

Testing David's Claim

1 Samuel 26:1-25

“Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?’² So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.³ And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness,⁴ David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come.⁵ Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.

“⁶ Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab’s brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, ‘Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?’ And Abishai said, ‘I will go down with you.’⁷ So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him.⁸ Then Abishai said to David, ‘God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.’⁹ But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?’¹⁰ And David said, ‘As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish.¹¹ The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go.’¹² So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul’s head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

“¹³ Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them.¹⁴ And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, ‘Will you not answer, Abner?’ Then Abner answered, ‘Who are you who calls to the king?’¹⁵ And David said to Abner, ‘Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord.¹⁶ This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the LORD’s anointed. And now see where the king’s spear is and the jar of water that was at his head.’

“¹⁷ Saul recognized David’s voice and said, ‘Is this your voice, my son David?’ And David said, ‘It is my voice, my lord, O king.’¹⁸ And he said, ‘Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands?’¹⁹ Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the LORD, saying, “Go, serve other gods.”²⁰ Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the LORD, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains.’”

“²¹ Then Saul said, ‘I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake.’ ²² And David answered and said, ‘Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. ²³ The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. ²⁴ Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.’ ²⁵ Then Saul said to David, ‘Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them.’ So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.”

Introduction

1 Samuel 26:22-24

“²² And David answered and said, ‘Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. ²³ The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD’s anointed. ²⁴ Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.’”

David contends that the Lord interacts with the affairs of men, rewarding the faithful. Is this true?

As far as the Lord interacting with the affairs of men, yes, that is certainly true. The Bible shows God interacting with the affairs of mankind from the moment He made them. The details of life are in His hands. As the Proverbs attests:

“The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9) (NASB)

God talks directly with some people. He interacts invisibly with most. But involves Himself with each person, down to accounting for every hair on their heads.

Does God reward man for his “righteousness and faithfulness?” There are several ways to look at this question. In the ultimate sense, we know that, compared to God’s holiness, there is none righteous, no not one. So if God rewards us according to our righteousness and faithfulness, no one would be rewarded! At the heart of the good news of Jesus:

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21) (ESV)

We have no righteousness of our own, but we receive the righteousness of Jesus as a gift. In that sense all who receive Jesus Christ as Savior, having their sins forgiven, being made righteous, will be rewarded — but not based on their own righteousness, but of someone else’s: Jesus’.

If you have never received Jesus as Savior and believe that your good works will be rewarded by God, you are mistaken. Our good works, the Bible says, are like filthy rags to God if we are not

saved. Why? Because God looks at our hearts. He knows we are sinful and wicked. The first step in pleasing God is not doing good deeds. The first step in pleasing God is putting your trust in His Son to wash you clean of sin. Then, when you do this, you will be made righteous by Him. It is after that — after you are already forgiven and made righteous — that you are to seek to do good deeds.

So, in this sense of the question, yes. Those who love faithfully and righteously will receive their reward from the Lord.

Does God reward every Christian for his or her righteousness and faithfulness? In other words, does God reward the good person's behavior after he or she comes to faith?

Again, there is more than one way to look at that question. The Bible shows us that many righteous people behave faithfully, and things go very poorly for them on earth. Consider John the Baptist, who always did right, and ended up with his head on a platter. Or there is Stephen: he preached the truth with power only to be stoned to death. Or Paul, who planted churches throughout the Roman empire, only to end his life in chains for years and finally was beheaded.

In David's situation, he behaved faithfully and was rewarded with the preservation of his life. But Paul also behaved faithfully, and he was slain.

Even so, Paul would claim that God rewarded him for his faithfulness. Look what he says before his death:

"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6–8) (ESV)

Paul believes that the way he lived his life on earth will translate to heavenly reward. So, in this sense of the question, that answer is yes. God does reward the righteous behaviors of the good man, for God saves up heavenly reward for His faithful ones.

But that still leaves the question: Does God give earthly rewards for the good behavior of His faithful ones while they are still alive on the earth?

The answer to that question is mixed, isn't it? We saw that David was rewarded with his life for his faithfulness. We saw that others in the Bible were rewarded for their faithfulness — like Abraham, and Joshua and Caleb, and others. But we have also seen that Paul and John the Baptist lost their heads due to living faithfully.

How should we live in light of these things? Three biblical principles to live by:

1. Wise living yields rewards.

Living wisely means making choices in life based on the truths of God's words. Such wisdom will generally pay off, improving your life here on earth. When we think of wisdom, we think of the book of Proverbs. In that book there is instruction on how wise people think and behave and how foolish people think and behave. The wise get more joy from this life than the foolish.

“Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.” (Proverbs 3:13–18) (ESV)

Wise living won't guarantee that your life will be all sunshine and roses. Your life will be what it will be. But wise living guarantees that you won't make your life worse, and you will get the most joy out of your life as possible. And true wisdom is found in God alone. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Proverbs 9:10). So in that sense, your living faithfully before God will bring a reward in that your journey in this life will have pains, but you will not make things worse; in fact, you will make life better for yourself and for others. It is good to study the book of Proverbs regularly and learn to live wisely.

2. God gives peace to those who are faithful.

The quality of this life is not determined by health, or wealth, or comfort, or pleasure, or safety. The quality of this life is determined by peace with God. This life will have joys and sorrows, sweet days and bitter times. But within this life, God can give peace, no matter what the circumstances. A verse often quoted is this:

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) (ESV)

Jesus promises that the storms of life will end. He has overcome the world. But while the storms rage, He promises that peace can be found in Him. No doubt, one of the lessons that God was teaching David, in the midst of all his trials, was that he could sleep in peace, knowing that he rests in God's hands.

Jesus is the One who went out on a fishing boat with His 12 apostles and fell asleep. While He slept, a storm came up, causing these 12 men to fear for their lives. Jesus continued to sleep. Then, this happened:

“³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ ³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?’ ⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’” (Mark 4:38–41) (ESV)

The One who promises to give us peace in this world of trouble is the One who was at peace in the midst of the storm. Peace is the reward given not to the disobedient, but to the ones who, having been trained by God, live righteous and faithful lives.

3. God is watching, so we must always seek to do those things that please Him.

In light of all that we have learned today, we see that God does indeed reward those who live righteously and faithfully on the earth. He rewards with peace and guidance, and with eternal reward, also. With this in mind, we must never forget that God is always watching.

God has saved us by grace, apart from our works, but a part of that salvation is that it produces good works in us. God expects us to live righteous lives, avoiding sin, and doing good deeds. Furthermore, He is paying attention.

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:7–10) (ESV)

We are saved by grace from sin, and to righteousness. We who love God are to daily prove that faithfulness by living a life of virtue — we are to be honest people. Kind people. Good people. Generous people. Courageous people. We are to love what is good and spurn evil.

God will not be mocked by us. If we say we love Him but do not live for Him, He will confront us. 1 Corinthians 11 tells of some Christians that God even killed off because they refused to obey Him. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul tells of turning one believer over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, even though his soul was saved.

David was chosen to be king over Israel by the God who looks on the heart. God sees our hearts. He knows our motives. He knows our intentions.

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:12–13) (ESV)

Let us be like David in Chapter 26. Upright and faithful in all of our ways.

