

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People loved by God, especially you graduates: Gracie, Shane, Makenna, Henry, and Elisha,
Our text wasn't specifically chosen for a graduation service.

It's just the next Biblical account in our OT sermon series this year, and as you know,
I love preaching and teaching on the OT, looking for Jesus and God's plan of salvation in each reading.

...

To give some background, we are in the years that King Saul reigned over Israel... He's their 1st king.

But because King Saul had rejected and disobeyed the Lord, the Lord had left him,
and chosen and anointed David to succeed him as king.

Though David had been nothing-but-loyal to King Saul and had won many battles for him,
Saul became very envious of David's growing reputation and was hunting him down.

...as follows in Jesus' name:

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. 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.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed." So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

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. And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' See, 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. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 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. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the Lord

that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

So... kind of an odd text for our service theme today regarding "heavenly riches" ...

there weren't any riches mentioned, earthly or heavenly, were there?

Nor is it specifically related to a graduation service... but I think there is still a valuable take away for each of us here. Let's see what God has for us in this account.

...

Graduations are certainly milestones.

They represent a certain level of achievement and preparation for the next steps in life.

They are often preceded by numerous "opportunities to succeed," otherwise known as tests, to see how well you have retained the information that has been taught,

or how you are able to use the information: making deductions, implications, and decisions.

As we see in our account, tests are a real part of life, but they aren't always the kind you take on paper.

David was put into a tough situation.

King Saul had been hunting him down... in order to eliminate the supposed threat to his rule.

It was completely unjust and a horrible abuse of Saul's kingly power.

So here was the test for David: should he kill the man who was actively trying to kill him... or not?

What if David's men were to do it? Would that be okay?

David's men believed that he should have, or that they could have.

They even tried to use God's promise to David, '**Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.**'

They were implying that if God had promised David that he would triumph over his enemies

AND he had already been chosen and anointed by God to be the next king,

then it would seem logical and appropriate for David simply to defend himself and strike Saul before Saul struck him down.

But David refused.

We're told that after merely cutting the corner of Saul's robe that **David's heart struck him**,

that is, his conscience was burdened... he felt guilty that he had ruined Saul's coat,

even if it was to send a message, in order to seek peace between them.

But notice WHY David refused. It wasn't because he didn't think he could actually kill Saul... ^{Goliath.}

Nor was it because he didn't really think he was in danger.

Read Psalms 57 and 142, written by David at this time. He knew his life was on the line.

David refused because Saul was still the king, the one that the Lord had anointed before him.

Regardless of whether Saul was acting justly or not,

David would not act unjustly and murder God's chosen king on his own accord.

Instead, as we hear in our text and those two Psalms, David trusted in the Lord to deliver him,

Listen to these lines from Psalm 57:

**Be merciful to me, O God, ... in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by. I cry out to God... who fulfills His purpose for me.**^{Psalm 57:1-2}

...

To a lesser degree, we have something similar going on in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel that was read just a few moments ago.

Though Lazarus was poor and sick, he didn't justify himself in stealing from or belittling the rich man. Instead, he waited on the Lord to deliver him. He believed as his name means, "the Lord is my help." So David, who was the anointed of God also, would not "help himself" by killing Saul; instead, he left it to God's judgment, timing, and work as to when he would ascend to the throne.

This text is so rich for us who are tested daily, that is, given opportunities to succeed, in our trust of God, and we SHOULD pass every single time... because God never fails to fulfill His promises. Of course, the devil would like to turn God's tests into opportunities to fail, what we call "temptations," and so we mistrust, misbelieve, or doubt God's word, His promises, His graciousness and mercy.

How often are we tested/tempted to believe that the Christian's life should be an easy life? That if you trust in God, all things will be butterflies, unicorns, and lollipops in this corrupted world? And yet, we hear of Lazarus, who received bad things in this life, yet was comforted in paradise. -Difficulties are not indications of God's disfavor, but opportunities to continue to trust the Lord.

Or how often might you have thoughts that the Christian is to be immune from injustices, that the government or your fellow citizens, or total strangers won't persecute you, won't bring false charges against you, or try to hurt your reputation or ruin you? And yet, David, the righteous and obedient subject, was being unjustly hunted down by his king. And what is more, Jesus even tells us to prepare for this, even bestows a blessing saying:
**"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven...."** St. Matthew 5:12

Or how often are you, dear Christian, tempted to justify taking matters into your own hands, to bring about what you think would be true justice, whether it is to get revenge on a brother who has hit you, a classmate who has slandered you, or a coworker or boss who has cheated you, or a government that has abused its authority?

We have these temptations every day. But remember: where there is a temptation, there is also a test. The devil would have you fail, to trust in yourself to deliver you: to get revenge or preempt injustices. On the other hand, the Lord would have you *fear, love, and trust in Him above all things*. This does not mean that you do nothing, that you can't use the appropriate authorities or legal resources that God has established for this very purpose. It means that you don't take justice into your own hands, and you don't put your confidence or trust in these recourses to deliver you, but in the Lord alone.

David is a great example of this in this particular instance, but he's only a shadow of our perfect Savior. Jesus, too, was unjustly persecuted by citizens and government. The religious leaders and political elites were constantly persecuting Him. How tempting it would it have been as the Son of God to simply zap those puny, proud people.

And yet, Jesus does not deliver Himself from their hands, doesn't get revenge, doesn't even curse them.
Instead, He warns them: **"you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power."** Mark 14:62
And He seeks their forgiveness: **"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."** Luke 23:34
And He trusts His Father's perfect plan, **"Father, into your hands I commit My spirit!"** Luke 23:46
And after this, He gave up His spirit and breathed His last.

God's justice looked very unjust on that day.

And yet the Lord worked out the greatest salvation the world has ever known,
as the Father unjustly, though mercifully, laid upon His own Son the persecutions, the injustices,
the abuses, the plots and acts of revenge, the curses, and all the other failings of the entire world...
not just of those perpetrated against Jesus by His enemies as He walked the earth,
but also those that you have committed against God and His authorities and your neighbors,
even of your distrust that God is in control and working for you.

And yet, everything was according to God's plan of salvation.

It was through those injustices that God was working for you, to deliver you from all of your sin.
To show you that you can trust Him, even/especially when things don't look/feel so great.
Jesus was perfectly trusting the Lord for you, so that on His glorious judgment throne,
He has justified you, that is declared you righteous... perfect... holy.

...

So here is our graduation text, reminding you that your tests are not over...

that while you can graduate from one academic level to the next,
until you pass from this world to the next, tests (and temptations) will come daily.

But you are not alone.

Like a horrible group test,

where the rest of the group goofs off and even derides the one student who has studied,
The Son of God and the Son of David, Jesus Christ, has passed the test for you and gives you the A+.
It is yours already... as your class verse says so beautifully and clearly:

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Romans 3:28

Peace be with you full and free, now and through eternity. ELH #595:2

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria