

MESSAGE — Part 23 — The Lord Is My Refuge

Back when I was in high school, I took a physics class.
One of our projects was to build a bridge out of toothpicks.

It had to be a certain size.
It could be any type of bridge we wanted.

But here's the catch...
We had to bring it to school to test how much weight it could hold.

Well...
I waited until the weekend before.
And immediately I realized I had a problem...

You really need to build the bridge in sections
Because wood glue takes a while to dry.
I didn't have time for that.

So I had the "genius" idea of using hot glue.

I finished the bridge.
It looked good.
I took it to school.
The teacher placed the first weight on it...
And what do you think happened?

It was like putting weights on a rubber band...
It just bent under pressure until it broke.

There was another kid in the class who clearly spent weeks on his bridge...
He even made *his own* toothpicks.

So he put it in place...
The teacher added weight...
Then more weight...
Then eventually every weight he had available...

And that bridge didn't budge.
It actually set a school record.

And as I look back on that...
I've realized our teacher wasn't just teaching us physics.
He was teaching us something about life.

He was teaching us the value of...
Patience... preparation... and strong foundations.
Because all of that determines how much pressure the bridge could take.

The same thing is true spiritually.

This is why we move slowly through Scripture here at Refton.
Because spiritual growth and formation takes time.

People are genuinely shocked when I tell them that we spent
60 weeks in the Gospel of John...
30 weeks in Revelation...
29 weeks in the Sermon on the Mount...
And now, probably 50 weeks in 1 & 2 Samuel.

Why do we do that?
Because I'm convinced that...

[SLIDE 1] Walking slowly through scripture gives the Word of God time to settle deeper into our hearts.

The Word of God is what shapes us over time.

In fact, you might remember when we talked about the narrow road...
Jesus said...

[SLIDE 2] Matthew 7:14 - ...small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life..."

We learned that the narrow road actually *presses in* on us...
It "*narrows*" us.

And that truth is actually foundational to our faith.

Because over time...
Through pressure...
Through hardship and perseverance...

The LORD is working in us.

Remember what James 1 said...

[SLIDE 3] James 1:4 — “Let perseverance finish its work...”

In other words...

We don't have to run from the pressure.

Instead, we seek God's kingdom.

We lift our eyes to Him.

Because **God uses our difficult moments to shape our hearts.**

He works in our hearts so that
when the weight of life bears down on us...
we won't bend and break like my hot-glued bridge.

Instead...

We'll stand firm in the strength of Jesus.

I bring all of this up because in 1 Samuel 24...
David is under a lot of pressure.
Probably the most he's ever felt at this point in his life.

So when we left David a couple weeks ago...

[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 23

David and his men rescued people in Keilah from the Philistines.
So you'd think they'd keep David and his men safe from Saul...
But that's not the case.
The people in Keilah were willing to give David over to Saul.

So he keeps running...
Never staying in one spot for too long...
Because Saul continued hunting for David.

And that eventually brings us to En Gedi.

[SLIDE 5] Picture of En Gedi

I was in En Gedi...
It's a desert region near the Dead Sea...
Filled with steep cliffs, caves,
and rocky mountains that rise about 1,000 feet above the Dead Sea.

It was the perfect kind of natural fortress for David and his men.
They could set up camp high in the mountains...
and disappear into the caves when they needed to.

But what makes it unique is that water flows down from the cliffs...
forming streams and waterfalls in the middle of the wilderness.

It becomes an oasis in the desert.

When we arrived there...
We got off the bus and hiked alongside the stream,
all the way back toward one of the caves.

It probably wasn't the exact cave David was hiding in.
But it was a great spot to rest before we turned back.

So let's rest there with David for a moment...

What kind of thoughts are running through his mind?
What emotions is he carrying?

My guess is that he hears the fear of his men.
He's feeling the weight of Saul's pursuit.
Maybe he's wondering how long he and his men can keep this up?

Well, in places like Psalm 142,
we get a window into what's running through his mind.

He's crying out to the LORD...
He says his spirit is growing faint...

Even though his men are there...
He's feeling alone and abandoned...

Maybe even forgotten.

And so he pleads with the LORD...

[SLIDE 6] Psalm 142:6-7 — Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name.

David's prayer request couldn't be more clear.

He needs help.

He needs the LORD to rescue him.

Watch what happens...

In 1 Samuel 24, Saul heard David was in En Gedi.

So he took three thousand men to look for David

—near the Crags of the Wild Goats (which, btw, are still there!)

[SLIDE 6.1] The Wild Goats Picture

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 24:3-4a - [Saul] came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and [he] went in to relieve himself. 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.'"

Picture this...

David and his men are hiding in the cave...

And suddenly... Saul walks in.

David and the guys are deep enough in the cave that Saul doesn't see them.

And David's men are like:

"This is it!

This must be what the LORD meant when He said:

I will give your enemy into your hands."

So they're all for David killing Saul.
To them, the situation couldn't be more clear:
Kill Saul... problem solved.

But notice that the LORD was allowing David to deal with Saul
in *whatever way he chooses*.

This was a test.

David is said to be a man after God's own heart.

But now, with a choice like this in front of him...
What's he going to do?

Is he really going to kill Saul?

Here's what happened...

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 24:4b-5 - 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.

This is interesting.

Even though David stopped short of killing Saul...
It seems that even cutting the robe crossed a line.
Something is going on in David's heart.

Notice he immediately felt convicted.

In that moment...
he realized his heart was moving in the wrong direction.

So he said to his men...

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 24:6-7 - "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

Remember...

David's men thought this was the LORD's answer to prayer.
In their minds... the LORD handed Saul over to David.
This was a done deal.

But again...

This was a test.

David didn't exactly fail the test...
But he also didn't walk out of the cave congratulating himself.

David was under extreme pressure...
He's struggling inside with what to do.

The "wide road" was pretty compelling.
Killing Saul might have solved all his problems.

But the narrow road wasn't easy.
And... it wasn't super clear.

What was David supposed to do in this moment?
The LORD didn't spell it out for him.

And honestly...
A lot of the hardest moments in life are like that.
We don't always get our answers written in the clouds.

So David acted...
And immediately the narrow road became clear.
The Spirit of God was revealing something inside David.
Because in that moment...

Clarity emerged through conviction.

And so as Saul walked away...
That was perseverance finishing its work in David's heart.

This was the Spirit of God at work in him...
Shaping David under the pressure of the narrow road.

After Saul left...

David followed and he called out to Saul...

[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 24:8-9 - "My lord the king!" 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'?"

[SLIDE 11] 1 Samuel 24:10 - 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 lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD's anointed.'

[SLIDE 12] 1 Samuel 24:11 - 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. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.

A few things to notice here.

David comes out of the cave, and bows down before Saul.

This is the position of humility.

David was recognizing Saul's position as the LORD's anointed king.

But even more than that...

David calls Saul his father.

And now he holds the corner piece of his robe...

Showing that he chose *not* to kill Saul.

And in this moment,

Something unexpected happened...

Saul wept.

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 24:16-18 - 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 about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands,

but you did not kill me...”

Here's what's really unexpected...

Saul said...

[SLIDE 14] 1 Samuel 24:20 - “I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.”

Isn't that interesting?

**Saul finally acknowledges David will be the next king.
But only after David shows him mercy.**

Saul knew this all along.

He's known it since chapter 15 when he tore a piece of Samuel's robe.
That's when Samuel said the LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from him.

After this... David promised to honor Saul's family name.

Then, Saul and his men went home...

But David and his men went back up into the mountains.

And so what are we learning from today's passage?

It strikes me that...

[SLIDE 15] David and his men were in a place of refuge.

This was a place in the desert with water...

Provisions...

Shade...

And from a military perspective...

They had the high ground.

It was easily defensible.

And if they had to hide,

There were plenty of caves.

In fact, throughout history...
En Gedi has always been a place of refuge.

But Psalm 142 shows us that David didn't feel safe.

Instead, he felt abandoned...
Overwhelmed...
Desperate...
And defeated.

And so he said...

[SLIDE 16] Psalm 142:5 - I cry to you, LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."

Listen to those words again...

If I may speak for David...
He prays like this...

You, LORD, are *my refuge*.

*Right now... I'm feeling desperate.
I need rescued from my enemies.*

*Lord, You are my only real sanctuary.
My safety is in You.
My life is in Your hands.*

*You are my portion.
I lack nothing.
Because when everything else is stripped away...
You, LORD, are my only real possession—my portion.*

**And You are my portion...
*in the land of the living...***

...that right there is profound.

David is anchoring his hope and trust in the presence of the LORD...

Not just in the future...
But *in the land of the living*...
In the now.

David feels alone.
Yet he knows that's not true.

The presence of the LORD is with him.
The presence of the LORD is his refuge and strength.

That's how he can press on while his enemies are pressing in.

This is why last week's sermon was so important.

**Heaven isn't just the future destination for those who follow Jesus.
Heaven breaks into our present reality through the presence of the Lord.**

And so what we're seeing today is that...

[SLIDE 17] The space between heaven and earth became thin when David felt convicted in the cave.

Because the presence of God was with David...
This is why he felt "conscious-stricken"...
The LORD was shaping David in that moment...
Deepening his trust.

In fact...

That's why *David walked out of the cave.*

Think about it...

Walking out of the cave was basically suicide.

Yet he did it anyway.

Because in this moment...
His trust wasn't in his men...
Or his sword...
Or even the mountain and caves where they hid...

His trust was in the LORD alone.

That's *radical trust*.

But it's not something that just magically happens...
This is the kind of trust that the LORD builds in our lives over time.

There's not this switch that flips in us...
where we can instantly say:

**[SLIDE 18] “Even though I walk through the darkest valley...
I will fear no evil...”**

This kind of trust only happens through the presence of the LORD.

The presence of the LORD in us is what gives us strength.

Which is why David *actually* says...

[SLIDE 18.1] Psalm 23:4 - “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

And so...

When we face trials and hardship...
It would be nice if God would give a clear message in the clouds...
But that's not how it works.

[SLIDE 19] The LORD allows us to face moments where we need to choose how we'll respond.

But as we do...
What's the wisdom Jesus gave us?

“Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.”¹

In other words:
Seek the heart of God.

Pay attention to how the Holy Spirit is guiding our hearts.

¹ Matthew 6:33

And in everything...
Through the tests and trials of life...

Trust the LORD alone.

Pray for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven...

And when the world presses in on us...
We seek the LORD...
We lift our eyes up to Him...
We remain aware of His presence...
And we allow perseverance to finish its work...

That's when He empowers us to stand firm.
That's when we press on in His strength.

And so, this morning...
We're going to sing a song that says exactly that.

During the bridge, it says...

[SLIDE 20] Build My Life (Bridge)
I will build my life upon Your love
It is a firm foundation
I will put my trust in You alone
And I will not be shaken

So no matter what we're going through right now...
May that be our prayer this morning.

There will be times when we feel like David...
Desperate... shaken... and alone.

But like David...
Let's remember that the LORD is our true refuge.
He is our strength when we are weak.
Because He's with us...
Guarding our hearts and minds with His peace.

Let's Pray