

The Cat and the Mouse

The Singer, Part 6

1 Samuel 23-24

More people worldwide have watched the cartoon Tom and Jerry than any other animated series.

In fact, to show you how much the times have changed, the two men who created and wrote Tom and Jerry actually won 8 Academy Awards for this series between 1940 and 1958.

Now if you've ever watched the cartoon it has one basic premise – and it's really simple. A rather dimwitted cat tries to catch a rather clever mouse; and in the end, the mouse always wins.

What's more, Jerry, the mouse, not only evades capture, but to the delight of the audience, he always gets revenge. Tom the cat ends up getting frozen, boiled, cut in half, run over, dynamited, put into a waffle maker, stuck in electrical outlets, pounded into the ground by trees and telephone poles, and he's even sent into outer space on fireworks.

How good can it get . . . the underdog – or the under-mouse, in this case – gets even.

Of course, Tom survives and comes back good as new and the chase begins all over again.

For decades, our English language has adopted this phrase and applied it to any number of situations where it's a battle of wits – and brains over brawn – we call it, playing cat and mouse.

If there is a description of what takes place over the next few chapters in the biography of David, it could easily be entitled, *The Cat and The Mouse*.

Saul is the Cat, and David is the mouse.

Maybe you've arrived here today, at the end of one more week where you've been chased unfairly. You're on the run from gossip or false accusations.

You barely have time to catch your breath.

First of all, make sure you're running for the right reason. As Peter wrote in First Peter chapter 3, make sure you're suffering for righteousness sake and not because of unrighteousness.

I can remember, when I was a kid, during the summer time, my friend and I would often explore the woods near our subdivision until it grew dark.

There was an apartment complex on our way home; and in the middle of the downstairs apartments, in a central area on the wall, was a big electrical box that supplied all the electricity for that

entire apartment building. And it could all be turned on or off with this big grey lever.

We'd scout around to make sure no one was downstairs, and then we'd pull that lever and run out of the apartment complex as that entire building would immediately grow dark.

One particular occasion became the last time we'd ever pull that stunt. We pulled the lever down and ran; two young adult men, one of them dressed in army fatigues, happened to be standing out on the balcony just above where we ran out.

They had heard that electrical arm slam down, saw their building grow dark, two kids sprint out underneath them . . . they put two and two together and we heard, "Hey you." As we sprinted away from the building I turned around just as the guy in army fatigues jumped over the balcony railing, landed on his feet like some kind of GI Joe . . . and ran after us.

If we didn't know some shortcuts and had gotten away . . . you would have a different pastor today. God is merciful to the foolish.

We never did that again.

I want to show you someone who's being chased – not for doing the wrong thing, but for doing the right thing.

And this isn't a cartoon; either . . . it happens to be a matter of life and death.

Let me invite your attention back to *1 Samuel and chapter 23*.

1. A Close Encounter

Chapter 23, which I'll briefly comment on, opens with trouble in the city of Keilah, a city about three miles south of the cave of Adullam.ⁱ

Verse 1 informs us that *the Philistines were robbing the threshing floors*.

This would have been incredibly devastating. The Philistines were *robbing the threshing floors* – in other words, after all the work of the Israelites – after months of planting, tending, harvesting and threshing – separating the grain from the chaff on the threshing floor – after it had been bagged and ready to sell or distribute or turn into much needed

food, Philistine raiding parties arrived and stole it all away.

Someone tells David – and David gathers his men and they go and literally liberate this city. They save the day. And then they enjoy an invitation to indoor living once again and probably some wonderful home cooked meals as they settle in this town.

Trouble is, the city fathers are loyal to Saul and they concoct a plan to betray David.

David discovers the plot and he and his men escape – *verse 13* gives us their desperate conditions once again as we're told that *they went wherever they could go* . . . how random is that?!

In the *middle part of verse 14*, you're given this statement that sums David's life up – notice – *And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.*

Betrayed by the citizens of Keilah, even after risking his life to save theirs, David and his men are once again forced to run for their lives.

They finally find a place to hide, *verse 15*, in *the wilderness of Ziph.*

And while he's out there hiding, Jonathan pays him a visit and in *verse 17* he states the fact that he knows David will be the next King of Israel.

Somewhere in here the evident purposes of God for David's life has become common knowledge – David is the heir to the throne.

The last part of *verse 17* cuts to the chase and Jonathan gives Saul's true motive for trying to kill David – notice – *You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.*

That's what this is all about, David. The raving episodes; the spears; the tears; the chase . . . Saul is literally fighting against the discipline of God in his life and the will of God for your life.

Jonathan and David then part as loyal friends . . . and they will never see each other again, this side of Paradise.

And then, lo and behold, the Ziphites betray him to King Saul and the chase is on again.

Look at what the Ziphites say to Saul in *verse 19. Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "is not David hiding among us? . . . verse 20 . . . Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand. 21. And Saul said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, for you have had compassion on me."*

What a hypocrite . . . Saul doesn't need compassion . . . he needs an awakening . . . he's a rebellious, spoiled little boy.

You can just feel the tension mounting as they encircle the hill where David is hiding out – let's just read the next few verses – beginning with *verse 25. And Saul and his men went to seek him – track him down – And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 26. Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, 27. A messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." So Saul returned from pursuing after David.*

That was a close call . . . the mouse had been cornered and the cat was ready to pounce.

In fact, notice in *verse 28.* That David called that mountain, *the Rock of Escape.*

Even still, the chase isn't over. David has to find another place to hide and so *chapter 24:1* finds them hiding out in the wilderness of Engedi.

Engedi, which can be translated, "spring of the goat", was a perfect hideout for David. It was an oasis in the desert wilderness where fresh water springs, waterfalls, lush vegetation and countless caves dotted the limestone cliffs, high above the Dead Sea where a lookout would have spotted Saul's approach.ⁱⁱ

About this time you'd have to say, there is no rest for the weary.

Saul has convinced the people that David is the aggressor – that David is a usurper who wants to kill him . . . and David is living with the unfairness and the unkindness and the unjustness of a King who wants him dead.

And by the way, David has only been doing the right thing.

I can't imagine the events that took place in one pastor's home in one of the Soviet-occupied countries just after World War 2. John Phillips includes this in his commentary at this point in David's biography as an illustration.

A Lutheran pastor had an attractive single daughter who worked in the office of a government agency. Eventually, the communist party secretary gave her a choice – either she became his mistress or her father would be arrested and his church closed.

Under constant pressure and in growing fear for her father's life, without her parents' ever knowing, she tragically gave in. Within a few months, when she discovered that she was going to have a child, in anguish and despair and guilt, she hung herself, leaving a note in her pocket explaining what had brought her to take her life. When a party leader found the letter, he confronted his superior with it. The official denied it, took the letter and then privately tore it up. He then secretly forged another letter from this young lady, saying that she had been molested by her father and could no longer stand the shame. The police arrested the father, his church was closed and he was sent to prison where he was often beaten by the other prisoners who hated such criminals. All the while, this pastor, his wife and family, the church grieved with the unjust and unfair circumstances. Several years later, the soviet official responsible for his daughter's death was arrested and placed into the same prison . . . it was in that cell where he confessed the truth . . . and to his utter amazement, this father forgave him claiming the purposes of God were being accomplished.ⁱⁱⁱ

As David is on the run from the traitorous and ungrateful Keilahites and the Ziphites and a murderous Israelite King, he would write one of his famous songs – and in that song he would cry out, ***O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might; for strangers have risen against me ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life (Psalm 54, verses 1 & 4).***

Only then, something unbelievable happens . . . in fact, 600 of David's men will unanimously agree that it can only mean one thing – that God has given David the opportunity of lifetime to get revenge.

Notice ***verse 2 of chapter 24. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to see David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks.***

Stop for a moment.

2. A Compelling Opportunity

Saul has chosen 3,000 elite troops – especially skilled warriors – to help him chase David down and crush him to death.^{iv}

David would have been able to see for miles – and he would have seen Saul and his elite troops coming their way.

Shepherds placed walls of stones around cave entrances to protect sheep from wild animals as they bedded down for the night.^v

Now notice ***verse 3. And he (Saul) came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself.***

Your translation may read, "***he covered his feet.***"

This is a euphemism for, well, going to the bathroom.

I think this simple, earthy, fact is given to us to let us know that Saul is absolutely, totally, vulnerable to an attack.

He has no idea that 600 pairs of eyes are watching him sit there, reading his newspaper.

Scholars add their comment from historical studies on even these rather transparent issues that Saul suffered from constipation – it was called even back in ancient days, "the curse of kings."^{vi}

All that to say, Saul wasn't in that cave for a couple of minutes – he was more than likely struggling to relieve himself and he's evidently so distracted – **perhaps in quite a bit of discomfort** – almost as much discomfort as my own right not in having to explain this verse to you – he's so preoccupied he doesn't hear the whispering behind him, somewhere deep in that cave.

And here's what they're whispering, verse 4. And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'"

In other words, David this is it . . . the fact that Saul decided to use this very cave for a rest stop . . . without any guard around him . . . is proof that this is your moment to strike.

I mean, God has set this up!

Can you imagine their excitement as they watch David slip through the dimness of that cave with Goliath's sword in his hand.^{vii}

Notice ***verse 4b. But David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.***

What?

I got a piece of his robe!

You were supposed to take off his head.

You could translate this – ***David cut off the wing – the lower train – of Saul's garment.***

One Old Testament scholar writes that David symbolically deprived Saul of his royal authority and transferred it to himself and immediately he felt guilty that he'd gone too far.^{viii}

Verse 5 says, his heart struck him. That is, his conscience convicted him.

Come on . . . you just cut a piece of cloth away . . . besides, that's your royal robe he's wearing anyway.

Learn it from David here: one of the marks of growing in grace is a sensitive conscience. Even the smallest offense – the most minor reaction – the first self-centered thought – becomes too heavy a weight to carry for very long, without confessing.

This was David's chance to get even, and he feels guilty now at even touching the King's robe in a spirit of defiance.

Verse 6. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to even put out my hand against him, seeing his is the Lord's anointed. So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul.

Isn't it interesting how the same event can bring two entirely different interpretations?

- 600 men saw this is God's will; an opportunity for David to take Saul's life and take his throne;
- And 1 man saw this as God's will to spare the king's life

One author pointed out that David communicated a tremendous truth here – while Saul was in the wrong, it was not David's job to make it right . . . that was God's job. And David realized that.^{ix}

As Saul gets up and leaves the cave, he is oblivious to the fact that the obsession of his murderous envy and hatred has just saved his skin.^x

However, while David won't harm the king, he will confront him. He might not be able to change Saul's heart, but he will deliver the facts and challenge Saul's misguided obsession and sin.

3. A Convicting Conversation

Notice **verse 8. Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the King!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. 9. And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, "Behold, David seeks your harm?"**

In other words, Saul, people are talking, but you're listening to the wrong people. They don't want you to lose your crown because they don't want to lose their own place or power.

David is effectively saying, "Saul, stop listening to the wrong people . . . the wrong gossip."

Verse 11. See my father (by the way this is a touching reminder at the outset that Saul happens to be David's father-in-law) – **see – look my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it.**

Phillip Keller wrote on this confrontation, Can you see David there at some safe distance away – can you see him suddenly hold his arm up to display the train of Saul's royal robe – see it fluttering in the hot wind, one end cut away by the razor-sharp sword of Goliath. Here was proof.^{xi}

He wasn't just saying to Saul he was loyal, he acted like it.

And the result was unbelievably – and wonderfully – amazing.

Saul began to cry.**16b. And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands.**

I mean, Saul is overwhelmed.

The truth of his close encounter with death shakes him to the core and here stands the King of Israel, weeping.

This might well have been the pivotal moment of his life.^{xii}

He was moved . . . he recognized David's nobility . . .^{xiii}

He admitted his evil heart; he cried hot tears, but tragically it was a short turning point; Saul will march back home unrepentant . . . and he will chase David again in a matter of weeks.

One author wrote 60 years ago, "Emotion that does not lead to action, only leads deeper into rebellion."^{xiv}

Did you notice the contrast here? David is convicted of the slightest act of rebellion, and Saul will refuse to truly repent of pride and envy and premeditated attempts to murder.

As we wrap up our study, let me give you two lasting impressions from David's reactions.

- First, every believer ought to expect to be chased at times.**

Like a mouse . . . chased . . . cornered . . . treated unfairly, unjustly, unkindly.

But to look for ways to get even is to stem the flow of grace in your heart and life; and you become the victim over and over again as you relive the hurt and pain.

I can't imagine what you might be going through today beloved – but I can encourage you to not only look to David's example, but to the Son of David, who will be treated with the ultimate injustice and betrayal.

Look at the grace of Jesus Christ – who endured the cross, when He could have struck back.

Every believer wants to be more like Jesus Christ; it's probably the number 1 thing on your prayer list – “Make me more like You, Lord.”

But not those nails . . . and those insults . . . and that betrayal . . . and that spear . . . and that cross.

As Paul wrote, “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship – the sharing – of His sufferings. (*Philippians 3:10*)

Expect to be chased . . . and hounded . . . if you truly want to be like Christ.

b. Surprise those who mistreat you by refusing to get even.

That doesn't mean you become everybody's doormat. In fact David will say to Saul, several times – look at *verse 12 – May the Lord judge between you and me – 24:12.*

In other words, I am entrusting this situation to God and God will judge you and me and determine who is truly rebelling against Him.

And David even goes so far as to say he's the innocent one. He says in *verse 15. The Lord will plead my cause and deliver me from your hand.*

In other words, “Saul, I'm not going to retaliate; I'm not going to get even, but you need to get right with God.”

For those of you right now being chased by unfair treatment or unfounded accusations or hateful rumors . . . leave the ultimate vindication of your reputation in the hands of God.

God will take care of it one day . . . the record of history will straighten out the innuendos and the criticisms and the lies and the rumors . . . learn from David here who said, “I'm leaving this in the hands of God.”

I hesitate telling you this story, simply because in it I happened to do the right thing . . . I'd rather give you stories from my past where I did the wrong thing, rather than create an impression that I have it all figured out.

Whenever I come to this text, I think of this one event.

It occurred early in our marriage. When we arrived in Detroit, Michigan where I enrolled for my first masters' degree, we eventually moved into the most inexpensive apartment we could find. It was an old two story house near the Fischer Body Plant - if you know anything about Detroit you know that living near the Fischer Body Plant meant when you parked outdoors, your car would be covered with a thin layer of soot in the morning; it bellowed from those huge industrial smoke stacks just across the river.

It wasn't the best neighborhood – in fact, you'd want to be indoors at night; but the rent was \$150 a month. We had met the landlord and church and this gracious believer gave us great deal – only \$150 a month for the entire downstairs of his former home. His mother occupied the apartment of the second floor.

And that would become our challenge.

His mother was an unbeliever, an alcoholic . . . and extremely angry and bitter that her son and his family had moved out, and we had moved in.

Our landlord had no idea she was going to respond the way she did.

She would come in late at night or in the early morning hours from the nightclub and stomp all the way up the stairway – knowing those bare wooden steps led directly over our bedroom.

She began to accuse us of stealing things – she accused me often, with vicious profanity . . . of all sorts of things.

Nothing we tried to do for her helped. No matter how kind or generous or helpful we tried to be, nothing worked.

It became a war of nerves.

On one occasion we bought an old upright piano, but whenever I played it, she would stamp her feet on the floor – which was our ceiling. She would yell and curse loud enough upstairs to interrupt whatever we were doing.

This went on over a year.

Finally, seminary graduation was just around the corner and we were preparing to leave.

One afternoon I walked out of the back porch toward the garage and she was standing on the balcony of her apartment overhead. When she saw me, she stopped sweeping and began to curse and swear – accusing me this time of stealing her garden hose and you've made my life miserable and you're just a hypocrite and you're not really going to be a

preacher and you are a blankety, blankety, blankety. Only she used different words.

I just kept walking . . . and then she said, ‘Do you know what you are.’ And then I turned around. She stopped – and for the first time I’d ever done it, I yelled back up at her, “Do you know what you are?” She stopped . . . I stopped . . . the neighbor next door on her back porch stopped to listen . . . the birds stopped in midair to listen . . .

In that split second of hesitation I chose the words – and all I can say is that God took over – I simply looked up at her directly and said in a lower tone of voice, “You are just a very unhappy woman.”

With that I turned and walked into the garage – I can tell you, it took 30 minutes to lower my blood pressure as I drove away.

Nothing had worked . . . we had failed . . . frankly, we couldn’t wait to move away.

When we moved to Dallas for my final masters’ degree – a couple of months after moving there, we got a surprising phone call. It was from Ron, our former landlord.

He said, “Stephen, you won’t believe it. After you moved away, she finally agreed to go with us to church – she had never agreed in all the years before. He said, “Today, I was able to lead my mother to faith in Jesus Christ.” Then, after that, when we began to talk about new tenants for downstairs she said to me, “Would you please get some people to live downstairs like Stephen and Marsha.” Ron said, “I knew you would like to know.”

Beloved, when I suggest that you surprise others by refusing to get even . . . let me add that you surprise yourself.

Surprised by the grace of God – not only the grace of God *to* you – but praise to His name – the grace of God *through* you.

Perhaps you are in some cave near the oasis of Engedi . . . you’ve got a chance to strike back . . . to get even . . . to get revenge . . . to settle the score.

May I urge you to resist the urge to get even.

And, like David . . . like the Son of David, leave a lasting impression that resonates with grace of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/9/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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