

**David Teaches You
How to Deal with Your Adversary
Sermon on 1 Samuel 24:3-12
August 13, 2006
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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Introduction: How Do You Deal with Your Adversary?

The Bible declares: *“It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.* That’s one of the lessons David learned, and today God will use him to teach it to us. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Do you have any enemies? ...That’s a tough question with which to lead off a sermon, isn’t it? But bear with me here. ...Do you have any enemies?

I’m thinking that for many people, the first reaction is going to be: “No, I don’t have any real ‘enemies’ that I can think of.” And if that’s your initial answer, that’s a gift from God. We should also realize we’re helped by our society in this regard. Modern-day American culture frowns upon the idea of ‘enemies’. A lot, we all do try to get along together. We all try to call each other “friends”. And that’s another gift from God.

But I want you to take another look at the question. Do you have any enemies? Well, a Christian, willing to speak the truth in love, has to say, “Yes—yes, I do have enemies.” At least we’re willing to say that sin, death, and the devil are our enemies. But our enemies are more personal, too. Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you, as well.” Deep down, there is hostility between non-Christians and Christians. In that same regard, Jesus even said, “A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household”—if, of course, they don’t trust Christ as he does.

So, we do have enemies. Let’s use the word “adversaries”; we certainly have adversaries. And let’s go further.... Every so often, we get the opportunity to give our adversaries their come-uppance, don’t we? Let me give you a few examples of that.

Let’s say your neighbor is a jerk. Or let’s say your own brother is a real pest, or worse. And this (let me use the term) “adversary” of yours does something evil. And you have the chance to expose that evil. ...What do you do in a situation like that?

Another example: Let’s say it’s a classmate of yours who is an adversary. Or let’s say it’s a co-worker of yours who makes your life miserable. And he falls asleep—either it’s in class, or it’s on the job. And you understand it’s family troubles that kept him awake so late last night. But you have the chance to expose his drowsiness. ...What do you do in a situation like that?

One last example: You’re a godly worker, who advises your supervisors and willingly follows their lead. Or you’re a godly wife, who advises her husband and willingly follows his lead. But your boss or your husband fails to listen to you, and he fails. ...What do you do in a situation like that?

Theme: David Teaches You How to Deal with Your Adversary

Interesting, eh? In every one of those situations, you know right away what you’d really like to do. But you have this gnawing notion in your conscience that it just wouldn’t be right to be vindictive. As a Christian, it makes you want to ask: How does God want me to treat my enemies?

Well, today God addresses us on that very subject. Today we’ll find out that: **DAVID TEACHES US HOW TO DEAL WITH OUR ADVERSARY.**

Exposition: David Deals with His Adversary

God's Word to us today is First Samuel, chapter twenty-four, verses three through twelve. Before we get to it, you really have to know the background here.

It's maybe ten twenty or ten fifteen BC, and we're in the southern part of the Holy Land. Israel's first king, Saul, has rejected the Lord, and the Lord has rejected him. The Lord has designated David to be the second king of Israel. So, Saul is exceedingly jealous of David, murderously jealous. Saul becomes David's adversary, David's enemy. And he spends years chasing down, hunting down, David, who is forced to become a fugitive.

As this chapter opens up, Saul is still hunting David. So, Saul heads down to En Gedi – a hot, dry, rocky area at the edge of the Dead Sea, way on the southeast edge of the Holy Land – where David has holed up. Saul has three thousand soldiers with him; David has four hundred soldiers with him.

And then we read, and this is our text: **Saul came to the sheep pens along the way**, the sheep down there were often kept in caves, **a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself**—literally, “to cover his feet”, and we don't want to go into any more detail.

Anyway: **David and his men were far back in the cave.** *The men:* and you have to understand these were the distressed, the debtors, the discontented from among the people—**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.'"** They were probably basically quoting David's friend, Jonathan, Saul's son.

So, we read: **Then David crept up unnoticed**—unnoticed, maybe, because (I've read that) hot springs issue from those caves, and so maybe there was water running and muffling the sound. And as David crept up unnoticed, you know that Satan was working on him to kill Saul, once and for all.

So, David creeps up, knife in hand, strong arm extended, **and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.** That's all—no blood shed, no death cry, no dispatching that soul to judgment.

But even for so small an infraction, we read: **Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.** Now, that's a tender conscience! That's a Christian man. **He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD."** Deferentially, David calls Saul his *master*. Accurately, David acknowledges that Saul is the *Lord's anointed*—even though David is twice as much the same. David refuses to fall to the temptation to do Saul harm. And David refuses to fall to the temptation even just to turn his back, to block his view, and to let Saul fall to the assault of others. **With these words David rebuked his men** – literally, *he split his men*; it may be that there was a division of opinion here – **and did not allow them to attack Saul.**

And Saul left the cave and went his way—up to the mouth of the cave, down the steep and rocky crevice, and onward at least fifty yards or so.

Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" There's that deference again—that unearned respect that David had toward Saul. And: **When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.** You can't adopt a more humble posture.

He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? 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. Literally – and this is important, remember it for later! – literally: *there was pity upon you.*

I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the LORD's anointed.' 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. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.

And finally, and here comes the second important thing – remember it for later! – David says: *May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.*

And that's it. That's God's Word to us today. But what does it mean to your life?

Well, it's sort of like I said before. David had an adversary, an enemy: Saul. David had the opportunity to give Saul his come-uppance, his punishment.

You also have adversaries, enemies. You also occasionally get the opportunity to give them their come-uppance, their punishment.

So, what do you do? Well, take your cue from David. This account was written for your instruction! And what did David do in the case of his enemy, in the case of Saul? – Well: Two things....

Application One: Trust the Lord to Deliver Necessary Punishment

First of all, David said: *May the LORD judge between you and me.* David said: *May the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.* David trusted the Lord to deliver any necessary punishment. And you and I need to do the same.

So, your neighbor is a jerk. And another neighbor of yours, a friend, insists on gossiping about your mutual adversary. Don't join in. Simply trust the Lord to handle it. Or your brother is a real pest. And he breaks a household rule. Do not gleefully run to Mom or Dad and tell all about it and suggest a punishment. Of course, don't lie about the situation either. Simply trust the Lord to handle it. That's what we learn here.

Or: your classmate has it tough at home. Or: your coworker has it tough at home. She falls asleep in class. He falls asleep on the job. Don't consider it your duty to raise your hand and get the teacher's attention and point out the infraction. Don't consider it your duty to take a picture of your sleeping coworker and post it on the website. No, don't lie about the situation either. But trust the Lord to handle it.

Or: you advise your supervisor, who fails to take your advice, and the project fails. Or: you advise your husband, who fails to take your advice, and what you've been working on together fails. Do you launch into a half-an-hour or half-a-week tirade about how he should have listened to you? No!—nor do you lie about what happened. You trust the Lord to handle it.

May the LORD judge.... May the LORD avenge the wrongs.... But my hand will not touch you. Isn't that what the Lord is teaching us through David?

Application Two: Have Pity Personally—and Forgive

But that's not the entire story yet. David didn't just trust the Lord to deliver necessary punishment. David also personally had pity upon his enemy, Saul. In effect, he forgave him. And he really tried to share with him the Lord's forgiveness. You and I need to do the same!

That neighbor who is a jerk, or that pesky or mean-spirited brother—what he really needs is your pity and your pardon. Forgive him! And share with him the Lord's forgiveness.

That sleeping coworker or classmate—what she really needs is your concern and your compassion. Forgive her! And tell her, "The Lord forgives you, too."

And your supervisor or your husband or your parent who fails to take your advice—what they really need is your pity and pardon. Forgive them! And assure them that the Lord forgives them, too.

I pitied you; I spared you; David said to Saul. And isn't that the way the Lord is teaching us to treat others by way of David?

Conclusion: Jesus Had Pity Personally—and Forgave Us

So: How do you deal with your adversary? On the one hand: You trust the Lord to deliver necessary punishment. On the other hand: You have pity personally, and you forgive.

But all of that trusting and forgiving is easier said than done.... So this week, when you actually have adversaries in front of you to deal with – in the heat of the moment and in the passion of battle – how will you resist getting even with them? how will you manage to forgive them?

Well, you will consider every mean thing you ever did to a neighbor, you will consider every mean thing you ever did to a brother, you will consider David's words, God's Word: *Jesus forgives all your sins; Jesus redeems your life from the pit* – God bought you back from hell with his own blood! – and you will trust Jesus, and you will forgive.

This week, you will consider every time you drowsily fell asleep to the opportunities you had to do good, you will consider David's words, God's Word: *As far as the east is from the west* – infinitely far! – *so far has he removed our transgressions from us;* and you will trust Jesus, and you will forgive.

Finally, you will consider every time you sinfully, selfishly made a dreadful decision, you will consider David's words, God's Word: *As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord Jesus has had compassion on us* – infinite compassion! eternal compassion! – and you will trust Jesus, and you will forgive.

That's the way you will treat your adversary: because that's the way Jesus treated you. And for you it means peace today—and paradise forever! Amen.

The Bible declares: *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another—just as in Christ, God forgave you.* That's a lesson David learned, and today through him God has taught it to us. Amen.