

*1 Samuel 24:1–7 (NIV)*

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.”<sup>2</sup> So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

<sup>3</sup> He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.<sup>4</sup> The men said, “This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.

<sup>5</sup> Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.<sup>6</sup> He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.”<sup>7</sup> With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

*Philippians 2:5–8 (NIV)*

<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

*Sometimes commitment means faithfulness above all else.*

To be faithful is, according to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, to be “steadfast in affection or allegiance, firm in adherence to promises or the observance of duty.” The Oxford English Dictionary puts it this way: To be faithful is to be “loyal, steadfast, constant, true to a person, to one’s word, or one’s beliefs.” God is faithful. You and I are to be faithful. We are not only to trust God, the faithful one, in all things, we are to be trustworthy ourselves.

Today, we have two stories of faithfulness. David, who remained loyal to the man who was trying to kill him, and Jesus, who remained loyal to his vocation and his Father.

*David*

You begin to grasp the importance of David in the biblical story when you realize that he gets more narrative space in the Bible than anyone, with the exception of Jesus. The obvious question is why David gets so much attention. Granted, the Jews came to see him as the idealized king of Israel, the one on whom God’s Messiah would be modeled. But that doesn’t really explain the

immense care that the biblical writers of the book of Samuel took in telling the story and stories of David's life.

I've come to believe that David gets such attention because in his life with God we see not only the complexities and ambiguities of the human experience, we also gain a deeper understanding of our life with God. All its ups and downs. The times when we seem close to God and the times when God seems to disappear. It is all to be found in the stories of David.

### *A king for Israel*

During the time that the Israelites settled in Canaan, they had no earthly king. The LORD God was their king. But as time wore on, the people, wanting to be like their neighbors, pushed harder and harder for a human king. In the end, God gave them what they wanted. God's prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of the united tribes of Israel. Saul quickly proved to be a disappointment. He was disobedient to God and given to making rash decisions. Once, Saul was even ready to kill his own son, Jonathan, for breaking one of Saul's battle orders. Only the intervention of the people saved Jonathan's life. After Saul disobeyed God a second time, we are told that "The LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35).

God then tells his prophet Samuel to anoint a young shepherd named David as the next king of Israel. Not knowing that God had chosen David to be his successor, Saul welcomed David into the royal court as a musician. But after David defeated Goliath, the mentally and spiritually deteriorating Saul began to suspect that David might be the one to whom God had given Saul's kingdom. And his heart turned against David.

### *The unexpected*

Saul has twice tried to kill David in the royal palace and is now marching throughout the wilderness hunting down David and his men. Saul is determined to eliminate his perceived rival and David is running for his life

One day, David and his men are resting in the back of a cave. They notice that someone has entered the cave to relieve himself. But it's not just anyone. It is Saul! Can you imagine the astonished reaction among David's men as they sit quietly in the back of the cave. God was delivering David's enemy right into their hands. The hunter had become not just the hunted, but the helpless.

David's men are ready to pounce, but he holds them back. Instead, David crawls along the side of the cave to where Saul has tossed his robe so he can go about his business. David cuts off a piece of the royal robe and then crawls back to his men. They figure that the time has come to fall on Saul and bring a quick end to their struggle. After all, it can't be mere coincidence that Saul has chosen this cave. God is handing him over on a silver platter. Who in their right mind would let Saul simply walk out of the cave?

But David's heart is stricken by the act of cutting the royal robe. Such brazenness is a humiliation to Saul and, David thinks to himself, who am I to lift even a hand against God's anointed? David then scolds his men for wanting to kill Saul and they let Saul walk out of the cave.

While Saul is still within earshot, David steps out of the cave. He calls out to Saul and falls to the ground, bowing before the man who wants him dead. David pleads with Saul. Who is telling Saul that David is against him? David

then lifts up the piece of robe to show Saul that David had foregone to the opportunity to kill Saul.

To the reader of the book of Samuel, David's sparing of Saul isn't really all that surprising. When Samuel had come to anoint God's choice for the next king of Israel, God had passed on the good-looking older brother, and instead chose young David. God told Samuel, "for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

What is surprising is that Saul, in a rare moment, expresses his own remorse. "You are more righteous than I!" he exclaims. "When a man finds his enemy," Saul says, "does he let him get away unharmed?" If the man is David, the answer is yes, at least on this occasion. David has remained faithful to Saul; his allegiance to God's anointed king has not wavered.

Before they part ways, Saul asks a favor from David. Saul seems to know where this confrontation is headed, saying, "I know that you will surely be king . . . now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family." David gives his oath to Saul and the two men head back to their war. . . . David would remain faithful to that oath as well.

### *The faithfulness of Jesus*

Christians often speak of their "faith in Jesus," sometimes leaving the impression that their own trust in Jesus saved them. *But that can't be right.* We have been made right with God by his grace – so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:9). As Paul writes, Jesus became a curse, hung on a tree, so that we might be redeemed. *It is Jesus who has saved us not we ourselves* – by his faithfulness all the way to death, even the horror of death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). He knew what lay ahead, anyone would have known. Others had claimed the mantle of Messiah and died for it.

So wasn't there another way? Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for just such a way, but there was none. If Jesus was going to be faithful to the vocation given him by God, if he was going to genuinely love God and neighbor without fail, then he would inevitably collide with the dark powers of this world, with those invested in and committed to their way, rather than God's way. It was true then; it is true now.

The apostle Paul was tasked with trying to understand what Jesus' death on a cross really meant. What did it say about God and his work in this world? Why was Jesus born? For what purpose? Why did God humble himself in this way, taking on a full-blooded humanity and dying on a cross? If your answer to these questions is "to save us," you are right so far as it goes . . . but there is so much more.

Grasping that Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection demonstrate God's faithfulness to his promises is the key theme of Paul's letter to the Romans. Jesus and Paul lived in a time of great turmoil, as many Jews resisted Roman rule. They awaited the day when God would finally keep his promises, when, as written the scroll of Jeremiah, "I [God] will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is right and just in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15, CEB).

For Paul, the fact of Jesus' faithfulness, even to death on a cross, revealed that God had kept his promises. In a sense, Jesus was the "righteousness of God" in the flesh.

Jesus was the way out of the covenant dilemma. Despite the unwillingness or inability of the Jews to live up to the covenant and to be the light to the world, God had provided the means of covenant-keeping – a thoroughly faithful Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, the one Jew who did truly love God and love neighbor without fail. Jesus' own faithfulness to the covenant and to God all the way to the cross revealed that God is not only the covenant maker, but the covenant keeper. In Jesus, God's covenant people had been restored to a right relationship with God. Hence, they had been saved. And who are these covenant people? Namely those who put their faith in Jesus Christ, Paul writes.

To reiterate, God's righteousness (his covenant faithfulness) was revealed to the world through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, for the rescuing of all who believe. This is the Good News.

Finally, I urge to reflect on these stories for a bit. Here are a few helps:

1. Spend a few minutes talking about what it means to be faithful. What are some stories from your own life of times people have been faithful or have come up short? How could we become more faithful disciples and persons?
2. Try stepping into the story of Saul and the cave. Read the whole story in chapter 24 of 1 Samuel. Read it in a couple of translations, even Peterson's paraphrase, *The Message*. Then, begin by imagining that you are Saul. Why do you go into the cave? What are you thinking about? What's your reaction when David calls out from the mouth of the cave? Are you really remorseful for chasing David? Why don't you stop? Why do you ask David for a favor? What is it? Why are you worried about your family and name if you are killed? What are you thinking as you leave the area to return to your army? Then imagine that you are David. Why crawl up and cut off a piece of Saul's robe? Then why so much remorse over it? Why not simply eliminate your rival, the man who is trying to kill you? After all, God has anointed you the king of Israel. Couldn't this be the God-given means by which you are supposed to assume the throne? And then why call out to Saul from the cave entrance? What are you really hoping to gain? Why grant the favor?
3. Read the entire Christ-hymn of Philippians 2:5-11. What does Jesus' faithfulness to his vocation all the way to death really mean to you? Is it truly relevant? Does the story of his covenant faithfulness contrast with explanations of the cross that you heard growing up? If so, how? How can Jesus' faithfulness reshape our own?

## Scott Engle's Bible Classes

### Monday Afternoon Class

Current study: *Judges*

This class will continue our study of the book of Judges.

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

## **Tuesday Lunchtime Class**

Current study: *Acts*

This class will continue with our study of the book of Acts.

Meeting at 12:00 noon Tuesday in person in Piro Hall and on-line on Scott's Facebook ministry page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Both classes are recorded and are available each week in my podcast at [scottengle.podbean.com](http://scottengle.podbean.com). They are also available on Apple podcasts and elsewhere. Search by "Scott Engle Bible Studies".

## **Scott's Sunday Class**

This week: Continuing *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 in Smith Worship Center and on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

**Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel.** Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.