



## A Sword in the Dark

King Saul did everything he could to earn David's hate.

He accused his loyal general of treason. He sent assassins after him. He sent armies after him. And David had done nothing to earn this hatred.

David became a hunted outlaw. And as Saul hunts him, pretty much anyone with an axe to grind against Saul sides with David. So David's got a bunch of malcontents with him. It's not a good situation. About six hundred men claim David as their leader, and they travel with him in the desert.

Saul finds out the area David's in, and he picks out three thousand troops to go after David. Now, look, 600 versus 3,000? I know where I'd put my money. David doesn't have a hope of standing up against them.

David and his men end up hiding in a cave system while Saul's men are hunting. They cringe in the back of a dirty, dark cave, hoping they won't be found, because if they're found, it's gonna be a slaughter. They hear all the horses and the men passing by at the foot of the cave – the metallic clinks of armor, the sound of hoofs hitting the rocky ground. Wait. They've stopped moving. Is the entire army setting up camp right outside?

Someone's climbing into the cave. What's going on? Oh, great. The army's going to use their cave as a latrine. That's fantastic.

But through the light that makes it into the cave, the men recognize who this visitor is. It's not just some random soldier: It's Saul. It's the king. It's the one who's been hunting innocent David. It's the person who's caused him so much pain.

Saul takes off his outer robe and tosses it over a rock. Look, clothing back then wasn't as practical as ours is today when it comes to uh... using the facilities. It's just easier to take the outer robe off when doing your business.

The men nudge David. "There he is," they whisper. "God said he'd give your enemy into your hands. Do whatever you think is right."

David draws his sword. With all the noise from outside, there's no chance Saul will ever hear David coming. And David's caught him with his pants down, literally.

And as David creeps nearer and nearer, he notices Saul's robe. Wouldn't it be something to just embarrass the king? To just cut a corner of the robe off, to show him just how vulnerable he was? To show him that David *could* have killed him right then? David smiles and lops off a corner of Saul's robe. Just like that. And he scurries back to his men while Saul is doing his business.

Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off the 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." His heart smote him. He disobeyed God's commandments

God had given his Ten Commandments about five hundred years before this. David had been taught the Ten Commandments growing up. And one of those commandments was, "You shall not steal." You shall not take what is not yours. You shall not hurt what isn't yours. And here was David, intentionally

damaging something that didn't belong to him: Saul's robe. It didn't matter what Saul had done to David. There was never, ever an excuse for breaking one of the Ten Commandments.

And what's more... God had chosen Saul to be the king. Yes, God had chosen David to be the *next* king, but for now Saul was still king. How *dare* David sin against God by sinning against the one God chose to be king?

Wanting to "get back" at Saul? David had no right. *None*. How dare he think he was smarter than God? How dare he think he didn't need to listen to God's choice? How dare he? *How dare he?*

And yet... God didn't punish him. Not because God was permissive. Not because God didn't care. God didn't punish David... because someone else died in David's place. And David had seen and taken part in the sacrifices. He had seen the lamb die in his place, pointing ahead to the Lamb of God who was coming. David's sin was already atoned for.

David told his men that they wouldn't kill Saul. And David didn't have this mercy because he was so much better than Saul. David had this mercy because he realized he was no different than Saul, and yet God had mercy on him. How could David not have mercy on Saul, too?

Saul finished his business. He walked out of the cave with no clue how close to death he came.

But that's not the end for mercy.

Saul and his men mount up, start riding away, and David steps out of the cave. He calls out to Saul. He confesses that he cut a part of Saul's robe – and he confesses his sin. And then he confronts Saul on his sin: "Look! I've done nothing wrong against you! Why are you hunting me?"

And Saul confesses: he should not be hunting David. Shamed by David, he rides away. He leads his army home. See, mercy isn't permissive. It confronts sin – but only after it has confessed its own sin.

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Brothers and sisters,

Greatness offers mercy. God hasn't given you what you deserve. You deserve what we all deserve: death. Hell. But in his wisdom, because of his mercy, God sent Jesus to die in our place, to suffer hell in our place.

Now, share that same mercy with others.

And this story is true.

I Samuel 24

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