

Prayer

Almighty God and Lord of all, within Your gaze You see the whole of creation, and within Your grasp You hold the entire Universe. May we who see everything through the limitations of time and space have the humility and courage to receive from You all You have offered us; Your love, Your grace, Your salvation and the hope of life eternal. Thank You, Lord Jesus for Your endless generosity: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Pastors

In this coming week we will pray for the church's pastors. By this I mean those who have the task of caring for the people of God in leadership and service. Pray for your 'pastor'.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who are the victims of political violence today*
- *Pray for the world of sport, and pray for integrity in its financing*
- *Give thanks for daily blessings*

Meditation

Be released in worship by the power of the Spirit:

Worship which comes from deep within the soul,
And is a genuine sacrifice of precious time;

Worship which calls repentance from the stubborn sinner,
And changes people's hearts towards each other;

Worship which lifts up every voice in spiritual song,
And which truly feels like music to the soul;

Worship which takes the Word of God as serious, holy,
And speaks prophetically to everyone who comes;

Worship which involves everyone who God has called to come,
And cannot happen without my commitment and yours;

Be liberated in worship to love and serve the Lord!

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 19:11-18

¹¹ *Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep watch over him, planning to kill him in the morning. David's wife Michal told him, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed."* ¹² *So Michal let David down through the window; he fled away and escaped.* ¹³ *Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed; she put a net of goats' hair on its head, and covered it with the clothes.*

¹⁴ *When Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick."* ¹⁵ *Then Saul sent the messengers to see David for themselves. He said, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him."* ¹⁶ *When the messengers came in, the idol was in the bed, with the covering of goats' hair on its head.* ¹⁷ *Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has*

escaped?" Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go; why should I kill you?'"

¹⁸ Now David fled and escaped; he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and settled at Naioth.

Review

Our story of David and Saul has moved on. Predictably, Saul irrationally lost his temper with David again, forcing David retreated to his house (1 Sam 19:8-10). There, he was confronted by his wife who told him bluntly that there is no going back. David would have to flee from the court of Saul immediately. What happens next is not immediately clear, but it seems that David's house was in the walls of whatever town Saul was occupying with his court (it was not Jerusalem – a city yet to be invaded by David, and only when he finally ascended to the throne). Today's story about David has a clear parallel in the story of Rahab the prostitute, who let the Israelite spies out of Jericho by a window in the city wall (Joshua 2:15ff) so that the Israelites could return to capture the city. The parallel tells us immediately that David would return one day and capture Saul's Kingdoms of Israel and Judah for himself.

What is quite surprising in this story is the way that Michal deceived Saul's messengers in order to give David a chance to get away. The text describes her taking an 'idol', covering it with animal hair and placing it in a bed (19:13). Her story to the messengers is that David was sick but she was quickly exposed by Saul (19:17) who demanded David's head, sick or not. When confronted by her father, Michal protected David with a convenient story, because David had long since gone, to search out Samuel (19:18). It was natural that in these critical times, the young pretender sought his mentor, the man who had anointed him secretly and placed him in the perilous situation in which he found himself.

It might surprise us that Michal kept a life sized figure in her possession as an 'idol' (19:13). Scripture refers elsewhere to 'household gods' kept by families in very early times. Rachel stole some from her father Laban (Gen 31:34) when she fled with her husband Jacob to return to Canaan; and in Judges 17 there is a story of a Levite, a Danite family and a 'household idol'. The question that we naturally ask is what kind of worship of Almighty God was practiced amongst ordinary Israelites, when so many prominent figures appeared to use a variety of household gods which were completely contrary to the spirit of the Old Testament and the commands of God?

It is difficult for us to enter into the world of ancient peoples, but we know from the Old Testament that although the Law had been given through Moses, and the Israelites gained their identity as the 'people of God' through Abraham, worship as we know it today did not exist. There was no connection between 'worship' and the Sabbath (which God had given for rest – see Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8ff); moreover worship was associated with festivals, sacrifices, rituals and family meals (see Deuteronomy 12-18, for example). But there was always a danger that people not only worshipped the Lord as Moses prescribed, but also took on board other ancient practices including the worship of 'Ba'als', who were gods of rain and fertility. This is probably what Michal was involved with, and nothing is said in scripture here about its incongruity with the worship of God, perhaps because the focus of the story is upon David and his escape. Michal reaps what she sows later in the story of David, when her life degenerated with bitterness (see 2 Samuel 6:16f.).

As is often the case with Old Testament stories, we have to read the whole thing in order to see how God's purposes pan out, and David is the one we should keep our eyes on here, not Michal. David is the one who serves God alone and Michal's devious beliefs are one source of her downfall. David, meanwhile, had escaped from Saul, and there was not much chance of him producing a successor now that he had left his wife, a woman who

now appears less like the ideal mother of a son to David than ever. David was on the run and without a wife, and would be an outlaw for many years, learning the arts of survival in the tough terrain and politically ruptured world of the ancient Middle East. However, we must keep that matter of a wife, a son and a successor in mind all the time. It will eventually be a matter of pressing importance.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have you had to do something to 'save your life'? Share what it is, and imagine the feelings involved in our story today.
2. What idols are on display or locked away in your cupboards?
3. What do you think Samuel made of the story David had to tell him when they met? What advice could you imagine that Samuel might give?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The story of David's flight from Saul's court appears to have dragged on for some time, but each part of it tells us something else about David and looks forward to some aspect of his eventual return to the heart of the life of God's people, as their King. Sometimes, the Lord leads us on a long journey and we must be faithful for many years if we are to see the fruition of His plans for us. Instant results are not what Christian living is about!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Spend some time thinking through what you believe to be God's long term plan for your life. You may know this already, in which case pray about whether you are indeed fulfilling this plan. Make sure you know the vision and seek ways of making sure you keep it in mind.
- You may have to withdraw from something in order to have eventual victory under God's guidance. Is there something in your life from which you should withdraw?

Final Prayer

Almighty God; I give You my all in the journey of my life, so take the little I have to offer and use me. Change me into the person that You would have me be, and give me hope as I catch sight of Your glory. Thank You, Almighty God. AMEN