

IN THE MESS

The test of Grace

We quite often bandy around the words the ‘extraordinary in the ordinary’ and ‘God working in the mess’ of our lives. In preparing this passage it really came home to me how God can work in the mundane activities of life with lasting consequences. It reminded me that however messy the world and our lives get, we can still find hope in God.

And that’s not meant to be a glib comment that our hope is in God. But as the Apostle Paul reminds us in that he had to learn to be content in all situations (Philippians 4v 11). So we have to learn to trust and place all our trust in God. David has learnt to trust God in every situation in his wilderness experiences, which is why David can write in the psalms:

“O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

And “I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears”

My hope this morning is that we can all take away the hope and the assurance David had in God.

1 Samuel 24 1-4

This is quite an amazing start to the story, here is Saul relieving himself in a dimly lit cave and David creeps up behind him and cuts off a corner of his cloak.

Now I don’t know about you but if I was relieving myself in a dark cave I would be in and out in a few seconds. I would not be hanging around and at the slightest sound I would be off. However David did get away with it, but why did he do it? What were the consequences of his actions? In this most ordinary of activities God was at work.

To answer the question why; David had a split second decision to make with Saul vulnerable and unprotected before him. Does he let him live or die? Persuaded by his friends, he went and cut the corner off the king's robes violating the Lords anointing, which was quite a big thing to do.

We have to remember that this is Gods representative on earth, his anointed one, the first King over Israel, and to cut his robe was the same as cutting the king himself. God could have dished out whatever punishment he liked for defiling his chosen leader, as those who disobeyed Moses found out to their cost in Exodus.

So in that split second David went with his friend's advice and took action against Saul not really thinking of the long-term consequence. It reminded me why it is important to take apostle Paul's advise

2 Corinthians 10 v 5

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

David made a decision that could have brought about disaster for him and his men.

This passage also reminds us that however good our friends intentions are, in wanting to support us in difficult situations; we would be wise also to check their advise against scripture and our own understanding of Gods character. For me there is a balance between supportive friends and having our ultimate trust in God.

It may sound an obvious thing to have our ultimate trust in God but we live in a culture that subtly tries to draw us away from God. It tries to persuade us, we have the answer to our problems within each of us. It tries to make the world seem more attractive and more alluring than obeying Gods ways.

This is why Gods word, prayer and taking time to listen to God is so important in our daily lives, to remind us the right way to live.

As Christians we have to be constantly on our guard against the way our society and culture wants to water down Gods influence in our society.

We need to understand how to apply God's word into our culture, we need to understand the difference between Christianity and Humanism for example, in this context I am taking humanism as an overarching term of the many isms of today's society such as:

Existentialism, which addresses the meaning of life,
Relativism, the values of life
Materialism, the comfort of life.

These "isms" and many more besides are trying to replace God from our society. There are not many cultural, scientific and medical advancements today, that would assign the foundations of their work to God and his values.

I haven't got time this morning to explore all of these "isms" today so I will pick one Existentialism (word of the week).

An existentialist is a rugged individualist who pulls himself up by his own bootstraps. He believes that a man's destiny lies within himself. As Jean-Paul Sartre observed, the first principle of existentialism is "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" (The rest of your life by Patrick M. Moreley)

And in our passage David takes the law into his own hands and thinks this is my opportunity to have it all.

And once done what happens, as with all temptations that seem good at the time, we read:

V5-8

Who of us sitting here has not given into temptation? I expect we will go down the same route again, and will feel like David troubled by our consciences. But when we do, we need to be careful not fall into the trap of trying to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.

But we need to confess our struggles to God and trust in his forgiveness and grace to release us from the guilt that can hang heavily upon us.

This approach is in stark contrast to the existentialist worldview "life is hard and then we die" or Sartre's view "life is a useless passion and then we die"

I was watching Luther the new detective series on BBC1 the other night and he has a conversation with someone in a church and concludes, life is meaningless we are all just matter, everywhere is just matter.

Existentialism can appear so appealing to people in society today as it recognises life is difficult. But it offers no real hope over how to overcome its problems in the long run. Its solution is to propagate an industry of self-help groups and programmes, which will never really meet the true needs of people.

If David learnt one thing as a cave dweller its that we have no-where else to turn to but to God. If you read your way through the Psalms time and time again David comes back to God faithfulness, who is his refuge, strength and salvation.

Christianity is not blind to difficulties Jesus said:

John 16 v33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus gives us hope to hold onto and that we will find peace in him when our world falls apart.

We have to hold onto the thought that we are all here by Gods grace and we have to trust in that grace and Gods unconditional love day by day.

Ian titled this week's talk "The Test of Grace"

Now if we are learning the importance of grace and want to trust in God, what are the implications for our daily lives?

I would suggest if we are going to take grace seriously we need to make wise choices and in every choice we make, there will be consequences. Now this may sound obvious but in reality we all face choices in how much grace and love we show one another each day.

David had every opportunity and motive to kill Saul after half a dozen assassination attempts and all he has lost in his life, wife, career, home and self respect. But he chooses to show grace to Saul on this occasion by sparing his life.

In return when David falls prostrate before Saul, instead of picking up his sword and doing the quick and easy thing in killing him, it makes him think and he spares his life.

V9 - V19

This was no easy option for David to lay down in front of Saul. This is the King who wiped out an entire town along with 85 priests because they did not do what he said or give him the information he wanted 1 Sam 22.

This is a leader who now rules his people by fear and intimidation rather than anointing and faith.

So when David lays before Saul he chooses to put all his trust in God, there is no turning back, he puts his life on the line for himself and his men in the cave. His men were effectively trapped in the cave with no where to escape to and with 3,000 elite troops waiting outside the cave entrance with no leader

Ultimately David put his trust in his faithful God, V12

We all face choices in how much grace and love we show one another each day, which can prove costly both emotionally and spiritually.

God chose the ultimate gift of grace when he sent his son to die on the cross to bring grace into this world and Jesus paid the ultimate price. Have we chosen to fully put our trust in Gods love and grace?

And if you are sitting here today and have not made that choice then you can make that choice to live Gods way today and accept his grace.

Through the gift of God grace he has given the whole world the opportunity to change its course of action and trust in him.

Will we trust enough to allow God to have total control over our lives?

Whatever the outcome of his action he trusted enough in God to sort things out.

The question today is, do we or can we have that same trust in God?

Are we prepared to lay down before our enemy and let God be the judge of who is right and wrong?

For the rest of your life!

When Fernando de Soto landed his expedition on the shores of Florida, he sent a small party back to the ships to set them ablaze. His confused men watched from the water's edge in horrified disbelief as puffs of billowing smoke swirled unto the air, de Soto wanted no man to think there was any turning back. When the sea finally swallowed the last plank, de Soto turned to his men and said "gentlemen, you are home"

Have you burned your boats yet?

I think it would be good to pray together in ones and twos about what boats we need to burn in our lives? How we might show grace and love to those around us. Maybe we need someone to pray for us that we would have the same trust and devotion David had?

For when we trust in Jesus we all become part of Gods family, we are all anointed and gifted as David was through God's Holy Spirit.

But maybe we need someone to remind us of that this morning?

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday June 6th by Ian Larkham.