul, and even if just for a moment, it opens up this hardened heart and allows the mercy and love to flow through. This is the power of honoring those who have leadership and authority in our lives.