

Will You Pass the Test?

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[0:00] We're reading from 1 Samuel 24 tonight, and a chapter out of David's life being chased by King Saul and his men.

! We'll read the entire chapter. 1 Samuel 24. David and his men were far back in the cave. 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.

Afterward, David was conscience stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. 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.

With these words, David rebuked his men. And did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way. Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, My Lord, the King!

[1:37] When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. 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.

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.

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. As the old saying goes, From evildoers come evil deeds.

[2:44] So my hand will not touch you. Against whom has the King of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?

May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it. May he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.

When David finished saying this, Saul asked, Is that your voice, David, my son? And he wept aloud. You are more righteous than I, he said.

You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me of the good you did to me. The Lord delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me.

When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.

[3:52] Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family. So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home.

But David and his men went up to the stronghold. This gracious Lord now addresses us in the preached word. Come, Brother Gordon. Bring God's word to us.

It has been a great delight and joy for me to be with you here in Bremen, Indiana. I rejoice with you at the gifts which God has given you to minister the word of God.

You are a blessed people. And I am blessed to be able to visit you. I mean that from the depths of my heart. I thank you for this opportunity.

I want to direct your attention tonight to the book of 1 Samuel. The chapter has been read in your hearing. 1 Samuel chapter 24. Which is the chapter which gives us one of the attempts which Saul made on David's life.

[4:56] It certainly, as you know, was not the only attempt that he made on his life. In fact, if my arithmetic is correct, this was the seventh time that Saul sought to kill David.

And seven is supposed to be the number of perfection. But that didn't stop Saul. He tried again after this as well. It's very clear that Saul was out to kill David.

And I'm not telling you anything new when I tell you that. It's very true that once again we see. And in this chapter very vividly. This isn't the only instance. But this is one of the clear instances where David had the opportunity to seize the kingdom.

And he refused to do it. One of the lessons that we can learn from David is a lesson that we're going to address tonight. And that is the lesson of waiting for God's time.

Many times God brings tests into our lives. God never tempts us to sin because God cannot be tempted to sin nor does he tempt us to sin.

[6:11] But God in his marvelous providence brings us to places where, because of the sin that yet remains in us, can lead us into sin.

And we don't want to sin. Everyone here tonight who is a believer in Jesus Christ would say with me, I want to pass the test when it comes.

I want to pass all the tests when they come. And David did pass this test. Now there was a time in his life when he didn't pass the test, as we all know, later on when he became king.

But this test he passed. And tonight I want to address the subject of passing the test. And to see from this passage what we can learn from the example of David, so that we may pass tests when in God's providence they are brought our way.

But before we do that, let's seek God's blessing and help in prayer. Our Father, we pray tonight that you would help us as we look at this chapter of your word, and as we look at your servant, and the test which he faced, and the great encouragements that he had to sin against you.

[7:31] We pray that we might profit from this, and that we might take to heart the example of David. And as you gave him grace, we pray that you might grant us grace, that we too would pass whatever tests that you bring our way.

We ask this in Jesus' precious and holy name. Amen. Amen. I want to review for you the six tests that preceded this one. The six times, I should say, that Saul sought David's life.

The first time was when David was playing the harp. He was just a new recruit brought in to play the harp so that Saul could be comforted. And Saul took his spear and cast it at David, and he missed.

One thing I note about Saul is that it wasn't the only time he missed David. I think he needed lessons in spear throwing. But I'm thankful he didn't have them. The second time that Saul sought David's life was when he got this brilliant idea, finding out that David was in love with his daughter. He said, ah, now I'll get him. I'll have him fight the Philistines and bring back the foreskins of the Philistines, the 104 skins, and then the Philistines will kill him.

[8:45] Well, much to Saul's surprise, David took the challenge, went out and fought the Philistines, and brought back the 104 skins. Saul was defeated again. The third time was when Saul called all his servants in, including Jonathan, and he said, David needs to be killed.

Now, Jonathan persuaded his father otherwise so that no action was taken. But it was in his heart, it was in Saul's heart to kill David. The fourth time was, again, a spear throwing incident. And this is while David was playing the harp.

And this one was more serious, and David recognized it, and so David fled from Saul's presence. The fifth time was when Saul sent messengers to David's house.

And you'll recall that Michael, his wife, put an image in the bed and covered it. And he let, or she let David out the window, and he fled and escaped. That's in chapter 19.

And the sixth time was when Saul found out that David was in Ramah with Samuel. And eventually, Saul himself went to Ramah. And rather than being able to kill David, he began to prophesy.

[9:55] The Spirit of the Lord took a hold of him. So it's very clear and obvious that the Lord was taking care of David in all these times. Now, it's important for us to remember that because as we come to the seventh instance of Saul attempting to take David's life, David had already had six times when the Lord had delivered him.

And I am sure that that helped him on this seventh incident. It's important because in God's providence, and when he tests us, many times he gives us smaller tests before bigger tests come. And so when we study this chapter, we need to remember that. This is probably not the first test that God's going to give you. I don't know if you've ever had anyone seek your life.

Probably not. I don't know if you've ever had anyone threaten your life. I've only had that happen once, and I don't think it was too serious, but it scared me nonetheless.

I got a phone call, and the voice on the other end of the phone said, you're going to be dead by morning. And my wife happened to pick up the phone at the same time, and she heard it.

[11:01] So I did what all brave pastors would do. I called the sheriff. I reported it. I reported the sheriff, and he came out, and he said, what's your occupation?

I said, I'm a pastor. He says, oh, well, then I understand it, he said. But I obviously lived through the night.

I just thought maybe the presence of the sheriff's car in my driveway at 10, 30, 11 o'clock at night would discourage someone from carrying out their intentions. Well, with Saul, it was a very different thing.

It was no laughing matter. Here was a man who was after him and had tried six times and had failed. So David is still on the run. He's hiding out. Saul is intent on killing David, and his intention is so strong now that this time he brings 3,000 men with him to pursue David.

David was hiding in En Gedi. I understand that it's a very beautiful region with plenty of water, plenty of caves, some mountain springs. It was a well-suited hiding place.

[12:11] The possibility of finding David in En Gedi, in this desert or wilderness, was very slim. But as slim as it might be, Saul was so intent on finding David and killing him that he pursued him anyway.

And Saul was seeking David. But guess what happened? David found Saul. Every young boy who reads this passage sort of snickers to himself, I suppose, as to how David found Saul.

And I've got to go into the details of that. I can just imagine the men in the cave, all the things they might have been thinking and saying and whispering to one another when Saul came in to relieve himself.

So there was Saul, and he was in David's hands. And David could do what he wanted to him. He was a great test for David. But David passed the test.

And I'm interested in making some observations about this test which David passed. I have three basic observations to make from this chapter. First of all, I want to talk about the foundation that is needed for passing God's test.

[13:20] And the second observation I want you to consider with me is the convictions that are needed to pass the test. You see, if we wait till we get to the test and we don't have convictions prior to the test, it's certain that we're going to fail the test.

It's like if we never go to class and never study, and we come to the test, the final exam, if that's all the professor happens to give in college, the chances are we won't do very well.

Chances are we will fail miserably. So there are convictions that are needed. We'll look at some three convictions that David had. And then finally, the final observation, I want to show the contrast between those who passed the test and those who failed the test.

This will be a contrast that we make between David and Saul. And we'll see the great difference between these two men, which explains why it is that David was who he was by the grace of God and Saul was who he was.

So let's look first of all at the foundation that is needed for passing the test. And what I see here in David's life is that he had a very sensitive and a very well-instructed conscience.

[14:28] By the grace of God, he had a well-instructed conscience. By the grace of God, he had a very tender conscience. And this is clear, I believe, in the chapter. Look at it with me.

Here is David and his men in the cave in the wilderness of En Gedi. And in verse 4, it says, This is David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave, which to me is quite amazing.

If there's any place I don't want to live, it's a cave. And I certainly don't want to live in the recesses of the cave. I assume that many of you have gone into caves and crawled around in them and walked around in them.

And there's not a whole lot of light in a cave. And it's a rather frightening thing. But that's where David was. It was a very secure place, of course, and Saul found this cave and went into it.

And notice what happened in verse 4. The men of David said to him, This is the day of which the Lord said to you, Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand that you may do to him as it seems good to you.

[15 : 34] Now that's a very powerful argument. Think about it a minute. These men come to David, his own men, and said, This is the day of which the Lord said to you. They use the name of the Lord.

It's as though there has been some prophecy that has been given that someday the Lord was going to deliver Saul into David's hand and he could kill him and seize the kingdom.

Why didn't this sway David? Because David must have asked himself one very important question. Who said it? Where do you find it? What prophet ever prophesied this?

And of course, there was no prophet who ever prophesied this. There was nothing that the Lord ever said that there was going to come a day that Saul will be delivered into David's hand so that David could do with Saul whatever he wanted.

David knew the prophecies. David knew that he had been promised the kingdom and that's all the Lord told him.

[16 : 43] The Lord didn't tell him that he was to kill Saul. The Lord didn't tell him that he was to do anything to secure the kingdom himself.

The only thing the Lord told him through Samuel was that the kingdom would be his. And I am amazed at this man. You see, his men knew that prophecy as well, but his men made a deduction. And the deduction they made was since the kingdom was David's, therefore David could do whatever was necessary to secure it. And certainly, if the Lord delivered Saul into his hand, the men deduced, then the Lord must be giving Saul to David and David could kill him.

But David's conscience was well instructed. He knew there was no such prophecy and that's what kept David from killing Saul. Now what David did do was that he went over and he, as verse 4 says, he arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

And then immediately when that was done, we read that David's conscience was troubled. Now all he did was cut off a corner of his robe and that deeply troubled his conscience.

[18 : 00] Why? Not only was his conscience well instructed, but here is a man who lived by conscience. And he knew in his conscience that even the act of cutting off a corner of Saul's robe was violating in some small robe the Lord's anointed.

Oh, dear friends, if we are ever going to pass God's test, we must have well instructed consciences and we must have tender consciences so that whenever, whenever we do anything, even so small and tiny as cutting off a piece of a robe, that we will be troubled in our hearts because we've done such a thing.

How can we have such a conscience? Only by the grace of God can we have it. And we'll talk more about that as we go along here.

We must always listen to a well instructed conscience. We must always do that. You see the contrast between David's men and David?

David's men would have had no problem whatsoever in killing Saul at that moment. In fact, David himself, the text of Scripture says, had to restrain his men from harming Saul.

[19 : 23] They had no conscience. their consciences had not been instructed, but David's was. And this shows us the severity of this test.

When all of your counselors say, go for it. Do it. This is what the Lord says. But you know in your own heart and mind what the Bible says, what God says, and you restrain yourself, then certainly that is the grace of God.

Let's review in our minds a little bit about what the Bible says about our conscience. Our conscience must always be followed. For example, remember what the Apostle Paul said when he talked to the Corinthians and to the Romans about eating meat that's been offered to idols.

What is wrong with eating meat that's been offered to idols? To us, that is so foreign because when you go out here in Bremen, I'm sure there's no meat market you can go to that has meat that's been offered to idols. But of course, in that culture, it was a very real issue.

Meat was offered to idols, and then after being offered to idols, it was brought into the marketplace, and it was sold probably at a cheaper price than the fresh meat. And some believers would buy that meat and have no conscience about it whatsoever.

[20 : 50] And Paul said that's fine, he himself could do such a thing. But some believers, knowing that that meat had been offered to idols, and having been converted out of paganism, their conscience was struck that they could not eat that meat that had been offered to idols.

What did Paul say to them? Did he say to the believers that were weak, get a life, come on, save some money, give more to the church, and no, of course he didn't say that. He said you must follow your conscience.

And furthermore, those of you who are strong in faith must not attempt to persuade those who are weak in faith to eat that meat. Follow your conscience. And that's what the Bible says.

Sometimes our consciences are not as well instructed as they ought to be, but whether they are in matters of indifference, but that does not matter. We must always follow our conscience, because if we do not follow our conscience, we may end up, as Paul says in Timothy, that we'll have a seared conscience.

Not following the conscience in little matters will dull our conscience so that we'll not follow our conscience in another little matter, where it will be further dulled, and then pretty soon our conscience will be seared.

[22:07] So we might be able to say something like this, well that doesn't bother me at all, when it ought to bother us, because God speaks to the issue. And David obviously had followed his conscience.

It was tender, and that kept him at that moment from killing Saul. And it caused him to feel pangs of regret and guilt when he cut off Saul's robe.

Now our conscience must be instructed, and it must be instructed by the truth. I can imagine in Paul's day that there were some believers who couldn't eat meat that was offered to idols, but as they studied the scriptures and saw more of the truth, and the glory of Christ, saw more of the reality that meat that's been offered to idols, that there's nothing wrong with eating it, could change their mind and eat it without violating their conscience, but only after they had been instructed by the word of God.

But the point is that if we are to pass the test which God brings our way, we must have a well-instructed conscience and it must be a tender conscience. We are in difficulty when we can do something that isn't quite right and say, well, I don't think there's anything wrong with it.

My dear friend, there is something wrong with violating the word of God and there's always something wrong in violating our conscience. Conscience whispers to us and is our guide.

[23:48] And that's what the Bible teaches and that's what we see here in the example of David.

Well, quickly, let's move on to the convictions that are needed for passing God's test. We've looked at the foundation that's needed.

The foundation is a well-instructed and tender conscience. Now let's look at the convictions that are needed. And the first conviction that I note in David as he was in the midst of this test was that vengeance belongs to God.

Verse 6, he said to his men, the Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master. The Lord is anointed to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is anointed of the Lord. And so David restrained his servants with these words and did not allow them to rise against Saul.

Why did he do that? Because he knew that God had to be the one who removed Saul and God must be the one who gave him, David, the kingdom.

And so he restrained his men. we must always be convinced in our hearts that God is the one who takes vengeance.

[25:11] He is the one who must deliver us. And then not only did David restrain his men, but then he approached Saul with words of conciliation.

salvation. He not only let him go, but as we shall see in a moment, he tried to do positive good to Saul. This was the principle that guided David.

Vengeance belongs to the Lord. I will repay, saith the Lord. Do you have any enemies? Have you ever had any enemies? I had a man tell me once, it's just too bad if a man has enemies.

He didn't think anybody should have enemies. And I thought, man, I am in trouble because I know I have enemies. I had a lady promise me one time it was the last thing she'd do.

She'd see to it that I was out of the ministry and not a pastor of Sycamore Baptist Church. A number of years later I saw her and she gave me a hug. It was not my place to show any vengeance to her.

[26:15] I'm not saying it was a genuine hug. I'm just saying that she did that. Vengeance is mine. I will repay. Saith the Lord. We must be as the psalmist in Psalm 119 verses 133 through 135 when he says, Direct my steps by your word and let no iniquity have dominion over me.

Redeem me from the oppression of man that I may keep your precepts. Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your statutes. The Lord is the one who will deliver us. It is not our responsibility to take judgment and vengeance on anyone.

It is the Lord who will do that. And this is one of the truths that preserved David in this test. He believed that his God would take vengeance on Saul and he knew it was not his place to do so. And we know as the story unfolds when Saul finally did die that David wept over that man. And he wrote commendations of that man.

How could he do that? It is because he had a heart that loved the Lord. It is because even in his enemy he could see good in him. And could see the way that the Lord used him.

[27 : 32] Even though his enemy tried to kill him. Do you believe that God will deliver you? Are you able to trust the living God? I hope that you are.

This is the evidence of true faith. My dear friend, if we are to pass the test, we must have this fundamental conviction and that is that vengeance belongs to God.

I will repay, saith the Lord. It is not my place, it is not your place, to repay our enemies. That is in God's hands.

Besides, God does a much better job of it than we could ever do. He really does. He really does. And in his marvelous providence and ways of working, he protects his own and preserves his own. And those who are opposed to us do not gain the victory which they hoped. They never will. They never will. I remember reading the story.

[28 : 38] It's in the book. Well, now, that's a sign I'm getting old. I can't remember the name of the book. It's a book about the work of the Lord in China. And there's a young lady over in China who writes music.

And she has captured the heart of the Chinese church, house churches. And at one point she was put into jail, as often is the case by Christians over in China.

And this young girl, when she was in jail, received persecution.

But she loved those who persecuted her. She did not take vengeance. And she witnessed to the guards. She witnessed to the fellow prisoners. And when it came time for her to be released, she said, I don't want to be released.

I want to stay here. They need to hear more about the Lord Jesus. She had no animosity whatsoever towards her captors. Why?

[29 : 40] Because she understood that vengeance belongs to the Lord. It wasn't her place to take vengeance. Which leads me to the second conviction that David had, which was a love for his enemies. David loved Saul.

And here I direct your attention to verses 8 through 15. And what a spirit of gentleness and holiness that David used in addressing Saul. I look at verses 8 through 15 and I see this as one of the finest efforts in evangelism that we can find anywhere in Holy Scripture, other than the work of our Lord with men, of course.

But everything that David said to Saul was really an effort to turn Saul, not just so that Saul would look favorably upon David, but it went further than that.

His effort was to turn Saul so that Saul would come to see the Lord's hand and trust in the Lord, even as David did. I see seven points that David used which were designed to lead Saul to repentance.

Now that didn't occur, but nonetheless it shows something of the heart of David and the love that David had for his enemy Saul. Look at them with me. First of all, in these verses, David of course called out for Saul in verse 8, and then at verse 9, David said to Saul, why do you listen to the words of men who say, and David seeks your harm?

[31 : 08] What's he saying here? He's saying to Saul, don't you understand that I don't seek your harm? And Saul should have thought, why don't you seek my harm?

I'm trying to kill you. This is the seventh time I've tried. Well, that should have broken Saul's heart just at that moment to realize that he had sinned against the God of heaven in seeking David's harm, the very man that now he knew could have killed him.

But of course that didn't happen. Look at the second effort that David makes in verse 10. He says to Saul, look, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord delivered you into my hand in the cave.

And he says, some urged me to kill you. And I, of course, is true. He says, but I'm not going to stretch out my hand against you. You're the Lord's anointed. So David is saying, I acted in

accordance with truth, with the will of God.

You are the Lord's anointed. Now, how should that have affected Saul? Saul should have thought, I'm the Lord's anointed.

[32 : 24] I'm trying to kill this man. And because I'm the Lord's anointed, he refuses to stretch out his hand against me. Would not that bring a man of tender conscience to tears of repentance before God?

But it didn't Saul. Look at the third effort that David made in verse 11. Moreover, my father, see, yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand. Here, David shows the evidence that he gives proof of his actions.

Now Saul knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that his life was in the hands of David and that David easily could have killed him. Certainly at this point, his heart should have been touched, should it not?

To see his wickedness in pursuing a man who let him go. And Saul later is acknowledged. He says, what man will ever let his enemy go?

David wasn't his enemy. Saul was so hard. Look at the fourth effort that David makes in verse 12.

[33 : 36] He says to him, now he brings him right into the face and to the presence of the living God. He says, let the Lord judge between you and me. Let the Lord avenge me on you, but my hand shall not be against you.

Should not this have broken the heart of Saul? Saul is brought into the presence of the living God. The reality is, David says, let the Lord avenge me.

I'm not going to take vengeance, but let the Lord. Saul should have immediately thought, I've tried now seven times to do away with this man's life, and I've got to face the God of heaven. Shouldn't that not be a frightening thought?

What would you think? What would every one of you here tonight think? If you had to face God, without Christ? I don't want to do that.

But it didn't faze Saul. Look at the fifth effort that David made in verse 13. He says, he refers to an ancient saying, a proverb, wickedness proceeds from the wicked, but my hand shall not be against you.

[34 : 50] here David is appealing to a common saying that Saul knew and probably many people knew. That too should have melted Saul's heart.

But it didn't affect him. Look at the sixth effort that David made in verse 14. And this is rather interesting.

He says, who'd you come out after? A dead dog the dog.

It's not your dog. You don't know who the dog is. And your father slams on the brakes, stops the car, and puts it in reverse, and goes backwards.

And you say, Daddy, what are you doing? Oh, there's a dead dog. Well, yeah, what are you going to do? Well, we're going to take it home. You say, I want a live dog, Daddy, I don't want a dead one. Well, you see, this is how ridiculous.

[36 : 16] So, David's using every argument he can possibly think of. I'm just a dead dog. I'm a dead dog. I'm a flea. How many of you, well, I don't need to ask that question.

We don't want fleas. Why would we pursue a flea? We try to get rid of fleas. But you see, this is what, that should have brought some sense to Saul's mind.

I mean, if he doesn't understand the true and the living God, and standing in judgment before God, he should understand at least dead dogs and fleas. But that doesn't faze him either, as we shall see.

The seventh point that David makes is his own personal testimony of what he's doing. He says, therefore, let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see, and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand.

David says, I'm casting myself on the mercy of God. Let him judge. And that too should have affected Saul deeply in his heart, but sad to say it did not.

[37 : 26] But what we see in David here is a love for his enemies. You see, what he's doing? At every single point, he's attempting to persuade Saul to look to God, to understand truth.

He didn't just go out and say to Saul, you rascal, you mean old king, you're trying to kill me, you ought to know better than that. I didn't hurt you.

There's no spirit like that whatsoever in David. There is a spirit of love for this man, and an attempt to persuade him seven times to come to repentance.

And dear friends, if we're ever going to pass the test, we must love our enemies. We must do good to those who abuse us.

We must do good to them. A number of years ago, there was a man who left our church with his wife, and I would see him over town from time to time. He would not look at me, he would not speak to me, and eventually his wife died.

[38 : 35] And I asked Rain, I said, what should we do? And she said, well, we need to go to the visitation. So we did. He had just shunned me. He would not even speak to me, but we went to the visitation. And I wondered how we would respond, and he received us.

Now you see, I don't set myself up as an example, but I'm just telling you that what do we do?

What do we do when people are our enemies, when people shun us, when people put us out of their lives? We love them. We are kind to them. And this is what David did with Saul.

And this is the principle of the word of God. And if we are ever to pass the test which God brings our way, we must indeed love our enemies. And there's a third conviction that I see underlying all these other convictions which David had.

He was convinced that vengeance belonged to the Lord. He was convinced that he must love his enemies. But David understood the sovereignty of God.

[39 : 46] Underlying all of this, he understood that God was going to accomplish his will. And that God was working good for him. He didn't have Romans 8.28 like we have today.

But he knew the truth of Romans 8.28 that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. And David was convinced that God would bring him to the kingdom in God's old time.

That God ordered all things and he was the sovereign Lord over all the affairs of men and that in God's time all this would come about. The sovereignty of God is a wonderful truth and it's practical. It's practical because it gives us the confidence that God will do his will. And when things seem to be going against us in every way, we can be assured, we can be assured that God is accomplishing his purposes.

And David was confident of that as well. Well, we've looked at the foundation for passing God's test. We've looked at the convictions, three convictions that are necessary for passing God's test.

[40 : 57] And now I invite you to consider with me the contrast between those who pass the test and those who do not pass the test. Now we've already looked at David, so we don't need to look at him some more, but the rest of our text talks about Saul.

And there's a great contrast between David and Saul. And we see what it is that causes a man not to pass the test. Saul didn't know God, of course. He didn't know him at all and is very evident. Notice what Saul's response is here. Well, we find that in verse 16, when he says, is that your voice, David, my son?

And then Saul lifted up his voice and he wept. Now isn't it great when somebody weeps? Well, it depends what they're crying about. As a young pastor, I had to learn that lesson.

I thought when somebody came into my study and cried that that meant they were repenting before God. And my wife told me, no, they just made me mad. I don't know exactly why Saul wept here.

[41 : 59] I can't figure it out. But I knew it was too little weeping and it was too late and it wasn't sincere. Gordon Keddie in his brief comments on this chapter says, it was the honesty of hell that made his tears fall.

That was very interesting. The honesty of hell that made his tears fall. It was a remorse that would not last.

In fact, all we have to do is turn over to chapter 26. And what does Saul do? After this incident, we find that the Ziphites came to Saul and said, David's hiding near us.

And so Saul went down to the wilderness of Ziph. He had 3,000 men with him. Again he takes 3,000 men. So yes, he was weeping, but it meant nothing.

This man is lost and lost forever. But notice what he does next. In verse 17, he said to David, you are more righteous than I. I throw up my hands at that.

[43 : 09] You are more righteous than I? Saul, where did you ever get the idea that there was any righteousness in you whatsoever? You're taking 3,000 men to kill an innocent man and you say you are more righteous than I?

This is the mark of those who don't pass the test. They think they're just not quite as good as the next guy who did pass it. But they're still good. They're still righteous.

David referred to himself as a dead dog and a flea. Saul referred to himself as someone who was righteous. And we all know he wasn't. And friends, if we are to pass the test that God brings our way, we must understand who we are.

That we are sinners saved by the grace of God. That we have no strength in ourselves, no righteousness in ourselves, that all our righteousness is found in Jesus Christ and his finished work and his finished work alone.

What should have Saul said at this point? Well, what he should have said was, I'm a great sinner. man, he should have done was this.

[44 : 29] He should have taken off his robe and his sword and his crown if he were wearing it and given it to David right at that point. Remember, Jonathan had already done that after the Goliath incident.

Jonathan was a man whose heart had been changed by the grace of God. Jonathan was a man who realized after the Goliath incident who it was that was going to reign. And essentially what Jonathan did was give the kingdom to David.

Amazing thing that Jonathan did. Absolutely astonishing. But none of that was in Saul. None of it whatsoever. Godly repentance produces, godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation. Not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 2 Corinthians 7 10. And all Saul had was the sorrow of the world that produced death.

If we're going to pass the test, we've got to have a sorrow for sin. That's a sorrow before the living God. Why are you weeping over your sin?

[45 : 40] Is it because you got caught? Or is it because you've sinned against God? For David, when he repented, he said, against you and you only have I sinned.

When Saul repented, quotation marks around that, he was simply saying, well, you're more righteous than I, David. You're just a little better guy than I am.

He never dealt with the living God. Never did he do that. Sad to say. What is it that we can learn from this chapter?

I want to draw some three or four concluding lessons to drive these truths home to our conscience. We've looked at the foundation needed for passing God's test, which is a well-instructed and tender conscience.

We've looked at the three convictions that are needed to understand that vengeance belongs to God. We must love our enemies, and we must understand the sovereignty of God that he will bring about his purposes in his time.

[46 : 44] We've looked at the contrast with Saul, a man who knew nothing of repentance, who knew remorse, but didn't know repentance. A man who thought himself just not quite as good as David, but that's all that he knew.

What are we to learn from this? Well, I suggest to you that we need to, first of all, learn to have a well- instructed conscience and listen to it.

Oh, I know that I'm in danger if I don't listen to my conscience. And one of the things of which we must repent quickly and immediately is if we do not listen to our conscience and we participate in something that our conscience says to us is wrong, lest our conscience becomes dull and seared. And we must not do anything opposed to conscience. Now, I was brought up in a fundamentalist environment and there were a lot of things that I was told that were wrong. As the years went by, I began to see that those things weren't in the Bible.

So my conscience changed on those matters. But I could not participate in any particular activity until I was convinced from the scriptures that it wasn't sin and that I could do so.

[48 : 09] If I did those things without against my conscience, it would have been sin. It simply would have been sin.

So we must have a well-instructed and tender conscience and we must follow our conscience in these matters. A second lesson that we can learn is that we must not depend on open doors.

Now, I didn't emphasize this in the exposition, but as we reflect on the whole exposition, I want us to think about it. You see, what David's servants were asking him to do was to kill his enemy, Saul, because God in his providence had delivered Saul into his hand.

You know, some people say, why did you do that? Well, the Lord just opened the door. Well, the Lord opened the door for David. It was a wide-open door whereby he could take his sword and kill Saul.

Open doors are no reason to do anything necessarily. There are much more important issues that must be dealt with than the open doors.

[49 : 24] We must depend upon the clear word of God. Sometimes doors can open for us, but we would violate the word of God in going through the open door, quote-unquote.

We must always live in accordance with the revealed word of God, not in accordance with what appears to be an open door of providence at any particular moment.

A.W. Pink has a most helpful comment on this whole idea. He says, An accurate knowledge of God's word, a holy state of heart, a broken will, are absolutely essential in order to clearly discern the path of duty in important cases and crises.

The safest plan is to deny all suggestions of revenge, covetousness, ambition, and impatience. A heart that is established in true godliness will rather interpret the dispensation of providence as trials of faith and patience, as occasions to practice self-denial, than as opportunities for self-indulgence.

Oh, how that strikes us. Listen to this again. He says, A heart that is established in true godliness will rather interpret the dispensations of providence, the open doors, if you please.

[50 : 52] That's what he means, or that's how I explain dispensations of providence, the open doors, as trials of faith and patience, as occasions to practice self-denial, than as opportunities for self-indulgence.

And that's one of the lessons that we can learn here from David. He understood that this occasion of providence, this open door, was no excuse for violating the clear word of God.

He said no to his men. God had not said yes. There's another lesson that we can learn, and that is we really do need to cultivate love for our enemies.

How do we do that? What we must do is pray for our enemies. This is what Jesus teaches us. Pray for them. If someone comes to your mind when I talk about enemies, I just simply ask you, are you praying for that person?

If not, begin to pray for him immediately, or her. They need your prayers. As you pray for them, you will find that your attitude will change toward them.

[52 : 11] And pray for their good. Pray for their ultimate good. Pray for their spiritual good. Pray for their material good. Pray that they would be doing well wherever they are right now. We know from the Psalms that David did this very thing.

He prayed for his enemies. He wept for his enemies. He did this for Saul. And so we need to cultivate this love for our enemies, and we do that in our hearts as we pray for them.

And then from Saul, we also learn a very important lesson, and we learn the need for true repentance. We learn the lesson that we need to see ourselves as we really are, and not compare ourselves with someone else.

And if we find someone better than ourselves, and say, well, you're a little better than I am, rather we need to see ourselves as vile sinners who are in need of the forgiveness and the grace of God continually and always.

And as we walk in that truth and that reality, I believe the Lord will help us to pass the tests which he brings our way.

[53 : 17] And when we fall, pray that God will grant us that true repentance, not just simply a remorse, a sorrow that leads to death, but a sorrow before God, a sorrow that Saul didn't have, and later on, as you know, in David's life that he did have.

May God grant it by his grace. Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for this chapter in your word and for the example of your servant David, for the way that by your grace you helped him and granted him all that he needed to pass this severe test that he faced.

Help us to learn from him, help those of us who profess the name of Jesus Christ to have these solid convictions that are needed so that when these tests come we may pass them.

May you grant us the grace that we need to do that. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.