



DAVID PLAYS IN SAUL'S COURT

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

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1 Samuel 16:14-23
Second Message
Brian Morgan
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Growing up as a child, I always felt I was in the dark as far as my family history was concerned. My mother's silence, I would later learn, grew out of her pain at being orphaned at nine and the years of emotional abuse she suffered from her adoptive parents. As far as my father is concerned, well, he was just quiet. I was 12 before I even learned that he had a sister. I never met one of my mother's sisters until last November. Around that time, Aunt Marie, my father's sister, telephoned me and said that if I came to her 80th birthday party, and a family reunion in Salt Lake City, she had a gift for me. The gift turned out to be a Book of Remembrance of our family history, going all the way back to the 1500's!

I went to Salt Lake City for the family reunion and stayed with my mother's sister, Aunt Ruth. Following the birthday party, we sat down at her kitchen table and she began to tell me all the stories that made up the history of my mother's family. At one point she showed me a copy of the "Boston Globe" newspaper, dated April 16, 1922. On page 4 was a photograph of my mother playing cello and her two sisters playing piano. The headline read, "Mormons or Gentiles—Which?" Apparently, a custody battle was going on. A certain opera singer was trying to adopt the three orphan girls and move them from New England to Salt Lake City. The court case made headlines in the newspaper for days. The whole community was up in arms about the possibility of these young orphans being relocated to Salt Lake.

But one word from a little nine-year-old girl who was to become my mother settled the matter. Her mother (my grandmother) was a concert pianist. She had told her daughter, a child prodigy cellist, that if anything ever happened to her, she wanted her friend, the opera singer who was fighting for custody of the girls, to adopt them so that their gift for music would be enhanced. This little girl's word to the judge in the custody case determined her destiny. She didn't want to go to Utah, but she told the judge that it was her mother's wish that this woman adopt her and her sisters. To the outrage of all of New England, the little girls headed West to live in Utah. Years later, that girl would meet and marry the man who would become my father.

Later, when I thought about this story, two things struck me. I was amazed at the sovereignty of God displayed in orchestrating the events that resulted in the meeting of two people who were later to become my mother and father. It's hard to say this, but I'm glad my mother went through all that pain. If she hadn't, of course, I wouldn't be here today! The second thing that had an impact on me was the legacy of musicianship which I inherited from my family. To my regret, I failed to appreciate this until my later years. Now it is too late to do anything about it. My trip to Utah certainly accomplished one thing: I came home with a new sense of privilege at being rooted and grounded.

As a Christian, of course, my spiritual roots go far deeper than a mere five hundred years. It is sad to think that most Christians seem uninterested in their spiritual roots. My generation of Christians is as ignorant of its spiritual history as I

was of my family history. In fact, we may be the most ignorant generation of the past two thousand years. If we seem to lack a sense of identity, if our convictions and ethics fall short, I feel it is because we are ignorant of the stories that make us who we are.

It is my prayer that this series on the life of David will help us rediscover the stories of our spiritual heritage. As Christians, we have been grafted into a tree whose roots go back three thousand years. What do you think lies at the very heart of our spiritual roots? The answer may surprise you. Just as my own family's roots are deeply sunk in music and musicianship, the Christian's spiritual roots lie in music, in the psalms of David, the marvelous prayers that he set to music. David, our great forefather in the faith, was a poet and a musician whose musical legacy has shaped the spirituality of Jews and Christians throughout the generations. It is to our shame that we have neglected the Book of Psalms. We have failed to use it as an avenue of prayer to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. Today, then, we will recount the story of David the musician.

Our first study in the book of 1 Samuel opened with the prophet grieving over King Saul. But God intervened and spoke to the prophet, saying, "How long...will you grieve over Saul, while I have rejected him, from being king over Israel?...I have selected (lit. "seen") a king for myself." We learned that the cure for Samuel's grief was to *come and see* the beauty of the new king. God was educating him to learn to *see* as God *sees*; he would anoint a new king in Israel.

God found such a king for himself from the back country of Judea. The youthful David, a shepherd boy, had been rejected by his family. But in his rejection he had learned to pray and seek the face of God. It was this David, the youngest and most insignificant son of the family of Jesse, whom Samuel anointed as king. Following his anointing, the Spirit of God "rushed upon David from that day forward."

Today, we will see how God maneuvers his newly anointed servant from the wilderness of Judea into the royal court of the rival king. There he will begin to influence the people of Israel. In this passage we get our first glimpse of David in the role of musician.

Before we get into our text, to help us better understand these stories I will set out three simple clues to the art of storytelling.

Three Clues to Storytelling

(a) Stories are built on words

Here is the first clue: look for words that are repeated. This is the best way to discover the theme of a text. Our text this morning, for instance, is built around the word *spirit*. This word is used seven times in the text, six times as a noun and once as a verb (in verse 23, where it is translated as *refreshed*). The word *spirit* also frames the scene. The opening words in the scene are "Now the *Spirit* of the Lord..."; while the closing words are "...the evil *spirit*." The theme of the passage,

quite obviously, is built around God's Spirit and evil spirits.

(b) Stories have a definite structure and movement

Here is the second clue: Stories and scenes have definite structure and movement. There is often a climactic center (called a *center-line*), upon which everything turns. Then the images turn back on themselves and are repeated. The story ends where it began, but something new has been injected.

(c) Individual stories make up a larger drama

Biblical stories are not isolated, unrelated incidents designed to teach morality; rather, in the Canon of Scripture they make up the pieces that form the larger whole. Biblical narrative stories give rise to powerful emotions in the reader by evoking memories of past incidents in Israel's history. Sometimes, even a word or phrase can evoke memories of other stories. For example, last week we read the phrase, "he [Samuel] anointed him [David] *in the midst of his brothers*." This reminds us of the story of Joseph and his brothers, with its poignant theme of rejection. Bible stories often evoke memories of past events in Israel's history.

But they do more than that: *They foreshadow the future*. They become linked into a larger whole and are repeated again and again (scholars call this "type scenes"¹). With new pathos, intensity and emotion, they begin building to the grand climax of the Jesus story. That is when Israel's stories are reenacted and made new in her Messiah. Take the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well. Most of us are not aware of this, but this is the seventh time this story is recorded in Scripture. But in this instance, it is told differently. This time, Jesus makes everything new. In the Old Testament, Jacob met the beautiful virgin, Rachel, at a well, but in the New Testament, Jesus, the new Israelite, has a discussion with a five-times married Samaritan woman at a well. Think of the emotional impact on the Jews when they heard about that meeting.

The stories in 1 Samuel, by the way, find their climax in the gospel of Luke. Tom Wright, an Oxford scholar, points out that the book of Luke is structured around the story of Jesus "as the fulfillment, the completion, of the story of David and his kingdom."²

There is one other very important thing to remember: The story of David and the story of Jesus are not finished until they become your story. Let me illustrate. One day in 1989, I was sitting on a hillside in Romania, together with some Romanian brothers, hiding from the security forces. I opened my Bible and began reading Psalm 27. This psalm of David's hiding in a secret place from Saul and singing the praises of God in that place became Jesus' own story. Now it had become my story, too. I found myself moved to tears at how privileged I was that my story had coalesced with theirs. This is what makes the Bible stories so exciting. The whole Bible is meant to be read that way.

Now getting back to our story, we want to answer the question: How is God going to maneuver David, an unknown youth from the secluded Judean wilderness, to center-stage in the royal court of King Saul? Let's begin by reading the opening verses of our text, 1 Samuel 16.

I. Evil Spirits and Insightful Servants (16:14-17)

Now the **Spirit** of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil **spirit** from the LORD terrorized him. Thus Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, an evil **spirit** from God is terrorizing you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a **man** ("*man*," the key word of chapter 17) who is a skillful player on the harp;

And it shall come about when the evil **spirit** from God is on you, that he shall play with his hand, and you will be **well**." So Saul said to his servants, "**Provide** ("*see*") for me now a **man** who can play **well**, and bring him to me." (16:14-17, NASB)

Saul's disobedience leads the Spirit of God to depart from him, creating a moral vacuum in his soul. An evil spirit, sent from the Lord, enters the spiritual void, to "terrorize" Saul. The Hebrew is graphic. It means "to fall upon, overwhelm, to be overtaken by sudden terror." The symptoms could be described as those of a manic-depressive. One moment the king was driven by insane rage, the next, he had fallen into dark depression.

You may find troubling the notion that it was the Lord who sent the evil spirit on Saul. Clearly, that is what the text says. As a matter of fact, on four different occasions the narrator declares that this evil spirit was from the Lord (14,15,16,23). Other texts confirm this (Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 19:9). We can take great comfort, however, from the obvious lesson here, and that is that evil spirits cannot operate on their own; they must operate under the authority of the Sovereign God. Saul is given over to an evil spirit because of his refusal to submit to the rule of God. Disobedience is a serious offense. In fact, according to Samuel, to disobey a direct commandment from God is as the sin of divination (15:23). How ironic to think that Saul, the disobedient king, finally resorts to divination because the Lord will no longer speak to him. If the king refuses to destroy God's enemies, then God's enemies will destroy him.

In the New Testament, we learn Jesus was given the power to rule over spirits. He empowered the apostles, and the apostles in turn empowered the church to do this. (When the church in Corinth failed to discipline a man who was committing incest, Paul delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, 1 Cor. 5:5.) The lesson is clear: Disobedience is not to be taken lightly.

In this story, it is the servants who discern Saul's problem and it is they who propose the solution. How sad. Having turned his back on the Lord, Saul seldom sees anything anymore. The servants suggest that a harpist be brought to Saul's court. The skill of the harpist, they say, will soothe the king whenever the evil spirit from God comes upon him — and "you will be *well*," they promise (there is another key word in the text).

Saul responds by saying, "Provide (*see*) for me now such a man." These are the exact words that God used in chapter 16. God has so skillfully orchestrated the situation that he creates in Saul the need for the man he has already "selected (seen) for himself" (16:1). What are the instruments that God uses to get his servant to where he wants him? The answer is, evil spirits, and insightful, unnamed servants. Oh! the majesty of God!

This brings us now to verse 18, the center-line of the text (the verse also has its own center-line);

II. David Identified (16:18)

Then one of the young men answered and said,
"Behold, I have **seen** a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite
who is a skillful musician,
a mighty man of valor, a warrior,
one prudent in speech,
and a handsome man;
and the LORD is with him."

One unnamed servant steps forward and says he has *seen* just such a man, one son of Jesse. This is the center-line of the

text. Notice that the focus is on the credentials of the son of Jesse. The point is, David is so gifted that no opposition is possible! The servant lists David's qualities in coordinating pairs, moving from the outside of the list to the center. First, "a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite" is linked with the last quality, "a handsome man" (literally, a "man of shape," meaning "well built." David is articulate and artistic — "prudent in speech and a skillful musician."

David had a marvelous gift to write and sing praises and prayers. He not only composed music for worship (seventy-three of his hymns are found in the Psalter), but he invented the musical instruments that accompanied them (Amos 6:5).

The center-point, however, is his strength. The servant says, "a mighty warrior and a man of war." David was so strong his arms could "bend a bow of bronze" (2 Sam 22:35). What a combination! A Renaissance man, musical and rugged!

David Roper describes him in these words:

David had incredible presence — an intangible elitism and magnetism that attracted others. He cast a spell on everyone. Saul loved him. Jonathan loved him. Abigail loved him. Women made up songs about him. Men flocked to him and were willing to die for him. Achish the Philistine described him as an "angel of the Lord." Ittai the Gittite would not leave his side in exile. What gave him that power over others? The bottom line, as the young courtier put it, was that "the Lord is with him."

When the Massoretic scribes inserted musical notations to chant the Hebrew Bible, they divided every verse into two portions (not necessarily of equal length). In verse 18, the half-way point comes after the word "handsome man," indicating that all the previous attributes are the result of what follows, "the LORD is with him." And David knew this, as you will see when you read his psalms.

"For by Thee I can run upon a troop;
By my God I can leap over a wall.
God is my strong fortress;
And He sets free the blameless in His way.
He makes my feet like hinds' feet,
And sets me on my high places.
He trains my hands for battle.
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze."
(2 Sam 22:30, 33-35)

So we have arrived at the center-line of this scene, with David in full view and clearly identified.

Next, he is sent for.

III. David Sent For (16:19-22)

So Saul **sent** messengers to Jesse, and said, "**Send** me your son David who is with the flock." And Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread and a jug of wine, and one young goat, and **sent** them to Saul by the hand of David his son. Then David came to Saul, and stood before him, and Saul loved him greatly; and he became his armor bearer. And Saul **sent** to Jesse, saying, "Let David stand before me; for he has found favor in my sight."

Using his kingly power, Saul delivers an executive order and *sends* for David. Jesse responds by sending his son on a donkey, with bread and wine, and a young goat as a sacrifice. Do you think that Jesus' disciples remembered this story when they saw him ride into Jerusalem, lowly, mounted on a donkey? Later that week, he would offer them bread and wine. But there was no goat. He himself would be the sacri-

fice.

So David arrives at the court of Saul. And the king "loved him greatly; and he became his armor bearer." Then Saul issues another executive order requesting that David take up permanent residence in his court since "he has found favor" in his sight.

The closing verse would seem to indicate that everything worked perfectly for Saul.

IV. Epilogue: "All is well...?" (16:23)

So it came about whenever the (evil) **spirit** from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play with his hand; and Saul would be **refreshed** (same root as *spirit*) and be **well**, and the evil **spirit** would depart from him.

The proposal by the unnamed servant is adopted, and his plan works. Whenever the evil spirit came, David played his harp and Saul would be *refreshed*. (This is the same root as the word "spirit"; it means "to make wide, spacious"; thus, David's playing brought Saul relief from the pressure.) Josephus, the Jewish historian, confirms this: "Saul was pleased with him [David], and made him his armor-bearer, and held him in very great esteem; for he charmed his passion, and was the only physician against the trouble he had from the demons, whenever they came upon him, he recited hymns, and played upon the harp, and thus, brought Saul to his right mind again."

Behind the story of the two kings is the story of two spirits. The story opens with the Holy Spirit leaving Saul and an evil spirit taking his place; it closes with the Holy Spirit now in David, confronting the evil spirit in Saul. Through David's skill with the harp, Saul's evil spirit is subdued. The king is refreshed and all is well — but only on the surface. This young man, David, is about to unravel Saul's kingdom.

God in his sovereignty has skillfully maneuvered this shepherd boy by means of his gift for music into the court of the king.

I want to end by giving three reflections on this text.

V. Reflections

(a) How to Spiritually Maneuver

What do you think drives this story of David? The answer is, the sovereignty of God. Behind the scenes, behind all the executive orders lies the constant, resolute, sovereign will of God. He selects the king that he wants, then he uses the most unlikely instruments to maneuver his servant to the stage of his choice. An evil spirit creates the need; unnamed servants propose the solution and identify David; and an arrogant, disobedient king (who thinks he is still in charge) issues all the executive orders. Thus does David arrive on center-stage.

Have you ever felt a desire to be on-stage, playing a role in God's redemption drama? Deep down, we all hunger to have influence in life. We want to influence our children, friends, fellow-workers, neighbors. This text teaches that we do not have to worry about creating our own stage. Part of the mystery of the evil that is reported every night on the television news is that evil spirits are let loose in order to create despair in the hearts of people. It is then, out of that sense of despair, that we are invited to come onto their stage as unnamed servants and announce that we have found the New David, Jesus Christ, who can deal with their demons.

What should we do while we are awaiting that invitation? Let us do what David did. In the wilderness, he focused on maturing spiritually. He learned to pray, and he refined his

skills of speech and music. Then, when the time was right, he was beckoned onto the stage. Our task is not to manipulate, but to grow spiritually and then allow God to *invite* us to the stage of his choice.

(b) The Necessity of Confrontation

God's kingdom does not grow in a terrarium where everything is controlled and growing conditions are perfect. In setting forth his kingdom on earth, God brings David, his chosen representative, into the palace of the rival king to confront demonic forces in Saul. The spiritual king must of necessity learn to confront the earthly powers of darkness and face rejection in order to mysteriously advance the spiritual kingdom. The same thing happened with Jesus. At the moment of his birth, the earthly powers were confronted and Herod tried to kill him. He grew up in hostile Israel and was rejected, but his rejection paved the way for the Gentiles to enter the kingdom of God. Luther and Calvin birthed a Reformation in the church by challenging the corruption of their day. Confrontation is inescapable when the new order is being birthed within the old.

The lesson is clear: We cannot escape the world by building a holy community. God is secretly building the new order within the old, not apart from it.

(c) The Weapons of our Warfare

Saul's disobedience left his soul open to demons, and evil in its worst form infiltrated the king's palace, the very center of Israel's government. But amazingly, a shepherd boy, whose hands were skilled on the harp, had power over the demons! "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,*" says the Lord" (Zech 4:6). Later, in the dampness of a dark cave, David would reflect:

My soul is among lions;
I must lie among those who breathe forth fire,
Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows,
And their tongue a sharp sword.
My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!

Awake, my glory;
Awake, **harp** and lyre,
I will awaken the dawn!
I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises among the nations.
For your loyal-love is great to the heavens,
And your faithfulness to the clouds.
Be exalted above the heavens, O God;
Let your glory be above all the earth. (Ps 57:4, 7-11)

The men of war had their spears, but David had his harp. Through his prayers, the Lord's rule would have dominion over the nations.

When the Word of God is sung to music, the soul comes alive and demons are driven out. David's legacy to us is his prayers, the psalms. Let us not neglect to sing them.

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1. see Robert Alter's excellent chapter "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention," in his book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47-62.
2. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 381.



DAVID AND GOLIATH: CHOOSING A MAN

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 950
1 Samuel 17:1-54
Third Message
Brian Morgan
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First Samuel 17, the story of David's encounter with Goliath, is the third vignette in this Old Testament book which introduces David as Israel's newly anointed king. Each vignette presents David on Israel's stage, with a new credential to serve as the messianic king; and each sets the stage for Israel to identify her future King, Jesus of Nazareth.

In the first vignette (16:1-13), David is portrayed as the *shepherd*. To his family he is insignificant, but in the eyes of his God he is a chosen one. In the second (16:14-23), David is portrayed as the skilled *musician*. Through his prayers set to music, he subdues demons in the royal court. Today, in the third vignette (17:1-53), David is presented as the *warrior*, the representative man who does battle with Israel's enemies.

The chapter is built on this key term, "*a man*." It is used nine times (in verses 12, 12, 24, 25, 26, 26, 27, 28, 33). Even the term "the men" of Israel is actually singular ("*the man*" of Israel). It is rendered thus to portray the whole nation of Israel as *one man*, who is paralyzed by this *one* Philistine. How very different from what the nation was supposed to represent. Israel, of course, was meant to be the new man, the new humanity who would defeat the enemies of mankind.

Chapter 17 has three movements. First (vv 1-11), Israel is confronted by the Philistine giant Goliath, a man so imposing he paralyzes with fear the armies of Saul and all of Israel. His taunt to Israel, "Choose a man for yourselves...give me a man that we may fight together!" rings in their ears, causing dismay and paralysis, but it is unanswered. Then in the second movement (which is made up of three separate scenes, 12-22, 23-31, 32-40), the narrator traces how God orchestrates the situation so that *the man* of his choice is skillfully maneuvered to the front line of the battle and becomes *the man* of Saul's choice. The third movement brings the boy-king into one-on-one confrontation with Goliath.

The Ancient Philistines

A little background information on the Philistines will help us better grasp the story. Trude and Moshe Dothan are a Jewish couple who have worked for forty years uncovering the archaeological evidence of the Philistines. In their recently published book, "*The People of the Sea; The Search for the Philistines*"¹ they trace the history of this archaeological research. It's a fascinating book. According to the Dothans, a French force under Napoleon Bonaparte landed in Alexandria to conquer Egypt in 1798. Napoleon brought with him 167 scholars to research the history of the ancient Mediterranean world. Three hundred miles up the Nile from Cairo lay ancient Thebes, the city which Homer immortalized in his magnificent descriptions of "the hundred-gated Thebes" in his *Odyssey*. In Thebes, the French scholars discovered the Temple of Medinet Habu, the facade of which was still standing, its walls reaching to their original height of ninety feet. When they studied the carvings on the side of the temple depicting incredible scenes of war, they noticed strange enemy figures. The Dothans describe the figures in these words: "Unlike the bareheaded Egyptian soldiers, they had distinctive 'feathered' head-dresses, secured with straps under their chins. They wore short, kilt-like garments with prominent tassels, and some of the warriors also wore close-fitting corselets on their upper torsos."² Up to this point, it was commonly believed that these carvings depicted an Egyptian campaign which extended as far away as India. It took another generation to discover that the battle portrayed was not that of an Egyptian offensive campaign, but rather, of an Egyptian defense of its homeland, in which they almost lost everything to these invaders, the Philistines.

The Philistines were part of a larger group of peoples (the scholars refer to them as the *Sea Peoples*), who made several migrations from the Aegean to the Eastern Mediterranean over a period of two centu-

ries. Settling in this area around 1200 B.C., they were part of a long historical invasion process. Contrary to their bad press, the Philistines were not an uncultured, barbaric people. Archaeological findings in Palestine reveal that they were one of the most advanced cultures of the Ancient Near East. They were highly competitive in international trade; in parts of Palestine they held a monopoly on local trade and overland commerce; and they exhibited great ingenuity in the art of pottery making. They adapted their skills in whatever environment they found themselves, bringing to their work a combination of Greek, Egyptian and Palestinian influences. Their cities were far more complex and advanced than their Israelite contemporaries, as was their agricultural development and military prowess.

As we begin our text in 1 Samuel, we find Israel in face-to-face confrontation with the military machine of these people, the Philistines.

I. The Challenge from the Man (17:1-11)

(a) Setting the Stage for Battle (17:1-3)

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the **men** (literally: *man*) of Israel were gathered, and camped in the **valley** of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on one side, while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the **valley between** them. (NASB)

The scene opens with a description of the Philistine military initiative and Israel's counter-initiative. The two armies have taken the high positions for battle; a valley lies *between* them. Neither army wants to make itself vulnerable by leaving the high ground in order to confront the enemy in the valley below.

The Philistines, however, unveil a plan to break the stalemate. Verse 4:

(b) The Man from the Philistines (17:4-7)

Then a **champion** came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed with scale-armor which **weighed** five thousand shekels of bronze. He also had bronze shin guards on his legs, and a bronze javelin (slung) between his shoulders. And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear **weighed** six hundred shekels of iron; his shield-carrier also walked before him.

Goliath, who is called a *champion* (literally, "*man of the space in between*" — an apt description of the situation!), steps forward to challenge the army of Israel. The text focuses on his appearance, describing him from the top down, laying great emphasis on the weight of his armor. Many of the terms used to describe Goliath are non-Jewish. They have never seen armor like this before; thus "*scale armor*" is translated literally as "*fish scales*." So it is this awesome individual, standing some nine feet tall, his armor-bearer walking before him, who comes out to confront Israel. (In an ironic twist, it will be Saul's armor-bearer, David, who will respond to the challenge.)

Next, the challenge.

(c) The Challenge from the Man (17:8-11)

And he stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, and said to them, "Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you **servants** of Saul? **Choose a man** for yourselves and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me then we will become your **servants**; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our **servants** and **serve** us." Again the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day;

Give me a man that we may fight together.” When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Goliath taunts Israel: “I am a lord; you are slaves of Saul.” Then comes his challenge: “Choose a man! If you win (and you won’t), but if I win (and I will), you will serve us.” “Choose a man” becomes the haunting cry that echoes through the camp of Israel from the valley of Elah. As the echo penetrates the ranks of the “man” of Israel, there is no response, only silence.

From this scene of paralysis, to begin the second movement of the story the narrator reverts back to Bethlehem, to the home of Jesse.

II. The Son Arrives from Bethlehem (17:12-22)

(a) Introduction of Jesse’s Family (17:12-15)

Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of **Bethlehem** in Judah, whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons. And Jesse was **old** in the days of Saul, advanced in years among men. And the three **older** sons of Jesse had gone after Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the first-born, and the second to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David was the **youngest**. Now the three **oldest** followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s flock at **Bethlehem**.

Here we are re-introduced to the family of David, the man from Bethlehem, the “place of new things.” David and his brothers are set in dramatic contrast by their age, allegiance and occupations. Having gone after Saul, both the father Jesse and David’s older brothers have lapsed into the same paralysis of spirit that has stricken the king. David, described as “the youngest” (insignificant), tends the flock. He is a shepherd by occupation, a fact that will be the key to his victory over the enemy.

Jesse has an errand for his youngest.

(b) Jesse Sends David To His Brothers (17:16-19)

Now the Philistine came forward morning and evening, and took his stand for forty days. Then Jesse said to David **his son**, “Take now for your **brothers** an ephah of this roasted grain and these ten loaves, and **run** to the camp to your **brothers**. Also these ten cuts of cheese, bring to the commander of their thousand, and look into the welfare of your **brothers**, and bring back news of them. For Saul and they and all the **men** (literally: *man*) of Israel are in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.”

As the stalemate continues for 40 days (a significant number, pregnant with memories of Israel’s testing in the wilderness), Jesse becomes concerned. He sends his youngest with provisions to check on the welfare (*shalom*) of his *brothers* — the key word of the scene. These are the exact words which Jacob spoke to Joseph in Genesis 37:14. The reader is being prepared for the rejection David is going to experience.

David wastes no time in setting out for the camp of Israel.

(c) David Arrives at the Camp

So David arose early in the morning and **left the flock** with a keeper and took the supplies and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the circle of the camp while the army was going out in battle array, shouting the war cry. And Israel and the Philistines drew up in battle array, army against army. Then David **left his baggage** in the care of the baggage keeper, and **ran** to the battle line and entered in order to greet **his brothers**.

What a different spirit the boy David has. Without hesitation, he gets up early and *runs* to battle. Yet he does not neglect his responsibility to care for the flock and the baggage; he leaves all in the hands of a keeper. What a contrast to Saul. When he was called to a higher vision, he hid among the baggage (1 Sam 10:22). Picture the scene: the tallest man in Israel, stooping among the baggage. But David readily leaves behind these things for a higher calling and *runs* to the battle.

Through Jesse’s concern for his other seven sons, God has successfully maneuvered David to the front lines. Now he must get him from the outskirts of the camp into the very presence of the king.

The next section has three scenes. Each time someone gets a report saying that David has arrived inside the camp, the boy is being brought closer and closer to king Saul.

III. The Report of the Son Inside the Camp (17:23-31)

(a) Into the Army Camp (17:23-27)

As he was talking with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine from Gath named Goliath, was coming up from the army of the Philistines, and he spoke these same words; and **David heard** them. When all the **men** (literally: *man of*) of **Israel saw the man**, they fled from him and were greatly afraid. And the **men of** (*man of*) Israel said, “Have you seen this **man** who is coming up? Surely he is coming up to defy Israel. And it will be that the king will enrich **the man** who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father’s house free in Israel.” Then David spoke to **the men** who were standing by him saying, “What will be done for **the man** who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?” And the people answered him in accord with this word, saying, “Thus it will be done for **the man** who kills him.”

Here we see the great difference between David and Israel. David is governed by what he *hears* (Goliath’s taunts to Israel), while the rest of Israel is governed by what it *sees* (the size of Goliath, his armament, etc.). This is why David’s emotion is one of amazement rather than fear, and why he cries, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should taunt the armies of the living God!”

These words, which describe David’s faith, form the *center-line* of the chapter. David is governed by what he hears, not what he sees. And what he hears is blasphemy and the worship of idols. He knows any life built on idols cannot stand in the presence of God. God is finally taken off the shelf and introduced into the equation. This is the wake-up call all of us receive now and then. At the point of our struggle, a Christian friend suddenly comes along and surprises us by asking, “Where is God in this equation?” We had put him on the shelf and forgotten about him.

David even inquires about the reward for victory. It is nothing less than the king’s daughter. Ironically, this would make him a potential heir to Saul’s throne.

As David’s brothers get wind that he is in the camp, the action moves from the circle of the army to the family circle.

(b) Into the Family Circle (17:28-30)

Now Eliab his oldest **brother heard** when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger burned against David and he said, “Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to **see** the battle.” But David said, “What have I done now? Was it not just a question?” Then he **turned away** from him to another and said the same thing; and the people answered the same thing as before.

When David’s oldest brother Eliab hears that David is in the camp, an emotional scene results. Without any interrogation, he confronts David, accusing him of merely coming “to see” the battle — the very thing that paralyzed himself and all of Israel. Faced with this rejection by Eliab, David turns his back on his brothers. This is a significant act. David’s authorization comes from another source.

The action now moves to the court of the king.

(c) Into the Royal Court (17:31)

When the **words** which David spoke were **heard**, they **told** them to Saul, and he **sent** for him.

The report of David’s arrival has been carried from the army, to his family, and now to Saul. The king betrays no emotion. Once more he issues the executive edict, “send for him.” Thus God has finally got the “chosen son” before the “rejected” king, to be chosen by the king to do battle with Israel’s enemy.

What an amazing God we serve! When you are being sent on errands by people who have no interest in you, to serve people whom you don’t know, it is God who is doing the sending. He is placing you in the front lines, right where he wants you, to do battle with him on behalf of mankind.

This is what has happened with David, as we shall see.

IV. The Son Selected and Armed by the King (17:32-40)

(a) David's Conversation with Saul (17:32-37)

And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail on account of him; **your servant will go and fight** with this Philistine." Then Saul said to David, "You are not able to **go** against this Philistine to **fight** with him; for you are but a **youth** while he has been a warrior from his **youth**." But David said to Saul, "**Your servant** was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and **killed** him. **Your servant** has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the **living God**." And David said, "The **LORD** who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "**Go**, and may the **LORD** be with you."

David makes his proposal to Saul, "I am your *servant*, let me go and fight." Saul replies that David is a mere *youth*, with no experience in war like Goliath, who has been a warrior since his *youth*. David's response, in effect, is, "No problem. I'm not going to do battle as a warrior, but as an animal tamer!" He presents his resume to the king to show how on two occasions, once when the flock was attacked, and another time when the shepherd was attacked, he prevailed. He, not Goliath, would determine how the battle would be fought.

How wise of David. The world cannot be fought on its own terms. While Israel had never seen armor like Goliath's, the Philistines had never seen a shepherd's sling-shot. The LORD would deliver David. This was the key to his success. As an animal tamer, he would make the Philistine, "*like one of them*." Victory is assured because God has been blasphemed and holy war declared. Saul grants him permission.

The tallest man in Israel now tries to help the shepherd youth by clothing him in his armor for the looming battle.

(b) Arming David

Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. And David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, "I cannot **go** with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off. And he took his stick in his **hand** and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his **hand**; and he approached the Philistine.

Saul tries to clothe David as a warrior but, of course, everything is way too big. Besides, David has no experience in the use of these things. "Get me a can opener," says David. "I'm not fighting like a warrior. I'm going to do battle as a shepherd." He arms himself with what is *at hand*, a shepherd's arsenal — a stick and five smooth stones, projectiles a little smaller than baseballs. But these small smooth stones could be hurled from the shepherd's sling-shot at more than one hundred miles an hour. Why five stones? you ask. Some commentators hint that Goliath had four brothers. I think the point here, however, is that David has faith, but he was not so cocksure as to think that it would take only one shot to kill Goliath. God uses means together with our faith. Faith coupled with perseverance gains the promises.

David now makes his way to the battle.

V. The Battle (17:41-54)

(a) The Battle of Words

Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a **youth**, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "**Am I a dog**, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by **his gods**. The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the **birds** of the sky and the **beasts** of the field." Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in **THE NAME** of the **LORD** of hosts, the **God** of the armies of **Israel**, whom you have taunted. This day the **LORD** will deliver

you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the **birds** of the sky and the wild **beasts** of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a **God in Israel**, and that all this assembly may know that the **LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's** and He will give you into our hands."

As the combatants prepare to fight, their words are more important than the battle itself. Words display the source of the trust that lies behind actions. Goliath *sees* David and disdains him and his weapons, because he is a *youth* (insignificant). Then, invoking the names of his gods, he curses David. But here he makes a fatal error. Stepping out of his role for a moment as a great warrior, he asks, "*Am I a dog?*" This is the turning point of the battle. Goliath has forsaken his own terms for the battle and accepted David's. He goes even further, saying, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the *birds* of the sky and the *beasts* of the field" — not a smart thing to say to an animal-tamer.

David responds to Goliath's words by invoking the name of his God, the Lord of the armies of both heaven and earth, the God who commands the moon and the stars. Not only would David kill Goliath, he intensifies Goliath's threat, saying that *he* would destroy the Philistines and give their bodies to the *birds* of the heavens and the *beasts* of the earth. Then, what would happen on this battlefield would a lesson for all Israel: The Lord does not deliver by sword or spear. The battle is the Lord's.

Once David has spoken these words, the fight is as good over. The actual battle account itself is rather brief.

(b) The Physical Battle

Then it happened when the Philistine rose and came and drew near to meet David, that David **ran** quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground.

Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; **but there was no sword in David's hand**. Then David **ran** and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. And **the men** of Israel and Judah arose and shouted and pursued the Philistines as far as the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the slain Philistines lay along the way to Shaaraim, even to Gath (the home of Goliath) and Ekron. And **the sons** of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines; and plundered their camps. Then David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his **weapons** in his tent.

Once more, in typical style, David does not hesitate, but runs into battle, thereby seizing the initiative. Taking one of the stones from his bag, he slings it at the Philistine, burying it in his forehead. Goliath falls face down to the ground. The scene is reminiscent of what occurred when the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant and placed it in the house of their god Dagon. The following morning, the god Dagon was found face down before the ark (1 Sam 5:2). The fate of the hero is identical to that of the idol. Then David uses Goliath's own weapon to cut off the Philistine's head. Goliath didn't even have time to unsheath his sword. When the Philistines saw their champion face down, dead, they broke ranks and fled. Notice that all of Israel, the men of Judah and Israel, are energized by the work of David, the representative man. They partake in the spoils, and as they do they are given back their title as "sons." The son of Bethlehem has turned the spiritually paralyzed sons of Saul into men, full sons who subdue and plunder their enemies. Finally, David takes Goliath's sword as a trophy of victory.

Reflections

How do we make spiritual application of this epic story in our own day and age? There is no guesswork involved, really. The story of David, the chosen man in Israel who defeated Goliath, was to become the story of Jesus. Christ, the representative man, the new Adam, subdued Israel's ultimate enemy. But when David's story was re-enacted in Christ, it had immeasurably broader ramifications. We

will look at three of them.

(a) The Key to Maneuvering

David, the shepherd, was carefully prepared in the wilderness of Judea for his moment of battle on behalf of Israel. But no one knew about this. Even his own family disdained him. How could he possibly get from that remote place into the public sphere? He could not take a class on self-advancement; he had no apparent credentials. Only one person needed to know his credentials, however, and that was God. God used those who held the world's spotlight, people had no interest in David personally, to send him on errands. It was his hand that was behind it all. God used the wrong motives and prideful ambitions of men to get David from the back country, to the front lines, and finally to the very court of the king.

This, too, was the Christ story. He, too, was a hidden child. Born in Bethlehem and hidden for thirty years, Isaiah said of him, "In the shadow of His hand He has *concealed* Me...He has *hidden* Me in His quiver" (Isa 49:2). And how did God move Jesus into the spotlight to confront the great enemy of Israel? He used the evil intentions of Israel, and the greedy ambition of Judas, to bring his servant to the royal court. Unbeknownst to his enemies, he chose Jesus to do battle with the real enemy of Israel, and that battle which he won on the cross has held the world spotlight for two thousand years.

(b) The New Way of Victory

In the David story, the shepherd boy seized the initiative from the enemy, and in so doing redefined the battle. He would not fight on Goliath's terms, but on his own. They would battle not like warriors, but like civilians, a setting in which Goliath had no experience. And it was not much of a battle. The Philistine played into David's hands when he asked the question, "Am I a dog?" At that point, the fight was over.

Such was Jesus' story, too. When he walked the earth, all of Israel lay paralyzed before the might of the Romans, the great military machine of that day. But then the one from Bethlehem was brought into the camp. Reports about him were met with disdain by his Jewish brothers and by the authorities. Before the confrontation, one of his own, Peter, even offered to arm him. But, like David of old, this one rejected the warrior's weapons and clothed himself as a shepherd.

At this point, two new twists enter the story. First, the ending is very different. The New David did not cut off the head of the Romans. Far from it. They killed him. The enemy won. But in his apparent victory, the greater Goliath, the devil himself, was disarmed. John in his gospel said that the greatest weapon of the shepherd was his own life. And this is what Jesus did. He laid down his life to protect his sheep. But in dying, he won. "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col 2:15).

Here is the second twist to the story. Instead of asking the Israel of God to subdue the Romans, Jesus asked them to suffer like him and invite the Romans, and all nations, to join in the New Israel of God and participate in salvation worldwide. Jesus was referring to an entirely new outcome, one that zealots found not very exciting.

(c) The Invitation to Participate in the Victory

David's victory affected the whole nation, and all of Israel participated in the spoils. So it is with Christ, but on a much larger scale, because people from every nation participate in his spoils of battle. Christ, the New Adam, created a new human race which conquers and subdues evil. "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD." The spoils of the battle that he won are the spiritual gifts that are given to build up the church and witness to the world. The main battle, therefore, has already been fought and won. There is no need to fight it again; all that remains is a mop-up operation.

Peter Dugulescu, a Romanian pastor, was with us at our men's Bible study on Wednesday last. He is one of two pastors who stood up against the communists in that country a few years ago. He said that as a pastor, he had to choose to either be God's man or a compromiser. He refused to tell the secret police what they wanted to know, and he suffered the consequences. They bugged his house so that he could not even talk to his wife. They even hired a bus driver run him down. He was injured, but his life was spared. Later, he looked into the bus driver's eyes and said, "I forgive you." The police

came to arrest his pastor friend, but despite the tanks and troops lined up in the city where they ministered, people began to come out in support of them, singing and praying to God as they assembled. At last, on Christmas Day, 1989, the anti-Christ was toppled. Two hundred thousand people gathered in the city square to give thanks. They chanted, "Who will tell us about God?" After forty-five years of communism, no Orthodox priest would come out to address them. Peter seized the initiative. He made his way to a balcony that overlooked the square and asked the huge crowd to say the Lord's Prayer. As two hundred thousand people spontaneously dropped to their knees, for the first time in forty-five years, the Lord's Prayer was recited in public in that land. Isn't that what we need to see happen in America?

It is my prayer that God will re-enact the David story in all our lives, and that we will allow him to move into situations where we are paralyzed. With eyes of faith, let us seize the initiative, redefine the battle, and engage in warfare on new terms. Instead of beating our enemies, let us suffer on their behalf and win them to Christ. For it is "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD."

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1. For a complete and updated archaeological history of the Philistines, see the excellent work, Trude and Moshe Dothan, *The People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan/Domino Press, 1992).

2. Dothan & Dothan, 15.



DAVID AND JONATHAN: THE BELOVED GIFT OF GOD

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 951

1 Samuel 18:1-5

Fourth Message

Brian Morgan

March 13, 1994

Occasionally when I'm reading a Bible story, suddenly a particular event will become flooded with light, just as a stage set is illuminated when a spotlight is shone upon it. It is then that I feel beckoned to come on-stage myself. Time stands still as eternity, in a sense, seems to transcend history. I can almost hear angels sing. The power of such scenes lies in the fact that they are cameos of true spirituality in its purest form. At times like these we need to pause and savor the moment in all its glory.

The Old Testament story of Jonathan and David is just such a scene. It is one of the golden moments in the Bible, a holy cameo of human love and spiritual devotion. For me, this account evokes many personal memories. It brings to mind the first Christian brother I really trusted and became vulnerable with. He called me his *Jonathan*; I called him my *David*. We were best men in each other's weddings. My wife Emily and I named our firstborn son David Jonathan (*"the beloved gift of God"*). My grief over losing this precious gift was even more heartfelt as a result. One year later to the day, another PBC pastor lost his son. His son's name was Jonathan David.

The story of Jonathan and David also evokes memories of times I spent in Romania. In the summer of 1988, I was in the Retezot Mountains in that country, at an altitude of seven thousand feet, preparing to teach a group of Romanians I had never met before. I was concerned, because they seemed a bit distant. Then a sister who was a member of our team said to me, "Why don't you tell them the story of your children? Perhaps they will be able to identify with your suffering." So I shared my story. Before long, the wall between us came down. It had been undermined in a flood of tears. Later I was to learn that in the crowd were two brothers. Their names were David and Jonathan. Another Jonathan became my translator, and yet another Jonathan my mountain guide. The following year, all of these men put their lives on the line for me when I was being pursued by the security police — an experience that had a profound effect on my life and ministry. Finally, in the summer of 1992, I was present at a wedding in a little Romanian village when our own Jim Foster married Nelly, the sister of David and Jonathan.

The Jonathan and David story, therefore, recalls wonderful memories and intense emotions for me. I pray that the saga of these two Biblical heroes will become your story also.

In our last study, David, the newly-anointed boy-king, slew the great giant Goliath with a sling-stone. His victory over Israel's enemy astonished King Saul. As we take up our text today in 1 Samuel 17:55, we begin with the king's incredulous question to his commander, Abner, "Who on earth is this young man?"

I. The Presentation of David the Warrior (17:55-58)

Now when Saul saw David going out against the Philistine, he said to Abner the commander of the army, "Abner, whose **son** is this **young man**?" And Abner said, "By your life, O King, I do not know." And the king said, "You inquire whose **son** the **youth** is." So when David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the Philistine's head in his hand. And Saul said to him, "Whose **son** are you, **young man**?" And David answered, "I am the **son** of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." (NASB)

How ironic is Saul's question. Even after David's great victory, he is still a stranger to the king. Saul wanted a hero on his side, but neither he nor his commander, Abner, are aware of David's origins. This text, says J.P. Fokkelman, "suggests a process in Saul, a shift from growing amazement to bewilderment to uneasiness: who on earth is this young man?" To Saul's question, Abner responds, "By your life (literally: soul), I don't know." It is chastening to think that this youth, David, will cost Saul his life.

How odd, that the decisive battle in Israel was fought by a stranger, a mere *youth* (a word used two times in the text), a *young man* (a term used once in the text), who is a *son* (used four times) of unknown origin. When the battle is over, David still does not reveal his name to Saul. So it will be with Israel's future king, another Bethlehemite. "*Whose son is this?*" is the ringing question in the gospels among the Jews. "From whence are his origins? Galilee? Bethlehem? Heaven itself?" (John 6:42)

As Saul and Abner are speaking, the king's son, Jonathan, is listening. In the next verses, the response of his heart is set in dramatic contrast to that of his father.

Before we examine the text, it will be helpful to look at a little of the history of these two men.

II. First Glimpses of Jonathan (1 Samuel 13-14)

We first meet with Jonathan in 1 Samuel 13. He had led a raid on a Philistine garrison and smote them, but when he got home, it was Saul who blew the trumpet and claimed the victory. When the main camp of the Philistines heard about the raid, they organized a huge counter-offensive. With thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, they set out to go up against the Israelite army, which numbered only three thousand men. The terrified Israelites began looking for cover, fleeing into caves, thickets, cliffs and cellars. Meanwhile, back at headquarters in Gilgal, Saul was desperately trying to hold his army together long enough for the prophet Samuel to arrive and offer the burnt offering for the LORD's authorization for battle. But while Saul was waiting, the people began to scatter. So he took things into his own hands and offered

the sacrifice himself, an action that only the priest was authorized to do. At that point Samuel told Saul, "Now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you" (1 Sam. 13:14). Jonathan overheard these words of Samuel.

Jonathan then slipped out of the camp of terrified soldiers and with the help of his shield-bearer, crawled into the crags near Michmash. From these crags the narrator gives us a glimpse into Jonathan's soul by means of a little aside which he made to his armor bearer. "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few" (1 Sam 14:6). Jonathan then attacked the Philistines and slew about 20 men within the first acre of land. As the battle raged, an earthquake sent from the LORD began to reverberate in the camp of the Philistines so that they panicked and began killing one another.

With chaos spreading in the Philistine camp, Saul immediately took charge and arbitrarily imposed a fast until "he" had avenged "himself" of "his" enemies. Jonathan, unaware of the king's egotistical edict, found a large quantity of honey. The sustenance he gained from it enabled him to pursue the enemy while the rest of the Israelite army languished in hunger and fatigue. By the time they plundered the Philistine cities, they were so famished they ate meat without draining the blood and cooking it thoroughly — a violation of dietary laws. Saul then inquired of the Lord as to whether or not he should continue the offensive, but God did not answer. Assuming that there must be sin in the camp, Saul drew lots to find the "Achan" in their midst. To testify to his resolve, he invoked another impetuous oath: "Even if it is my own son Jonathan, he must die." The lot fell to Jonathan. We are reminded of Jephthah's impulsive vow which proved so costly to his daughter (Judg 11:35). But the people objected: "Shall he who brought us salvation die?" It was unthinkable that their savior should be put to death. The people's common sense prevailed over Saul's rigid impetuosity, overruling the king's impulsive vow, and Jonathan's life was spared.

This then is Jonathan, a young man with a discerning mind, an exquisite faith, a man of courageous initiative. He is forced to live under the rule of an oppressive father whose outlook is vain, his will arbitrary, and his demeanor controlling.

Armed with this information, we take up our text now in 1 Samuel 18, prepared for the contrasting responses of these two men, Saul and Jonathan, to the news that Goliath has been slain by David.

III. Jonathan's Spontaneous Affections (18:1-5)

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the **soul** of **Jonathan** was knit to the **soul** of David, for **Jonathan loved** him as his own **soul**. But **Saul took** him that day; and did **not** allow (literally: **give**) him to return to his father's house. Then **Jonathan** made a covenant with David; because he **loved** him as his own **soul**. And **Jonathan** stripped himself of the robe that was on him and **gave** it to David; with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. So David went out wherever **Saul sent** him, and pros-

pered; and Saul **set** him over the men of war; And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of the servants of **Saul**.

(a) A Day of Deep Affections

Witnessing the battle, Jonathan's soul is *knit* with the soul of David. The Hebrew word means "bind together as one." Ironically, the noun means "a conspiracy" — which is how Saul will interpret the relationship between his son and David (20:30-31). The term evokes the memory of the story of Joseph, when Judah spoke to Joseph concerning Jacob's love for Benjamin, saying "his life (soul) is **bound up with his life (soul)**" (Gen 44:30). No stronger human affection is possible. Pleading for the safe return of his daughter, Polly Klass's father said, "She is my life." This is the same kind of bonding that mothers feel with their newborns.

As Jonathan watches the battle, something deeply profound occurs in his soul: his life is mysteriously bound up with David's. Far from feeling threatened by David's success, he is very much moved by it, and a strange, deep, mystical love for David is generated in his soul. Instead of feeling jealous and displaced, he loves this kindred spirit even as his own soul. How utterly generous of Jonathan! "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," says Leviticus 19:18b. This text is not saying, "You shall love your neighbor and yourself." What it means is we must see the other person as he or she really is, quite apart from our own expectations and desires. For Jonathan, the day that David battled Goliath was a day of spontaneous affections, a time when a deep, mystical love for David was born in his heart.

Aelred of Rievaulx in his *De Spirituali Amicitia* observes that "the sacred bond of friendship between David and Jonathan...was consecrated not through hope of future advantage, but from contemplation of virtue...Jonathan was found a victor over nature, a despiser of glory and of power, one who preferred the honor of his friend to his own."¹

(b) A Day For Giving

Notice that these deep affections culminate in commitment. As Jonathan's life is bound up inextricably with David's, he makes a covenant with him. David Roper, my old college pastor, used to tell us, "Don't ever say to a woman, 'I love you,' until you're ready to say, 'Will you marry me?'" It was obvious to us that if we would do this, every future display of affection and service would have a commitment of loyalty as its foundation.

Just as young people in marriage give each other the gift of a ring to express their commitment, Jonathan gives a symbol of his commitment to David in the gift of his weapons. His giving away his arms is the sign of his transferring the title of champion to David, the national hero who acted in the name of the Lord of Hosts. And in the act of undressing, he renounces his right to the throne. So overcome is Jonathan at seeing the Spirit of God act in David, he strips himself of his robe. This action marks the finale to the scene of Saul's tearing of Samuel's robe (1 Sam 15:27). There Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you." Now Saul's son willingly gives his robe to the son of Jesse. Saul will strip later (1 Sam 19:24; 31:8-9), but only because he is forced to do so.

And notice that Jonathan holds nothing back. The Hebrew text is more emphatic than the English translation.

The word that is translated “including,” or “even to,” is used three times in the Hebrew text. Translating the English text thus would sound redundant, so the translators use the word *only* once. But the original says, “*including his sword, and including his bow, and including his belt.*” Jonathan gives everything he has to David. Loving your neighbor as yourself is a denial of self. It is not the granting of a tip. It means you are putting everything you have at his disposal until there is no self left. In this instance, of course, what it means is that Jonathan is giving up his right to the throne. Later, as we will see, his action will cost him his life.

When people give in this way, it is a beautiful thing to behold. This is why we like to take teams of people to Third World countries where people don’t have much in the way of material comforts. Even food is scarce. But Third World peoples have a way of demonstrating their love that is foreign to us in the West.

Something happens to you when you experience love like this. We have an excellent example of this in our congregation. A few years ago, Earle and Jolyn Canty traveled to Romania, hoping to adopt an orphan. They encountered many difficulties, but a young man named Mihai, whom they met on the street, began to help them. For ten days this man did everything humanly possible to help them. He welcomed them into his home, translated the adoption documents, and spent all of his waking hours assisting them. The result was that after ten days they were successful in adopting a little boy. They named him Samuel Mihai, in remembrance of the Jonathan figure who had stripped himself of everything he owned in order to help them. Some time later it was discovered that Mihai’s wife, Veorica, needed an operation in order for her to conceive. Earle and Jolyn flew the couple to the United States for surgery. A little over nine months ago, Veorica became pregnant. As her delivery date approached, her doctor told her that the baby would have to be delivered through a Cesarean section. Once more, the Cantys flew the couple to California. Last week, Veorica gave birth to a girl, Andrea Hannah. Can there be any doubt that these two children, Samuel and Andrea, will grow up to give testimony to the holy affections of their parents?

However, in contrast to these most holy affections of Jonathan and David, Saul demonstrates no emotions. In the text, only verbs of action are attributed to this Old Testament mover and shaker. Note his two-fold response.

IV. Saul’s Controlling Actions (18:2, 5)

But **Saul took** him that day; and did **not** allow (literally, **give**) him to return to his father’s house.

So David went out wherever **Saul sent** him, and prospered; and Saul **set** him over the men of war; And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of the servants of **Saul**.

(a) A Day For Taking

Saul sees the battle, but rather than sensing appreciation or love he suppresses his emotions. He responds by becoming a man of action. From his perspective, it is not a day for giving, but a day for taking. Jonathan gives, but Saul refuses to give. For the king, this is a day for opportunity, not a day worship, but one of self-advancement. He quickly seizes the initiative to further his rule. The phrase,

“Did not allow (literally, *give*) him to return to his father’s house,” is saying, in effect, “This is not your son, he’s my son!” He saw this as a day for taking, for seizing control of the situation, for taking charge of another person for his own advantage. Saul is a self-centered fruit picker who picks what others have cultivated to satisfy his own lusts.

Next, Saul issues an executive order.

(b) A Day For Executive Action

The king sends David out to enlarge his petty little kingdom. Saul is king, so wherever he sends David, that is where he must go, of course. And David is successful in his task. There is a very interesting play on words in the Hebrew text. Even in English, we have the alliteration: *Saul, sends, success*. In Hebrew, the alliteration is even more pronounced: all the words rhyme with the name “Saul.”

So Saul’s executive orders meet with success. One could not be faulted for expecting an emotional response from the king at this time, something along the lines of “then Saul rejoiced.” But no. What we get instead is another verb of control: “*Saul placed him over men of war.*” There is only one letter of difference between the Hebrew words for “placed” and “rejoiced” (*samah, samach*). In fact, when I first translated the text, I mistranslated the verb. This is a skillful play on words by the narrator. The reader might well be expecting Saul to rejoice (as the women do in the next scene), but he is still controlling the situation. While his emotions are left suspended, however, those of all the people and those closest to him are not. The actions of David are “*pleasing in their eyes.*”

I have noticed that Christian workers often fall into the sin of Saul in their ministries. Saul wanted to remain lord in his kingdom and have others serve him. Christian workers frequently take more joy in “placing” the Son over others, sacrificing worship for management, than they experience in the victory of the Son. What they do may look spiritual, but it is religious manipulation of the worst kind. If our hearts remain unmoved is because we are like Saul: We still want to run our own lives and be lords in our puny little kingdoms. So we suppress our emotions and remain active to in order to maintain our shrinking power base.

Thus in this text we behold two radically different approaches to the spiritual life. Jonathan sees the battle and his soul is bound up with the soul of David; he loves David as himself; he makes a covenant with him, renouncing his right to the throne; and places himself at David’s disposal. Saul, on the other hand, sees the battle and takes David for himself; he places him over others; and suspends his emotions.

V. The Jesus Story

In the New Testament, we see the David and Jonathan story re-enacted on the stage of Israel. John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets, has a following of disciples, but when he beholds the beauty of the King, and the Spirit of God resident in him, he says, “*I must decrease, He must increase.*” He strips himself of his disciples and gives up his kingdom for the Kingdom of another. Interestingly, like Jonathan of old, his actions would cost him his life.

This example set by John becomes the basis for true spirituality and service for all who will follow Christ. It is not service first and emotions later. The goal of spirituality is

to gaze upon the beauty of the Savior. Then, as we behold his victory on the cross, we will find our hearts strangely warmed and moved.

Richard Rolle wrote this of his experience along these lines:

I was more astonished than I showed the first time I felt my heart burn with fire. The sensation was not imaginary: I felt real warmth. I was amazed at the way the fire burst up in my soul and gave me unexpected comfort, and I kept touching my breast to see if there was some physical cause, then I was assured that it was the gift of my Maker. And so I am glad to melt into a desire of greater love; and especially I rejoice at the wonderful delight and spiritual sweetness of this holy flame with so comforts my mind. Before this moment I had no idea that we exiles could know such comfortable and sweet devotion: for truly my heart was as inflamed as if a real fire were burning there.

I call it 'fervor' when the heart and the mind are ablaze with eternal love. One can feel a fire burning within. I call it 'song' when there is in the heart a spirit of everlasting praise. The soul sings in perfect harmony with heaven, and the mind is enchanted by the song. Fervor and song arise from the utmost devotion, and together they bring an indescribable sweetness...These sensations are not mere illusions, but are the most exquisite result of all our deeds. (Richard Rolle: c. 1300-1349, from *Fire of Love*.)

If this does not happen with us, if we are too busy to stop and meditate, Jesus will gently but firmly rebuke us. This was what he did with Martha in the New Testament story of the two sisters. Martha's actions took precedence over worship and she suppressed her emotions to serve the Savior. But then she became controlled by them and angrily complained about her sister Mary who had chosen the better part. Jesus was forced to remind Martha, "*One thing is needful.*"

This was his rebuke, too, to Peter following the resurrection. Peter did not worship in joy and gaze upon the victorious Christ. Once again, he returned to his occupation of fishing. But Jesus' loving rebuke pierced his heart: "*Do you love me more than these?*" "Don't you have more affections for me than these fish, Peter?"

So let us gaze at the Christ and at the cross where he defeated our Goliath, the devil. Let us gaze until we are melted by his love, then all of our actions will be holy. When this love strangely warms our hearts, and for a few treasured moments we see the face of Christ in these, our brothers and sisters, Jonathan's story is re-enacted once more. How privileged are we that it should be so.

O honey-sweet heat, sweeter than all delight, more delectable than all riches. My God! My Love! Come into me; thrill me with your love; wound me with your beauty. Smother me with your comfort; give your healing balm to your feeble lover, and show yourself to me. For you are all that I desire, all that I seek. My heart yearns for you, and my body thirsts for you....I know of no sweeter delight than to sing to you and praise you in my

heart, Jesus my love. I know of no greater or more plentiful joy than to feel the sweet heat of love in my mind...Come, my Savior, and comfort my soul: make me constant in my love, that I may never cease to love you.

Richard Rolle, *Fire of Love*.

*In loving memory of my son, David Jonathan,
and in appreciation to David and the four Jonathans
I found in Romania in 1988.*

1. David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 411.

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LOVE OR DREAD: HEART RESPONSES TO THE MESSIANIC KING

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 952
1 Samuel 18:1-30
Fifth Message
Brian Morgan
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Last Sunday evening I had the privilege of going to our newcomers class and hearing the stories of those who are new among us, and also sharing my own story with them. Driving home afterwards, I reflected on how intensely personal and deeply emotional — even mystical — was my own early pilgrimage toward God.

Long before I was grounded in doctrine I felt my heart strangely warmed by the love of God. At times I felt myself bathed in his rays of kindness and overcome with appreciation. At the age of nineteen, on a lonely Greek island, as the full moon hung over the Aegean Sea, God came to me with such intensity that the sweetness I felt could not be compared to any human joy. Though I felt such emotions, I didn't always feel free to express them, because I wasn't sure that they were to be a driving force of spirituality. My emphasis then was more on solid teaching, exquisite doctrine, principles for godliness, and effective ministry. So my feelings had to take a back seat. I held that aspect of my spirituality in abeyance and doggedly pursued theology, exegesis, and languages, so much so that later, a friend even labeled me as "stoical and mechanical" in my teaching. Then in 1988 I went to Romania, and there I met a poet. Since that time I have never been the same. He put music to all the blessed doctrine that I had immersed myself in, and as I sat with him I felt as if my soul could sing or even fly. As all those old feelings were revived, it was like a second honeymoon for me.

Our text today on the life of David from the book of 1 Samuel is packed with emotions. David has just slain Goliath and returned from the battlefield, and his epic victory evokes powerful emotions of love, joy and singing throughout Israel, feelings of the kind that hadn't been experienced since the days of the Exodus, when Miriam led all of Israel in dance to the song of Moses. Everyone is moved by the victory of the young warrior. Everyone that is, but one: Saul, the king of Israel. Saul appears in every scene in the text, amidst all the joy-filled emotion brought about by the defeat of the Philistine giant, yet this man refuses to allow anything to move his heart. It is obvious that Saul is the main player in the text. The narrator wants us to focus on him, because there is something of Saul in each one of us. Two questions, then, arise naturally from this text: What happens to our spirituality when we shut off our hearts to the deep emotions of love and joy? And, How much of Saul is in each one of us?

As we begin reading, Jonathan's love is contrasted with Saul's actions.

I. Jonathan Gives and Saul Takes (18:1-5)

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the **soul** of Jonathan was knit to the **soul** of David, and Jonathan **loved** him as his own **soul**. And Saul took him that day and did **not** allow (**give**) him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he **loved** him as himself. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and **gave** it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. So

David went out wherever Saul sent him, and **prospered**; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

In this first scene, Jonathan's soul is inextricably bound up with the soul of David, and he loves him as himself. Stripping himself, Jonathan gives everything he has to David, including his own right to the throne. Saul, in contrast, expresses no emotion, demonstrates no appreciation for David, and gives him nothing. Rather, he takes this son for himself and sends him to do his executive errands. He takes more satisfaction in placing the son over others than in celebrating the joy of the son's victory over the enemy of Israel. But Saul's actions have a considerable impact on the emotions of the rest of Israel for, as verse 5 says, "*it was pleasing in the sight of all the people.*"

The next scene moves from Saul's headquarters to the open fields, where both king and hero are given a triumphant homecoming.

II. The Women's Joy and Saul's Jealousy (18:6-9)

And it happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the **women** came out of all the cities of Israel, to sing in round dances, to meet Saul the King, with tambourines, with **joy** and with musical instruments. And the **women** sang as they played, and said,

*"Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands."*

Then **Saul** became **very angry**, for this saying was **evil in his eyes**; and he said, "They have ascribed (*given*) to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed (*given*) thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul looked at David with an **evil eye** from that day onwards.

The fatigued men are greeted enthusiastically on the home front. In an action typical of ancient cultures, a new song of victory, sung by the women, breaks forth in Israel. The narrator paints the picture of a whirl of activity surrounding Saul as he is thronged by multitudes of jubilant, singing and dancing worshippers. But, surprisingly, Saul can't enter in. The women sing,

*"Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his **ten** thousands."*

The song is no insult to Saul. It merely reflects a typical literary structure of Hebrew poetry. When a poet wanted to express a certain thought in numbers, he would put a number in the first line and then increase it by one unit in the next line (for example, 1-2; 1,000-10,000) so as to create an intensification, but not necessarily an antithesis, between the two lines. We find an example of this very thing in Deuteronomy:

*"How could **one** man pursue a **thousand** of them
How could **two** put **ten thousand** to flight,
If their Rock had not sold them to their enemies,*

If the LORD had not handed them over?" (Deut 32:30)

So the women of Israel lavish their praise on both heroes. The text clearly states that they came out to honor Saul, their king, not David. But now Saul sees everything through the lens of jealousy. He takes an innocent song, with no insult intended, and interprets it as a personal affront. The women, he feels, are giving more glory to David than to him. His anger burns. He could suppress his emotions before his son, but not before a choir of jubilant women. So he isolates himself from the celebration, refusing to allow the song to penetrate his heart. In the meantime, the people take David into their hearts.

Then, amazingly, the king says of David, *"What more can he have but the kingdom?"* What an astonishing statement! In his jealousy, Saul subconsciously gives voice to the divine purpose behind David's arrival in his own court, which was to take over his throne! The fact that David had already been given the throne was a well-kept secret, but in these words Saul's paranoia intersects with God's divine purpose that David take over Saul's kingdom. Someone said, "Just because your paranoid, doesn't mean no one's chasing you!" Walter Brueggemann comments: "Thus far, however, the intent of Yahweh had been a well-kept secret. No one knew, but in the voice of the women, and through the prism of Saul's own fear and paranoia, he sees David's future. There is keen irony in the fact that the fearful discernment of Saul and the grand intent of the LORD converge in seeing David destined for royal power."

What Saul cannot see, however, is that this development is not the result of David's ambition, but the irrevocable will and resolve of the LORD. Thus, from this day forward he sees David with an *"evil eye."*

The next scene moves from the open fields to the privacy of Saul's home — an apt symbol of his isolation. Here, the king's hidden emotions finally give birth to action.

III. A Demon's Rage and Saul's Fear (18:10-13)

Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved (literally: *prophesied*) in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his **hand**, daily; and a spear was in Saul's **hand**. And Saul hurled the spear for he thought, "I will impale David to the wall." But David escaped (turned) **from his presence** twice. Now Saul was **afraid** of David; for the **LORD was with him**, but had **departed** from the **presence** of Saul. Therefore Saul **caused him to depart** from his **presence**, and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the **presence** of the people.

In scene one, Saul successfully suppressed his emotions by means of manipulative actions. In scene two, the jubilant women provoked his true feelings. Jealousy was born, and settled deep into his soul. Now in scene three, through the doorway of anger and jealousy, an evil spirit has free access to his soul and drives him stark raving mad. Have you ever gone to bed angry? The enemy loves to see you do that, because then he has free access, an open door, to your soul. This was what happened to Saul. His anger and jealousy give free rain to Satan, with the result that he goes mad.

It is ironic that only David with his harp can soothe the king. But David, too, drives Saul mad — mad with jealousy. The king is trapped in an endless cycle: he need this musician, yet at the same time he is repelled by him. Saul, with his spear, appears outwardly motionless, yet a seething volcano churns within his soul, while David, playing his harp, is in

constant motion.

Finally, Saul erupts and gives his first gift to David: he hurls his spear at him. But the spear in the hand of a demon is no match for the harp in the hand of the man of Spirit. David's movements are too quick for Saul's impotent spear. His plan to rid himself of David met with failure, fear now bores its way into Saul's heart of steel. And so should he be afraid, for the LORD is with David. Saul has no recourse but to drive him away from his presence and that of the people.

This brings us to the center-line of the text. Here we learn what lies behind all of these emotions.

IV. Center Line: The Reason Behind the Emotions Which David Evokes (18:14-16)

Now David was **prospering** in all his ways; for the **LORD was with him**. When Saul saw that he was **prospering** greatly, then he **dreaded** him. But **all Israel** and Judah **loved** David, for he was going out and coming in before them.

This, the center line of the chapter, gives the theological reason for David's popularity, and it is this: "The LORD was with him." This phrase, which is given three times in the chapter, is the reason for David's success, charisma and magnetism. It is the reason behind Israel's love of David and Saul's dread of him. People either love this king, because he is the savior, or dread him, because they are his rival. Saul can't see this. He can only react to the effects of it, which he sees as David's prosperity. So it is with any man who suppresses his emotions to control others: he loses spiritual perception. Because he won't allow his heart to feel, he is unable to see the spiritual issues that govern everything else, and so he becomes emotionally unstable. J.P. Fokkeman comments: "Saul...has placed his center of gravity outside himself, thus cannot retain his equilibrium and makes himself completely dependent on what takes place outside himself, while David remains with himself and finds his fortune and self-development on his own ways."

Have you noticed that sports fanatics are very much affected by how their teams are doing? But true spirituality means that your center of gravity is within you: *"Christ in you, the hope of glory,"* in the apostle Paul's wonderful phrase. If the Lord is with you, as he was with David, then circumstances and people outside you will not affect you. Saul's equilibrium depended on what David was doing, and this was what destroyed him.

This then is the turning point of the chapter. With his brilliant observation that David is prospering, Saul's role changes from passive to active, from one of reacting to the emotions of others to attempting to manipulate them in order to dispose of David.

He begins by finally offering a gift to David.

V. Saul's Deceptive Gift to David (18:17-19)

Then Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will **give** her to you as a wife, **only** be a valiant man for me and fight the LORD's battles." For Saul thought, "My **hand** shall not be against him, but let the **hand** of the Philistines be against him." But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel; that I should be the king's son-in-law?" So it came about at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been **given** to David, that she was **given** to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.

Since Saul's hand was impotent to kill David directly, he

tries again, this time under the pretext of offering him his daughter in marriage, hoping that the hand of the Philistines will accomplish for him his evil ends. Notice that Saul initiates the conversation with David. Fokklem points out that “this is the last time that Saul speaks to David of his own free will; he does so in 24 and 26, but only because David stalked and cornered Saul and compels him to speak.” But Saul is a poor actor.

Rather than approaching David with appreciation, and fulfilling his promise to give his daughter in marriage to the one who would slay Goliath, Saul roughly pushes his daughter forward as a mere object: “*Behold my daughter...her, I give you for a wife.*” There is no word of love, and no consideration for Merab. Then, rather hastily and clumsily, he ties the idea of marriage with that of war — a dead giveaway for his real motives: “*only be a valiant man for me.*” Saul is willing to sacrifice even those closest to him (this is typical of controlling types) to achieve what he wants.

David’s question, “*Who am I? And what is my father’s family in Israel?*” is a subtle reminder to Saul that he had already promised to grant the family of the victor over Goliath tax-free status in Israel (17:25). David’s shrewdly humble response is designed to give Saul pause and force him to take responsibility for his past promises. Instead, the provoked Saul shirks his responsibility. Merab is *not given* to David, but arbitrarily brushed aside and given to another, no questions asked, because the king has decided. All of this is designed to make David feel like a mere plaything in the eyes of the king — something that Saul takes great pleasure in.

But there is one problem left to deal with: David is still alive. So Saul sets a more complex snare.

VI. Saul’s Feigned Emotions Toward David (18:20-27)

Now Michal, Saul’s daughter, **loved** David. When they told Saul, the thing was **upright in his eyes**. And Saul thought, “I will **give** her to him that she may become a snare to him, and that the **hand** of the Philistines may be against him.” Therefore Saul said to David, “For a second time you may be my son-in-law today.” Then Saul commanded his servants, “Speak to David secretly, saying, ‘Behold, the king **delights** in you, and all his servants **love** you; now therefore, become the king’s son-in-law.’” So Saul’s servants spoke these words to David. But David said, “Is it trivial in your sight to become the king’s son-in-law, since I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?” And the servants of Saul reported to him saying “According to these words which David spoke.” Saul then said, “Thus you shall say to David, ‘The king does not desire any dowry, except a hundred **foreskins** of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king’s enemies.’” Now Saul planned to make David fall by the **hand** of the Philistines. When his servants told David these words, The matter was **upright in the eyes** of David, to become the king’s son-in-law. Before the days had expired, David rose up and went, he and his men, and struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their **foreskins**, and they **gave** them in full number to the king, that he might become the king’s son-in-law. So Saul **gave** him Michal his daughter for a wife.

Saul tries a second time, but on this occasion he distances himself from David and adds the missing element — that of emotions — which he had neglected in his first proposal. Hearing that his daughter loves David, he reckons he can use her emotions to his advantage (“*it was upright in his eyes*”). But this time he is not so direct and blunt. He veils his offer under

the guise of his own feigned emotions: “*The king delights in you (utterly false), and all his servants love you (soon to be true).*” It is dangerous to feign emotions because you are ambitious. If you do, your heart will begin to die and you will never feel emotions again.

Not having a dowry, David again answers with humility: “*I am a poor man and lightly esteemed.*” Saul responds by asking for what is for him an appropriate dowry: one hundred foreskins of the Philistines. He links marriage with death, and that of the worst kind — making someone sexually impotent. He may have come up with this plan because he was jealous of what he took to be David’s acclaim among the women of Israel, thus he desired to contaminate him to make him unclean.

Now the matter becomes “*upright in the eyes of David.*” David acts hastily and *gives* to Saul twice what is required (perhaps to indicate he is not playing the game on Saul’s terms and adds 100 as a love gift his bride), so Saul must reluctantly *give* his *promised gift*. Note that everyone gives a gift to this anointed king: Jonathan gives his love; the women their praise; and Saul his daughter.

VII. Epilogue: All Emotions Toward David Consummated (18:28-30)

When Saul saw and knew that **the LORD was with David**; and that Michal, Saul’s daughter, **loved** him, then Saul was even **more afraid** of David. Thus Saul was David’s enemy continually (*all the days*). Then the commanders of the Philistines went out to battle; and it happened as often as they went out, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was **highly esteemed** (literally: *precious*).

Despite all of Saul’s executive powers, as we come to the end of the account there is no change; in fact, things are worse. Now Saul’s daughter loves David, just as his son does — and so does all Israel. David is now firmly entrenched in the royal court as a legal heir to the throne. Through his own manipulative actions, Saul has finally come to know what everyone else in Israel already knows: *the LORD is with David*.

The lesson for Saul is clear: If he would not join in the parade of love, he was doomed to live in isolation and failure, because he was fighting against God himself. It is God who works everything to the good of David and nothing to the good of Saul. “We are invited to watch while history works its relentless way toward God’s intention. History is not a blind force or an act of sheer power. There is a purpose at work that regularly astonishes us. It is a power that disrupts and heals. David is now carried on the wave of this purpose. The ones who trust the story ride atop this flow of history with David. They ride there with David every time they tell or hear the story. The others, like Saul, either die or go mad” (Walter Brueggemann).

Reflections

What is this ancient story saying to us today? The question each of us must ask ourselves this morning is: Who do I identify with in this story, Saul or David? When the story of David is re-enacted on Israel’s stage a thousand years later, the same dynamics are at work. Jesus, anointed with the Spirit of God, becomes the new David and slays not only Israel’s enemy, but the greater enemy of mankind, the devil. When the early Christians gazed upon the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, so melted by love were they that they rejoiced and danced. Theirs was a spirituality driven by hearts that were tender toward Christ. But what of those who refused to feel, the rival

kings who only felt threatened by this One? Like Saul of old, their manipulative actions only furthered the gospel, while they themselves died or went mad.

Is there any hope for present-day Sauls? Must those who shut out God, and shut out the feelings of others, controlling, manipulating and destroying them in the process, must they all all *"die or go mad"*? In the history of Christianity, perhaps no one was more awestruck in reading this story than that brilliant Jew, Saul of Tarsus. He, too, was from the tribe of Benjamin. Though he was not a head taller in stature, he was so in theological training, far surpassing his countryman in learning and zeal. Then one day he came in contact with the new David. This One had slain Goliath on a cross, and he, too, like David of old, was stealing all of Israel's heart. Saul of Tarsus burned with rage and zeal. Determined to stamp out the movement, and given legal authorization to do so, he, too, threw a spear. Unlike the Saul of old, however, his spear found its mark in one follower of Christ named Stephen.

But in the end, the LORD was with the little band of disciples. Saul's manipulative actions only furthered their cause. His persecution of them forced them to disperse, and as they did they spread The Story even further (Acts 8:4). Saul's rage intensified, almost consuming him, and he headed off to Damascus carrying the death warrants of all who loved the Savior. Then on the Damascus Road, a voice came from heaven saying, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* — echoing

David's words to Saul in 1 Samuel 26:18. Saul was blinded and broken. That day he was changed from the enemy of God to the friend of God, from the persecutor of the church to the great apostle who gave his life for the church.

Can God revive the emotions of controlling personalities who have destroyed the lives of others? What emotions do you think Saul of Tarsus felt as he re-read the ancient story of Saul and saw it re-enacted in his own life and, instead of his going mad and dying, both Christ and Stephen died for him? Do you think Paul had emotions? Could he love like a Jonathan? Read his letters: *"The love of Christ constrains me...whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as a loss for the sake of Christ."* Could Paul sing with joy like the women of Israel? He sang in a Philippian jail for the love of Christ. Could he love like Michal? He wrote: *"I have fond affection for you like that of a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her own children."* What changed him? It was nothing less than God's all-pursuing love for sinners.

*Amazing love! how can it be,
That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?*

Oh Saul, where are you today? May you see Christ and be converted from the heart.

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THE GREAT ESCAPES

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

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1 Samuel 19:1-17
Sixth Message
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Do you ever have nightmares? In one of my recurring nightmares I am chased by someone who is bent on my destruction and no matter how hard I try to escape, I always get caught. My fear of being captured is even more powerful than my fear of death, so in my dream, as a last resort I'll jump off a cliff to end the whole thing. I'm glad to say I always wake up from the horror.

I trace my fear back to my childhood. When I was ten years old my family moved into a new neighborhood that later became a hotbed for burglars. We lived in the corner home at the top of a hill, and from my bedroom window I had an excellent view of everything that happened on two streets. I often woke up to the sounds of unfamiliar vehicles, and on rare occasions I saw strange men casing out the homes of their next victims. The house next door was robbed seven times, and we were robbed twice. While my fear was always worse than the reality, to this day I still wake up at night, dreaming that someone has broken into our house, bringing high-tech lasers to capture us!

I became a Christian when I was a teenager. I changed my allegiance from the devil to Christ, from idols to the living God, from the world to the church. There is no small stir in hell when someone makes this change of allegiance. Now a very powerful, crafty, brilliant murderer is actually bent on your destruction, and it is not a dream. What do you think that does to your fear?

Our text this morning on the life of David from the book of 1 Samuel is carefully constructed to teach us how to overcome our greatest fears, and how to deal with those who pose the direst threat to us. Having defeated the Philistine giant Goliath, David is welcomed home as Israel's hero. But the jealous Saul, who looks upon David with an evil eye, "welcomes" him home by plotting his death. "Death" is the key word in this chapter; it is used eight times (verses 1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 11, 15, 17). "Death" is the first word out of Saul's mouth to begin our story; "death" is the last word from the lips of Michal, Saul's daughter and the wife of David, at the end of the story.

This is no idle threat from Saul. As king, he has every earthly power at his disposal to carry out his plan. But, juxtaposed with the word "death" in the text is the word "escape," which is used three times (in verses 10, 12, and 17). As we will see, in each of the three scenes David narrowly escapes death. In the first and last scenes he escapes by the hands of an intermediary whose affection he has won; in the center scene he escapes by the power of the Holy Spirit, who comes into direct confrontation with the demonized king.

In the New Testament, this theme will find its climax in Christ. He was divinely protected from death until his hour had come (Luke 4:30; John 8:59; 10:39). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus confronted the world forces

of darkness which were no match for him. Finally, through his atoning death, he conquered death for us, his followers. Now as his servants, we can say with Paul, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life...shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38,39) Our text from 1 Samuel therefore is designed to lead us from fear to that bold confidence that Paul embodied.

We begin in Scene I, where David averts death in an opening skirmish.

I. Death Averted Through the Intermediary of a Son (19:1-7)

Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to **death**. But Jonathan, Saul's son, greatly **delighted** in David. So Jonathan told David saying, "Saul my father is seeking to put you to **death**. Now therefore, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you; if I find out anything, then I shall tell you." Then Jonathan spoke well (**good**) of David to Saul his father, and said to him, "Do not let the king **sin** against his servant David, since he has not **sinned** against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial (**good**) to you. For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you **sin** against innocent blood, by putting David to **death** without a cause?" And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul vowed, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to **death**." Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these words. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his **presence** as formerly. (NASB)

Poisoned with jealousy and rage, Saul publicly announces to his son and his servants his intent to have them put David to death. "But," adds the narrator, "Jonathan *delighted* in David." Jonathan has greater loyalty for his friend David (who was anointed by the Spirit), than he has for his father (from whom the Spirit has departed). He immediately steps into the gap and becomes David's intermediary to save him from death. When the Spirit comes he begins to disrupt old, abusive families, creating in their place new families whose loyalties are based on love and spirit and whose bonds are stronger than death.

Jonathan's loyalty is neither casual nor inconsequential, but thoughtful and deliberate. Before he confronts his father with the truth, he takes David into his care to assure his safety. "*Stay in a secret place and hide yourself,*" he counsels the new king. This verse holds the key to David's destiny: it lies in the wilderness. There he will find refuge

from terror and death, and there he will find his secret place in God and begin writing the Psalms, Israel's prayer book (Psalm 27:5).

Jonathan promises to be a revealer of the truth to David. But he does more than he promises; he actually stands in David's place and becomes his advocate. It is a beautiful thing when friends refuse to allow waves of evil intentions to crash unchallenged on innocent shores. It is an even greater thing when believers do this for our beloved Messiah when his reputation is sullied.

Verse 4 is the center-line of this scene. Here, in a telling play on words, Jonathan confronts his father's *sin* (mentioned two times) with David's *good* (also mentioned two times). Jonathan says, "Do not let the king *sin* against his servant David, since he has not *sinned* against you, and since his deeds have been very beneficial (*good*) to you." Why should Saul kill David for no reason?" asks Jonathan. "After all, David killed Goliath and you *rejoiced*." Joy was the emotion we expected from Saul, but surprisingly, there was no joy in his response. Of course, any response short of a complete confession of his shortcomings and disobedience would be lacking.

Jonathan's logic is too compelling. Saul feels he must make a vow: "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to *death*." Vows play a significant role in 1 Samuel. They bring the Living God into the very center of human relationships as a witness and judge of the commitments of men. Notice the difference between Saul's vow and Jonathan's. Jonathan committed his life to David, but all that Saul can commit is "no death" to Israel's hero — a vow he will break before very long. Jonathan's efforts meet with success, at least temporarily. Tensions are resolved, and David finds himself back in Saul's presence.

So death is averted through the intermediary of a son.

In Scene II, David again escapes death.

II. Death Averted in Face to Face Confrontation (19:8-11)

When there was war again, David went out and fought with the Philistines, and defeated them with great slaughter, so that they fled before his **presence**. Now there was an evil spirit from the LORD on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his **hand**; and David was playing the harp with his **hand**. And Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear but he slipped away out of Saul's **presence**, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and **escaped** that night.

David is back in the war business. As usual, he is successful, and the Philistines flee before him. Once more success adds to his popularity, and once more Saul is driven mad. Though he had made a vow with his lips, nothing has changed in his heart. There is no confession, no effort to deal with the past. Jealousy, the driving force of his life, now becomes the open doorway to demonic impulses that drive him to deep and incongruous mood swings.

What a dramatic scene this is. In the privacy of Saul's residence, two kings, two hands, and two spirits (one the Holy Spirit) are all brought together in direct confrontation. The Hebrew text densely packs all of this intensity into thirteen words in verse 9. Ten of these words describe

Saul; three suffice for David. One king is motionless and tense, his hand dripping with sweat as it tightly clutches the spear; the other king is all motion, his hands moving skillfully over the harp.

The explosion comes in verse 10. In an instant, all the forces of hell are unleashed. But it is to no avail. David escapes and, for a second time, the spear thrown by Saul to impale David is left stuck in the wall. In the opening verses of the chapter we found the Philistines *fleeing* before David, now we find David *fleeing* from the jealous rage of Saul.

In this confrontation David comes face to face with an evil that is even deeper than the evil that Jonathan beheld in his father: He sees the demon behind the spear.

So David flees for his life and seeks refuge in his own home. There he is greeted by Michal, his wife and Saul's daughter, and once more he is delivered.

III. Death Averted Through the Intermediary of a Daughter (19:11-17)

Then Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, in order to put him to **death** in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to **death**." So Michal let David down through a window, and he went out and fled and **escaped**. And Michal took the household **idol** and laid it on the bed, and put a quilt of goats hair at its head, and covered it with clothes. When Saul sent **messengers** to take David, she said, "He is sick." Then Saul sent **messengers** to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me on his bed, that I may put him to **death**." When the messengers entered, behold, the household **idol** was on the bed with the quilt of goats hair at its head. So Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this and let my enemy go, so that he has **escaped**?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go! Why should I put you to **death**?'"

David escapes in the night to his home, but the king's spies put a watch on David's house. Like her brother Jonathan, Michal has defected to the new leader. She intercedes on David's behalf, warning him of the urgent necessity of escape. Perhaps as a woman she has a clearer understanding of her father than Jonathan. Death is imminent. The word frames the passage (verses 11, 17). David is let down through a window and escapes. What a humbling thing. The apostle Paul, of course, suffered the same indignity (2 Cor 11:30-33). But he made that occasion of weakness his grounds for boasting in Christ.

To buy time, Michal places a household idol (*teraphim*) in David's bed and dresses it up to deceive the messengers. We could well ask what is an idol doing in David's house? From whence did it come, from David or Michal? This is a worthy question, but we find no answer in the text. There is much here, however, that reminds us of the story of Jacob's flight from his father-in-law Laban. Rebekah stole the household idol (*teraphim*) and hid it in her saddle bag. When she was confronted by Laban, she explained she could not dismount from her camel to allow him inspect the saddle bag due to the fact that it was her time of the month. Like Michal, Rebekah deceived her father.

Though I cannot shed much light on the question of who owned the idol in David's house, I can elaborate on what this episode was designed to teach Saul. He refused to listen to the truth in direct confrontation, so God would confront him with his own deception. He would not listen to the truth from a son, so God would use a blind and deaf idol to deceive him. Those who serve idols become like them, says the Scripture. When Saul confronts Michal with the truth, she deceives him, feigning loyalty. Thus Saul receives his retribution in kind, since in a vow he had feigned loyalty to David. In time, Michal, who isn't bold enough to speak the truth, will find that her relationship with David also becomes impotent, for she bears no children (2 Sam 6:23). It was as if she had married an idol. In any event, David escapes a third time.

It is obvious that death is the theme that resonates throughout this chapter. Death is mentioned eight different times, and Saul makes three different attempts at killing David. In the first and last scenes he uses intermediaries who are paid to execute his orders, and in each instance God counters with his own intermediaries, a son and a daughter, who are moved to intercede on David's behalf. In both cases love prevails, defeating the professionals, and David escapes. Then in the center scene, Saul attempts to carry out the sentence directly, in a face to face confrontation with David. Even with demonic forces arrayed against him, however, David is delivered by the direct intervention of God's Spirit.

What does this text have to say to us today? God gives three things to help us overcome our fear of those who threaten us.

Reflections

(a) Facing Fear In Confrontation

It has been a sobering thing for me to learn that many in this congregation grew up in abusive homes or presently work in abusive environments. The causes of abuse and its workings are admittedly complex, but the book of 1 Samuel is very helpful in this area. Sixteen chapters of this book are given to the psyche of Saul and the anatomy of the abusive soul. In chapter 17 all three characters, Jonathan, David, and Michal, are put in positions where they have to confront Saul and face his evil. This is something we must all learn to do to overcome our fears: we must at times confront evil face to face. It seems this is the normal school for spirituality. Jesus faced this kind of evil. So did the apostles, the Reformers, and the Puritans.

The first thing that God wants us to do to help overcome our fear is go directly into the confrontation. He wants the abuser confronted. In this story, God wanted Saul to be confronted with three things. First, with the "Why?"

1. Confronted with the "Why?"

It is important to understand that questions probe much deeper than direct accusations. Confronted with his disobedience, Saul refused to face up to it. Instead he became angry and attempted to cover up and deflect the truth. In the beginning of the chapter, Jonathan asks his father, "Why?" The same question is repeated at the end, this time by his daughter Michal. She says of David, "He said to me, 'Why should I put you to death?'" But the question that really resonates in Saul is, "Why are you putting Da-

vid to death?" Had he answered, he would have had to make a full confession of his sin. But he did not do this.

Refusing to answer the "Why?", Saul is next confronted with the danger of not repenting.

2. Confronted with the Danger

Refusing to repent, Saul was given over to invisible realities much more powerful than himself. This is what happens to people who will not repent. It's naive to think that it's all right to indulge in a little idolatry. Once we open the door to an idol, it has free access to us. But behind the idol is a spirit of control that is far more powerful than our ability to manage or manipulate it. This is the beginning of addiction. Have you noticed that the world is finally waking up to this fact and has begun using the word "addiction"? But this has been the biblical viewpoint all along. Jesus said, "He who commits sin is the slave of sin." Ask any addict. Addicts are always just one act removed from disaster. Saul is confronted with this.

Finally, he is confronted with the cost of his actions.

3. Confronted with the Cost

This account is framed by the actions of Saul's son and daughter. Their loyalties change because David has the gift of Spirit, and this creates a stronger bond than earthly, blood ties. If Saul refuses to follow the new king, he will lose both his son and daughter. What price was he willing to pay to have life go his way?

None of us wants to look evil directly in the face, but this is part of the spiritual curriculum, not just for what it does for the one we confront, but for what it does for us. Confrontation brings situations into focus. Life is not a sea of moral grays; it has clear lines of delineation.

I hate confronting evil, but on occasion I find I must. Last year I attended a meeting of parents who were concerned about a certain individual. After the meeting, the parents came to me and asked me to go as their representative and speak to this man. I was terrified, but I went. When I looked into his eyes, I saw Saul. I saw the mood changes, the manipulation, the control, the deflection of the real issues. But God gave me confidence to ask the "Whys?" and then I left. That is how we overcome our fears.

(b) Facing Fear In Flight: The Geography of Spirituality:

"Stay in a secret place and hide yourself"

There are times, however, when things become so dangerous we have to leave in order to protect loved ones or for our own safety. Jonathan's words to David are instructive that God's anointed will find his destiny in the wilderness. The wilderness is the place of spiritual growth. There is where we learn to give up control of our lives and allow God complete access. There, cut loose from all props, we live in a untamed land, bereft of the resources that bring order to life. But that is where we find God. "Wilderness" means "place of revelation." That is where God's word comes to us. In the wilderness, in the rocky crags and hiding places, David's senses were heightened and purified. That was where he met God through his sacred music, the book of Psalms.

As I studied this text, I wondered what had David written about it. The words of Psalm 27 seem to fit well:

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?
When evildoers come upon me to devour my flesh,
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and
fell.
Though a host encamp against me,
Though war arise against me,
In spite of this I shall be confident.
One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek;
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of
my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord,
And to meditate in His temple.
For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tab-
ernacle;
In the secret place of His tent He will hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.
And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies
around me;
And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.

In the presence of God, David could confront his fears.

The Psalms, of course, are quoted extensively in the New Testament. Actually, Psalms is the most quoted book in the NT. They were considered so important that the Sixth Council of Chalcedon decreed that candidates for the priesthood could not be ordained unless they memorized David's psalms.

Finally, to help us face our fears we need one more thing: a friend.

(c) Facing Fear In Love

Jonathan said to David: "I will stand beside my father...and I will speak with my father about you." Jonathan continues to demonstrate his faithfulness to his covenant with David. In verses 19:1-7 he is the subject of at least ten verbs. His delight in David thrusts him into a whirl of actions — warning him, interceding for him, hiding him, restoring him. Love is what spurred all these loyal actions — love that is motivated by the Spirit of God. God's Spirit disrupts old, abusive families and builds new ones whose loyalties are based on love, not duty, and whose bonds are

stronger than death.

The presence of God, and the loyalty of one friend who loves us, will enable us to face our fears.

On Friday last, My mother called me from southern California to say that my father had collapsed and was in intensive care, suffering from viral pneumonia. I spoke to him on the telephone and I never before heard him give expression to the kind of fear he was feeling. I immediately flew down to visit him in the hospital. By his bedside I held his hand and he looked at me, his eyes filled with love. I felt I was re-living the Jonathan story when he says to David,

"I will stand beside my father...and I will speak with my father about you."

As I shared these words with him, I felt that we both took comfort in the great New Testament promise, *"perfect love casts out fear."*

Amen.

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THE SAFEST SANCTUARY

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 954
1 Samuel 19:18-24
Seventh Message
Brian Morgan
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One of the gravest concerns facing Christians today is the invasion of evil into the foundational institutions of our nation. Our ancient sanctuaries are no longer safe. Not just our decaying cities, but even suburbia, the once-peaceful Eden to which many aspired, now must deal with drive-by shootings. With the invasion of drugs and gangs, our once-safe schools have become intimidating places. Even our sports fields are not exempt from danger. Our children must deal with abusive coaches, and some parents are so obsessed with success that violence has become a real threat. Just last week the *Mercury News* reported that teams in Ventura, in southern California, have dropped the normal handshake after games for fear of fist fights.

One of our high schoolers has written this poem describing his pain in growing up in today's world:

I sit in my room
Not to be shown
I don't come out
For fear of the unknown
I want to cry
I cannot weep
The only thing I can do is sleep,
When I dream
I dream of songs
That helped me when my day was long
I see certain images
During my rest
Thinking about being only second best
I fought and struggled
All I could
Never seeing what was good
And when I wake
I see the sun
All my dreams leave and run
I feel alone
I feel like I'm the only one
The cycle repeats on and on
All I can do is think of what is gone.

At least my young friend has a good home to flee to. But many today have no safe haven. Where do you turn when even your own home is not safe?

This was David's problem, as we have been learning in our studies in the book of 1 Samuel. Under Saul's death sentence, David was forced to flee his home. It was no longer a sanctuary, but a trap for him. Where could he go for protection? This is the question that many have to face today. Where do you go when your home is no longer safe? And what do we do as Christians when the foundational institutions of the nation

are so corrupt they can no longer be considered safe?

Our text this morning from 1 Samuel 19, the chapter which we have called "The Great Escapes," has very good news for us.

I. Saul Attempts Death Three Times Through Intermediaries (19:18-22)

Now David fled and escaped and came to Samuel at **Ramah**, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in **Naioth**. And it was told Saul, saying, "Behold, David is at **Naioth in Ramah**." Then Saul sent messengers to take David, but when they saw the company of the **prophets prophesying**, with Samuel standing and presiding over them, the **Spirit of God came upon** the messengers of Saul; and they **also prophesied**. And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they **also prophesied**. So Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they **also prophesied**. (NASB)

(a) A School of Prophets: Naioth in Ramah

Finding that he is no longer safe in his own home, David escapes Saul's clutches a third time and flees to Samuel's home town in Ramah. Ramah (which means "height") lay about two and a half miles due north of Gibeah of Saul. Arriving there, David shares with Samuel everything that Saul had done to him. Samuel probably was not surprised. Of course we would love to hear the comforting, encouraging words that the prophet spoke to the new king, but we are not told what passed between them. Rather, what we are told is the place where they took refuge: Naioth in Ramah. It is very significant that in seven verses the word "Naioth" appears five times and "Ramah" six.

Most scholars believe that Naioth was not a geographical name, but rather a reference to the dwellings where Samuel housed his school of the prophets. According to the rabbis, "Naioth" were dwellings, or the common residences of the prophets. The Targum (the Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament) renders Naioth "house of instruction." Thus, Naioth were the dormitories of the prophets.

Samuel began this little academy in response to the religious and spiritual decline in Israel in his day. After the time of the Judges, all of Israel's religious institutions had been corrupted, and subsequently they were judged by the LORD. The ark had been lost to the Philistines and the tabernacle destroyed. Out of this moral vacuum, Samuel gathered together men who hungered to cultivate their spirituality and return Israel to her spiritual roots. Thus was born the first school of the

prophets.

One of the commentators describes the curriculum of this school: "It is generally assumed that the stock education was the study of law and history of Israel, as well as the cultivation of sacred poetry and music to lift the senses to the Spirit of God and prepare them to receive divine revelation." The cultivation of poetry and music can be inferred from 1 Samuel 10:5. There we read that musicians walked in front of the prophesying prophets, playing as they went along. Perhaps this was where some of the early monastic orders got the idea of living in common buildings and performing certain sacred duties. But here in Naioth in Ramah, the purpose of Samuel's men was not to withdraw from the world, but to gather for mental and spiritual training, that they might exert a more powerful influence upon their contemporary world. Such schools of the prophets appeared again in the days of Elijah and Elisha, the most corrupt time in the history of Israel (1 Kings 20:35), when considerable numbers of prophets lived in Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho.

In Jesus' day, we find the same method used by our Lord, who gathered to himself a small band of disciples. Throughout church history this is the model that has been followed. Small bands of disciples bind themselves together so as to cultivate their spirituality, placing themselves under the discipline of the word, and expressing it in preaching, poetry and music.

Rowland Bell, the father of our director of interns, Bernard, founded just such a "school of the prophets" when he was a missionary to Thailand, in 1981. Instead of teaching in the seminary, he sought out farmers who had a heart for the Scriptures. These men studied together one hour each day, and then meditated on their studies during the rest of the day as they worked in the fields. In addition, they studied one full day a month, and one full week a year. In six years of study and meditation, Rowland Bell took this group of men through the entire Scriptures. They were far better trained than seminarians, so much so that his method of teaching and discipleship was incorporated in the curriculum of the local seminary.

So David fled to the dormitory of the prophets, to Naioth in Ramah.

(b) The Invasion of Holy Ground

Now the question that springs from this text is, What happens when the king and his royal messengers invade the humble dwellings of the prophets? Who wins the confrontation between king and prophet?

When the agents arrive in Ramah, they see the company (or congregation) of prophets in ecstasy, with Samuel, their choirmaster, presiding over them. Strangely, David is left out of the picture (perhaps to denote that he was under such complete protection by the Lord that he could not even be seen). Then the powerful Spirit overcomes the agents of Saul and draws them into the divine activity. They, too, fall into the world of the divine imagination. In the process, they forget the mandate to arrest David. Calvin comments:

"God changed their [the messengers] thoughts and purpose, not only so that they failed to apprehend David according to the royal command, but so that they actually became the companions of the prophets. And God effected this, that the fact itself might show how He holds the hearts of men in His hand and power, and turns and moves them according to His will."

Undaunted, Saul sends another group of messengers to accomplish his work. But they meet with the same result. The lesson is obvious: Naioth in Ramah is not Saul's world; it is Samuel's world, the world where the Spirit rules. Again the Spirit breaks in upon the messengers and shatters their world of mundane orders and errands, making them in the process completely available for celebration with God.

The text is replete with repetitive vocabulary: "Naioth" is used five times; "Ramah" six times; "prophesy" or "prophet" eight times; the "Spirit of God came upon" two times, framing the passage in repetition. Walter Brueggemann comments, "the backbone of repetitiveness hammers home the fact that while David escapes, there is no one who escapes the power of the Divine Spirit."

Verse 21 marks the center of the scene and the turning point of the text. Saul pays no heed to the reports or the lessons. In fine executive style, he reasons that if he wants something done, he had better do it himself.

II. Saul Attempts Death In Face to Face Confrontation (19:22-24)

Then he himself **also** went to Ramah, and came as far as the large well that is in Secu; and he asked and said, "Where are Samuel and David?" And someone said, "Behold, they are at **Naioth in Ramah**." And he also proceeded there to **Naioth in Ramah**; and the **Spirit of God came upon** him **also**, so that he went along **prophesying** continually until he came to **Naioth in Ramah**. And he **also** stripped off his clothes, and he **also** prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, "Is Saul **also** among the **prophets**?"

(a) If you want it done right, do it yourself!

The incorrigible Saul refuses to learn from what happened to the messengers. He even negates his own previous experience when he became king and the Spirit came upon him (1 Sam 10:10). Off he goes in full royal determination. But when he arrives at the place of the well, he hesitates, asking questions that he already knows the answers to. "He appears to hesitate just at the moment that David comes within range. Instead of the king boldly completing his march and summarily arresting his rival, his subconscious now appears to slow him down, so that he wastes energy in superfluous checks" (Fokklemann). Saul hesitates because he has a flashback to the time when he was anointed as king. After he had lost his donkeys, he came to a well looking for a prophet to help him on his errand (9:11). That meeting changed his destiny. The prophet overruled his errand. Now he is brought back to that begin-

ning as king and made to face the crisis caused by his own disobedience. Saul cannot continue without being squarely confronted with his past, something he has adamantly refused to do up to this point.

This is what God does with us at times, isn't it? We are going along in our disobedience and suddenly God brings before us our past. Of course, we don't want to face it, but we cannot go on unless we do so.

(b) Slain in the Spirit!

Saul, however, musters up enough courage to proceed. But the Spirit breaks in upon him even before he gets to Naioth in Ramah, so there is no hostile confrontation with the prophet. As a matter of fact, when Saul meets Samuel, the king is already prophesying! Upon his arrival, he immediately strips before the prophet and lays down before him, naked, like an infant. Now we find that both Jonathan and Saul have stripped before David, the newly-anointed king. But note the difference. Jonathan freely strips, while Saul has to be coerced. Jonathan's stripping is a symbol of the highest love and nobility, but Saul strips because of his shame.

Here is the lesson: When the king invades the prophet's holy turf, it is the prophet who wins the confrontation, not the king. Despite his obstinacy and authority, the king is no match for the Spirit. In this last scene Saul is in absolute involuntary subjection, stripped and naked, just as he will be at the end of the story (1 Sam 31:8). Picture this: the king (who was known for his height), lying down in subjection to the prophet, lost in unconsciousness. In the first three scenes in chapter 19, David escapes and averts death; now, in the climactic fourth scene, in face to face confrontation with Saul, death is not only averted, it is overcome. This foreshadows the fact that it is Saul who will die, not David.

The proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" immortalizes the truth. "This snapshot places Saul's state in time, perpetual, like an old photograph and seals his fate" (Fokklemann). The reader now knows that though the plot may take time to unravel, Saul is finished as king. It was the same proverb that began his ministry, and now the one which seals his doom. He is without hope because God has departed from him.

Reflections

I would like to make three applications from this text.

(a) Who wins the battle?

"Saul lay down naked all that day and all that night"

We do not need to fear when evil penetrates our homes, schools, and governments, because people who wield earthly powers are simply no match for people who possess Spirit. As we have seen in our text, the effusion of the Spirit is so powerful it draws everything under its influence. When the Jewish authorities presented themselves in face to face confrontation with Jesus, the same, almost humorous effect resulted. Jesus' endowment of Spirit was so great (Isa 11:2) that the mere mention of his name ("I am", John 18:6) caused his enemies to collapse in involuntary submission. Jesus had to pick them up so they could arrest him!

Saul of Tarsus would learn this same lesson the hard way. He marched into holy turf, with legal sanction to put Christians to death, but on the Damascus Road he fell down, blinded before the risen Christ. For three days and nights he lay helpless, naked, like a baby, and then he became an apostle and a prophet. When evil seeks to invade holy ground, it is no match for Spirit.

(b) Where do we flee? *"Naioth in Ramah"*

Where should we flee when our world is no longer safe? Our text instructs us to flee to where the Spirit of God is. And where is that? Remember that this gift has been given to the church in full measure. Following Pentecost, this vignette in Naioth in Ramah was multiplied worldwide in the church. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 quotes the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, I will pour out **My Spirit** upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall **prophesy**
And your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
even upon my bondslaves, both men and women,
I will in those days pour out **my Spirit**
and they shall **prophesy.**" (Acts 2:17,18).

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews addresses this issue of where to flee when the pressure rises. The house churches in Rome, faced with a threat of persecution and loss of property, began to return under the cover of the synagogue for legal protection. Hebrews was written to instruct them not to do this, for legal protection without Spirit is no protection at all. This is why the writer said, "not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some...let us go outside the camp bearing His reproach" (10:25; 13:13). That is the place of refuge, not legality or politics, but Spirit.

(c) What do we cultivate? *Schools of the Prophets*

1. Discipleship with those of like spirit

Today, we are living in an age when our national institutions are morally corrupt, just like the court of Saul in the days of Samuel. Our text from 1 Samuel tells us what we should do in response: We should gather in little bands of disciples. The basis of our relationship is not academic degrees or worldly success, but, like the Thai farmers, hearts that are spiritually sensitive. This is why as pastors whenever we travel, we go in teams, in company with other believers. Then truth reverberates with power, creating earthquakes of renewal.

2. Discipleship under the Word of God set to music

David saw God's power released to subdue evil by Samuel's presiding over the prophets as they prophesied. The anointed king made this ceremony a permanent institution in Israel. According to 1 Chronicles,

"And he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, even to lament, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel." (1 Chr16:4)

David directed the Levites, with a choir director presiding over them, to sing, praise, and lament, as a permanent institution is Israel. This is why we find the

dedication *"for the choir director"* in many of the Psalms.

Since that day three thousand years ago, God's people have been singing God's word. This is what draws people in, and this is where the power lies. Paul would instruct the church,

"be filled with the Spirit...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." (Eph 5:18-19).

This is what subdues evil. So when the invasion comes, don't fear, but prophesy.

Before my children were old enough to attend high school, on occasion I would drive by the school they would eventually be attending. I was concerned about the forces that even then were invading high school campuses: drugs, gangs, weapons, immorality. I began to pray every time I went past the campus that God would send his Spirit to that place. When at last my daughters began attending there, Emily and I went to football games and sat with the other parents. There, amidst all the activity and ceremony, I would pray for that school. When my daughter began playing for the softball team, I offered to help the coach, and he allowed me to become involved. The following year, however, the new coach told me I could no longer do this because I hadn't been certified as a coach. A few weeks later he relented and I again began helping out. This past fall the coaches asked me to become certified. They even asked me if they could host a potluck dinner for all the parents of the players at our church.

On the Sunday of the potluck, our church high schoolers were gathered here, training for their ministry in Mexicali. My daughter invited our shortstop, who speaks Spanish fluently, to accompany our team to Mexicali, and she accepted. For a whole week she lived in that environment (which was no small school of

prophets), and was drawn into the fellowship of the Spirit in Mexico. I prayed for that young woman all week long. When they returned, I drove to church to pick them up. You can imagine my joy when she ran up to me in the parking lot and hugged me, saying, "Mr. Morgan, I accepted Christ!" On Easter Sunday morning when I joined with all of you to sing the Hallelujah Chorus, I can tell you I had no little emotion. David's magnificent verses from Psalm 34 proved true for me on that resurrection morning:

*"O magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.
I sought the LORD, and He answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears,
They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces shall never be ashamed."* (Ps 34:3-5)

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THE REVELATION OF DEATH AND THE LOVE OF LIFE

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 955
1 Samuel 20:1-17
Eighth Message
Brian Morgan
April 24, 1994

A couple of weeks ago, a friend telephoned me to say that a mutual friend of ours had just been killed by a drunk driver. The following week, a neighbor stopped by my house to tell me that her mother had died suddenly. Then at our men's Bible study the following Wednesday, one of the men had difficulty holding back his tears as his mother had just died. Death is certainly part of the Christian curriculum, especially when it comes before its time. What do you do when the phone rings and you hear the word "cancer," "brain tumor," "leukemia," or "auto accident"?

I have had the privilege of walking with many in this congregation through that valley of weeping, and I have found that something mysterious happens there, as the psalmist says,

*Passing through the valley of Baca ("weeping"),
They make it a spring.
The early rain also covers it with blessings.
They go from strength to strength,
Every one of them appears before God in Zion. (Ps 84:6-7)*

On occasion I have seen hospitals strangely transformed into gardens, holy places of the soul where the soil, having been deeply plowed, and watered with tears, blossoms into a fertile Eden of love. In a mysterious way, the advent of death gives birth to holy love. Death even becomes a powerful means of evangelism. As God's people weep together in holy love the world watches longingly, keen to become part of that holy family.

Death is very much the subject matter of our study today in the life of David. Here we are brought face to face with Jonathan's agony of soul as he comes to grips with the fact that David, his close friend, has been sentenced to death by Saul. Death has a way of intensifying the emotions. In 1 Samuel 20, our text this morning, we will see that this is what happens with these two friends. The narrator depicts this intensifying of the emotions of both Jonathan and David by a doubling of the Hebrew verbs, nouns and adjectives in order to create a strong echo or resonance within the soul. Commonly in biblical narrative, this technique is used perhaps once in a chapter, but here in chapter 20 it is used thirteen different times. The chapter begins (v 3) and ends (vv 34, 41) with the emotion of grief. In between comes the emotion of love, with its display of undying loyalty. This is why I have given this chapter the title *The Revelation of Death and the Love of Life*.

Four scenes make up the chapter, as follows:

- A. Scene 1: *In the Court* — The Revelation of Death (20:1-11)
David reveals Saul's intentions of death to Jonathan
- B. Scene 2: *In the Field* — The Revelation of Loyal-love (20:12-23)
Jonathan reveals his loyal-love to David
- A'. Scene 3: *In the Court* — The Revelation of Death (20:24-34)
Saul reveals his intentions of death to Jonathan
- B'. Scene 4: *In the Field* — The Revelation of Loyal-love (20:35-42)
Jonathan reveals his loyal-love to David

In the opening two scenes (verses 1-17), which we will take today, we will learn how to minister to someone who is facing death. In these verses, Jonathan reveals just what we need to know. Verses 1-4:

I. Scene 1: The Revelation of Death (20:1-11)

(a) Breaking Through the Emotional Barriers

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, "**What** have I done? **What** is my iniquity? And **what** is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life (soul)?" And he said to him, "**Far from it**, you shall not die! Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without **revealing** it to my ears. So why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!" Yet David vowed again, saying, "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your sight, and he has said, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved (see v 34).' But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step **between me and death**." Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you (lit. "your soul") say, I will do for you." (20:1-4, NASB)

In chapter 19, David escaped death at the hand of Saul four different times. Here in chapter 20 he flees from Naioth (the dormitories of the prophets) in Ramah and returns to the royal court to present his case to Jonathan. Under sentence of death by Saul, Jonathan's father, he asks his friend, "What have I done? "What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father?"

Jonathan's response is very emotional. "Far from it, you shall not die!" he cries. The term "far from it" comes from the Hebrew root which means "to pollute, profane, dishonor." The noun form means that the thing or thought is so profane or reprehensible, it evokes deep emotions. Abraham attributed these words to God in Genesis 18:17 when he asked whether God would destroy Sodom if fifty righteous men were found in the city. The patriarch answers his own question: "Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (For other uses see 1 Sam 2:30; 14:45; 22:15; 26:11; 2 Sam 20:20; 23:17; here the word frames the passage in verses 2 and 9.)

Jonathan can't believe what he is hearing from the lips of David. He is a little naive. He always wants to think the best about people. His relationship with his father was open and transparent, and Saul had taken an oath before him that David would not die, so both logic and experience assured him that everything was fine between his father and David. I confess I am a lot like Jonathan. I, too, tend to think the best about people. I'm a bit naive when it comes to evil. Years ago I was betrayed and greatly wronged by a friend. When another friend began to investigate this man's story and his character, I was shocked. Everything in my emotional makeup protested his innocence. But, like Jonathan in this story, I was wrong.

Next, David counters Jonathan's logic with a little of his own. He says to his friend, "Your father knows well that you

love me. If he had been open with you about the matter, you would be grieved" (the appropriate emotion for death). Then David backs his logic with a vow: "As the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death." David brings the living Lord into the equation. Though Jonathan doesn't yet see the matter as David sees it, this vow presses the seriousness of the circumstances deep into Jonathan's heart and brings him to a place where at least he is willing to listen. Because he loves David he responds by saying, "Whatever your soul says, this I will do." This is the turning point of the scene. Jonathan at last is willing to view things differently.

This is the first step that love must take: Even when everything in you says that the other person can't be right, love demands that we be open to listen to another point of view. We must be willing to bypass our emotions and listen to the other side of things. This is where Jonathan has arrived at last. So he asks David, "What do you want me to do for you?"

(b) Stand In My Place

So David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening. "If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family.' If he says, 'It is good,' your servant shall be safe; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil. (20:5-7)

David asks Jonathan to allow him to leave, and to stand in his place so that he could see for himself. Here is love's second step: We must take the other person's journey and see life from his perspective. David would remove himself from the scene and have Jonathan take his place; then his friend could see things from his viewpoint — a much better solution than merely arguing conclusions. At times I find that this is the only way to break through an impasse in relationships. Have them exchange places and try to see things from each other's perspective. When Peter discovered that the gospel had gone out to the Gentiles and he actually sat down and ate in a tanner's house, he didn't argue conclusions when he reported back to his brothers in Jerusalem. What he did instead was report on the visions he had, how he had preached at this man's house and before he had finished his listeners began speaking in tongues. What would his brothers have done had they been in his place? Before arguing conclusions, it is a loving thing to allow others to tell their stories.

Now that Jonathan is going to take David's place he must find a way to get Saul to open up and reveal his true emotions. Here we have an example of David's genius. First, he comes up with an idea to get Saul's attention by making a radical break with routine — not showing up when he was supposed to. When Saul inquires as to his whereabouts, David primes Jonathan to offer the excuse, "David earnestly asked of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family."

David's genius for skillful speech shines through in these words. He carefully chooses every word so that what Jonathan says will provoke Saul's emotions. Jonathan's first words to his father, "David earnestly asked," is the Hebrew word (which rhymes with "Saul") uttered twice, "shaul, shaul." Then David's words "leave of me," are not put to Saul, but to Jonathan, because he knows Jonathan loves him. And David asks leave of him "to run to Bethlehem his city." Why would he need to run if he were not in danger? (In fact, Jonathan adds the word "escape," as we will see in verse 29.) Then the words, "it is the yearly sacrifice for the whole family," would be a

reminder to Saul of the time when David's whole family was present for another sacrifice, at which time David was anointed as king. Every word of David's which Jonathan would relate to Saul is designed to provoke the king's hidden emotions. We call this "pushing someone's buttons": light the fuse, stand back, and watch. This entire scenario is designed to help Jonathan learn that his father has decided to do evil to David.

In verses 8-11, David asks for Jonathan's loyalty.

(c) Are You Prepared for the Worst?

"Therefore show **loyal-love** with your servant, for you have **brought** your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is iniquity in me, put me to **death** yourself; for why then should you **bring** me to your father?" And Jonathan said, "**Far be it from you!** For if I should indeed come to **know** that evil has been decided by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you about it?" Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" And Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out into the **field**." So both of them went out to the **field**. (20:8-11)

David pleads with Jonathan to be faithful to the covenant he had made with him. "You brought me into a covenant of life," he says, in effect, "why would you bring me to your father for death? If I have sinned, kill me yourself!" David is testing the waters to make sure his friend is loyal. He is a master at eliciting the truth from others. He thinks Jonathan is either woefully naive or that he is a spy. His statement evokes the same emotional response in Jonathan as his original statement at the beginning of the chapter: "Far from it, you shall not die!" It is impossible for Jonathan to consider killing David. His statement reassures his friend of his loyalty. He is not a spy, but a faithful revealer of the truth.

But David presses the issue. He knows what the outcome is going to be, and he wants to make sure Jonathan is prepared for the worst. So he asks, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly? What will you do when your father turns on you?" Now the truth is beginning to hit home for Jonathan. He escorts David into the privacy of the field where they can make their plans without fear of being overheard.

II. Scene 2: The Revelation of Loyal-love (20:12-23)

In his book *Fear No Evil*, Natan Sharansky, a dissident Russian Jew, told the story of his imprisonment by the KGB. There, in the loneliness of his captivity, Sharansky, a chess master, mapped out in his mind every possible move his captors could make, then he countered every move with his own to ensure that no matter what happened to him, he would not compromise his moral ethics. He played this mental chess game all the way to his own death.

This is what David and Jonathan are doing now as we begin Scene II. In each of the three movements here, an element of uncertainty is carefully plotted out and then juxtaposed with what is certain. In the first movement it is the intentions of Saul that are uncertain; in the second, life itself; and in the third, David's destiny. But in the midst of life's greatest uncertainties, David finds there are two things he can count on: Jonathan's love and God's faithfulness. In the face of Saul's death threats, these virtues are put through the fire and found to be pure, steadfast, and eternal. It is this precious love that anchors David's soul.

Verse 12:

(a) Love Which Does Not Hold Back the Truth

Then Jonathan said to David, “The **LORD**, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have searched out my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, **if** there is good feeling toward David, shall I not then send to you and **reveal** it to your ears? **If** it please my father to do you harm, may the **LORD** do so to Jonathan and more also, **if** I do not reveal it to your ears and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the **LORD** be with you as He has been with my father. (20:12-13)

Love does not hold back the truth whether the news is good or bad.

Three weeks ago, as I stood beside my father’s bed in a Palm Springs hospital, I thought he was going to die. His doctor was very frank and forthright with me. He said my father could die that day from viral pneumonia. Then he told me that he was going to do a lung biopsy, and the moment they found out anything, he would tell me. The doctor did not hide things from me. His promise to me to be a revealer of the truth greatly helped me during a deeply emotional time.

This is what Jonathan does for David here in Scene II. David can count on two things. First, Jonathan vows before the Living God to do whatever it takes to “search out” his father. The word means to search for hidden things in a thorough manner. It is the word used of the LORD in Psalm 139:1. He “searches” our minds and hearts. Jonathan will search out his father and whatever he finds, whether good or bad, he promises to reveal to David. “No matter what Saul does,” says Jonathan, “you can count on my loyalty.”

And secondly, David could count on the LORD’s love. God had made a covenant with David, and he was with him. If Saul intended to harm him, Jonathan would stand between him and father. And the Lord would be between both of these friends. Even if Jonathan, the first line of defense, were to die, the LORD never dies. So David could go in peace. He could endure anything because he had these two: God, and one friend.

As Jonathan begins to plot the course of history, the possibility of his own death begins to sink in for him.

(b) Love Which Counts the Cost

“And **if** I am still alive, will you not show me the **loyal-love** of the LORD, that I may not **die**? And you shall not **cut off** your **loyal-love** from my house forever, not even when the LORD **cuts off** every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” So Jonathan made (literally: **cut**) a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the **LORD** require it at the hands of David’s enemies.” And Jonathan made David vow again because of his **love** for him, because he **loved** him as he **loved** his own life.

David forces Jonathan to plot out every move of the game right to the very end. Jonathan at last comes to the realization that his loyalty to David may very well cost him his life, so he makes provision by making what is essentially his last will and testament. Now he needs David to show him loyal-love in return by caring for his household. Even in the midst of the ultimate uncertainty, death itself, love does not fail. It does not hold back the truth, and it does not hold back commitment; rather it is embraced, enhanced and established. Jonathan solicits David’s loyal-love, asking him not to “cut off” his faithfulness when the LORD “cuts off” his enemies (“cut” is also the word used for establishing a covenant, verse 16.) The vow is sealed in pathos and deep emotion. Jonathan loves David as his own soul.

There is a school of thought that says this text and a text at the end of 2 Samuel 1:26 gives evidence that Jonathan and David’s relationship was homosexual in nature. I dislike commenting on this, but I have to say that I think that is the grid of those who would seek to denigrate the holy love of these men and advance their own agenda in the process. Clearly, the context of this chapter is death. Anyone who has experienced the loss of loved ones, as I have, knows that this love, which springs from the context of imminent death, transcends sexual love. While the Scriptures are very frank and open about the fact that David had sexual flirtations, the love that this chapter is speaking of is holy love.

Summary Reflections On Jonathan’s Love

1. It is Teachable: “Far from it, you shall not die!”

Jonathan feels free to express his feelings, but he is not bound by them. Initially, he does not see what David sees, but he is willing to listen and learn because he loves his friend. The first thing we need when we are hurting is someone who is willing to listen to our point of view.

2. It is Available: “Whatever your soul says, thus I shall do for you.”

Love makes itself available to serve others. It is Jonathan’s love for David that enables him to go into hiding, thus allowing Jonathan to sit at his place and view life from his perspective. We should not try to change others. Love listens to their story and takes their journey with them. It is this kind of love that knits us together in the Body of Christ.

3. It is Truthful: “The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness...shall I not...make it known to you?”

Love does not hold back the truth. It does not cover over evil — that is not love — but rather exposes it.

4. It is Unconditional in its Commitment: “If I am still alive...”

Love does not hold back from commitment. It is not blind. It counts the cost and pays what is demanded. Here, Jonathan discovers that his love for David may cost him his life, so he asks David not to withhold his loyal-love from his household after he has gone. What is so powerful about Jonathan’s love for David that makes it transcend everything else in life? It is the fact that David as the Messianic King was anointed with the Holy Spirit. His office raised the love of these friends to a higher level. Jonathan saw not just David, but the whole house of his friend up to the Messiah himself. In order to truly love, people have to be challenged with a cause that is bigger than themselves. This is why Jonathan lets go of everything in order to serve David.

5. It is Expressive: “Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own soul.”

Once Jonathan knows that his days are numbered, he relishes the memories he has of his friend. This is what happens when a sentence of death invades a home. People start appreciating and loving one another, reliving the memories, going through the photo albums.

It is fascinating to me that in the Jesus story, people fall in love with the new David the same way they fell in love with the David of old. They gave up their homes and their occupations to become part of something bigger than themselves in the work of Christ’s kingdom on earth. How hard Jesus had to work to convince his disciples that he would die. Like Jonathan, they were a bit naive. When they finally grasped it as the New Covenant was enacted in that Upper Room, they

gave free rein to their deep emotions of love. Peter took on the role of Jonathan, protesting, "I'm willing to die for you. I'll take your place." But the gospel story takes a different turn. This new David will not permit Jonathan to die for him. He becomes our Jonathan and dies for us, taking our place so that we could have his stage! So moved were the disciples by this expression of divine love that they in turn began to give up their lives for the sake of others. And this story lives on down through the generations.

To conclude our time together this morning, I have asked one of our own Jonathans, Connie David, who lost her husband to cancer last year, to read the poem which she wrote following Art's death:

FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES

He disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:10b-11).

My heart grew cold in fear as you aged before my eyes
haggard, weakened with pain
no sleep, no relief - caught in a vise.
This is too big, too hard
I cried to the Lord.
First my father, now my husband
What are You doing?
Trust Me my child. Be still.

The doctors sang their litany
We're sorry, so very sorry.
My husband is dying.
Where are You, God?
I'm here my child, you can see Me in your beloved's face.

Oh, Art - you were brave, trusting
Accepting every blow as from the Father's hand.
God made you ready
I was numb
You have the easier job.
I know, you smiled.
Your face radiated Christ's love as you
prepared for heaven with grace.
Pure love flowed through
People flocked to your side
learning, marveling.
How will I live without him God?
he is my rock.
I am your rock, my child. Be still.

But Lord -
Art taught me everything
how to laugh
how to trust
how to die
And Who taught him?
Trust me my child. Be still.

You were meant for the outdoors
plaid wool shirt, chain saw in hand
huge smile, quick step
I feel God's nearness in the mountains, you said
His beauty takes my breath away.

What are the mountains in heaven like
my darling?
Does the water flow as crystal clear as
the spring at Timbercreek?
Does God have trees for you to chop down?
houses to frame
things to build and fix?
Is everything so perfect there is nothing to repair?

Questions more than answers
flood through my sorrowful tears
But the answer is a Person
comforting my fears.

Knowing You my Jesus
is worth the heavy cost
Your perfect love in Your good time
will restore this loss.

While I'm waiting
I'll be still.

Connie David
December 14, 1993

Jonathan's love is relived with every announcement of death. As a pastor, I feel greatly privileged to see this kind of love at work here in our congregation. As the psalmist has so beautifully put it,

*Passing through the valley of Baca (weeping),
They make it a spring,
The early rain also covers it with blessings.
They go from strength to strength,
Every one of them appears before God in Zion.* (Ps 84:6-7)

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FROM YOUTH TO MANHOOD

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 956
1 Samuel 20:24-42
Ninth Message
Brian Morgan
May 1, 1994

The lack of mature men is part of the crisis we face today in society. The popular television show "Home Improvement" portrays Tim Taylor, the classic male figure of the '90's. He is good looking, cute, and extremely funny. But he has a serious problem: He is still a child; he has never grown up. He is inept at common household skills, and he is irresponsible and unreliable with commitments. He is so afraid of confrontation he will compromise the truth to keep the peace. His only consolation resides in his faceless neighbor, Wilson, who freely dispenses wisdom across the fence. But then, when the newly motivated hero tries to apply wisdom, he is so gauche that everything ends up in disaster. Who is this man of the 1990's? He is a fool in everyone's court. An audience at work laughs at him; his buddy Al feels put down by him; his wife puts up with him; his children manipulate him. But it doesn't matter, we say, because he makes us laugh. The tragedy is, we're laughing at ourselves. I want to say to this hero, "Grow up, Tim!"

No wonder many of today's recovery groups use the words "adult children of..." to describe themselves. Even in adult life, people are still operating on the survival skills that got them through their traumatic childhood. They are trying to get at the root of their behavior, to expose it and confront it and learn to grow up. The apostles never settled for immaturity in any realm of life. Paul often rebuked young Christians for immature, childlike behavior. It's time we grew up.

In our text this morning on the life of David we will discover what growing up is all about. Two key players in this story from 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan and David, leave behind their youth and graduate into manhood, with all that that entails. In his youthful naiveté, Jonathan thought he could maintain loyalty both to his father Saul, the displaced king, and to his friend David, the newly anointed king. At the first sign of any dissonance between the two, Jonathan's response was to become a placater, a peacemaker. He felt responsible to keep everyone happy because he loved all the players. Many of us live that way. Our self-appointed task in life is to maintain peace and keep everyone happy. But trying to serve competing loyalties only creates more tension. Many a young bride has discovered this as she sought to design her wedding plans to please both her mother and mother-in-law. So Jonathan will learn that as his loyalties begin to conflict, maintaining peace is beyond his powers.

All of this begins to unfold at a family feast, as we will see today in the second half of the account in 1 Samuel 20.

I. Blowing Up the Family Feast: Jonathan Becomes A Man (20:24-34)

(a) The Table Is Set (20:24-27)

So David hid in the field; and when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. And the king sat on his seat as usual, the seat by the wall; then Jonathan rose up and Abner sat down by Saul's side, but David's place was **empty**. Nevertheless Saul did not speak anything that day, for he thought, "It is an accident, he is **not clean**, surely he is **not clean**." And it came about the next day, the second day of the new moon, that David's place was **empty**; so Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" (NASB)

Family feasts are excellent opportunities to discover the hidden feelings people have towards one another. On the surface, things might appear normal and friendly, but a seemingly insignificant incident can set off a volcano of emotions. Have you ever attended a family gathering, hoping to enjoy a relaxed time with food and fellowship, but to your amazement discovered that others had personal agendas you knew nothing about? So it is here at this feast in Saul's house. David, a master at getting at the truth, knows this in advance, and so he uses the occasion of this family feast to uncover Saul's hidden emotions before the eyes of Jonathan. Jesus, too, was a master at cutting through hypocrisy and getting at the truth. He loved to go to feasts and uncover the evil intentions of men.

At first, everything at the dinner seems normal. Saul takes his *usual* seat (opposite the wall that is riddled with spear holes!). Then, as Saul's right hand man, Abner, arrives, Jonathan rises in honor to give the seat of preference to his father's general. The hierarchical order is carefully followed. First, there is Saul; then the crown prince, Jonathan; then, Abner; and finally, David. Notice the contrast: Saul, who doesn't want to lose his throne, and Abner, who with his permanent appointment doesn't want to lose his influence, are both *seated*; while Jonathan stands between them; in David's absence, his place is empty.

Initially, Saul is able to maintain his cool. Suppressing his anger over David's absence for one evening at least, he reasons to himself "*He is unclean, surely he is unclean.*" But the thought reverberates deeper and deeper inside him, betraying the fact that he can't let go of the reality that David is absent. Interestingly, it is David's conscience that is "clean," while Saul, with his murderous intentions, is sitting in the midst of his "*uncleanness*". The same issue surfaced in the gospels when Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of being *unclean*, because he had failed to wash. But Jesus turned the tables on them, accusing them of being *unclean*, because they had murder in their hearts. (Mark 7:5, 21). By the second evening, Saul is unable to hold his emotions in check any longer. He blurts out the angry question to his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal?" At this point the king can't even bring himself

to utter David's name.

Jonathan, having been well rehearsed by David, now lights the fuse.

(b) The Fuse Is Lit (20:28-29)

Jonathan then answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem, for he said, 'Please let me go, since our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my **brother** has commanded me to attend. And now, if I have found favor in your sight, please let me get away (lit. *escape*) that I may see my **brothers**.' For this reason he has not come to the table of king."

As we have already seen, every word in Jonathan's response is designed to provoke Saul's emotions. He even adds a few choice words of his own. The phrase "*If I have found favor in your sight*" is crafted to provoke Saul's jealousy. David's words "*My brother has commanded me to attend*" imply that his brothers have more authority over him than the king. Then Jonathan attributes to David the words "*let me escape*" (to Bethlehem). That is why David has not come to the *table of the king*. Jonathan is learning to become a man. Rather than allowing his father to use a dinner party to advance his cause, Jonathan makes a preemptive strike and uses the occasion to expose Saul's evil motives. Real men don't stand by while the powerful plot evil.

So the fuse is lit...and Saul explodes.

(c) The King Explodes (20:30-34)

Then Saul's **anger** burned against Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not **know** that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely **die**." But Jonathan answered Saul his father and said to him, "**Why** should he be put to **death**? **What** has he done?" Then Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down; so Jonathan **knew** that his father had decided to put David to **death**. Then Jonathan **arose** from the table in **fierce anger**, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was **grieved** over David because his father had dishonored him.

With the first words out of his mouth, Saul disowns Jonathan, calling him a bastard. For Saul, the issue is quite clear: Jonathan could not maintain his status as his son while he maintained loyalty to *that* son of Jesse. Saul reasons that if David has a future, Jonathan would not. He is saying, in effect, "I'm doing all this for you, for your future, you fool!"

At this point, Jonathan steps up to the plate and asks *the* question: "*Why should he be put to death? What has he done?*" Jonathan doesn't react to abuse with direct force; he unravels it with penetrating questions. This was the very question David asked of Jonathan in verse 1: "What have I done? What is my iniquity?" Now Jonathan is willing to stand in David's place and become his advocate. This is the center-line (verse 32) of the scene; here the drama turns.

Jonathan's searching questions bring Saul's anger to the boiling point. He is so angry he can't even speak. He hurls

his spear, that famous, impotent spear (an apt symbol of his leadership), at his own son. As the spear hurls past him into the wall, Jonathan finally comes to see things from David's point of view. Saul is incorrigible. Death is irrevocable.

Last year, I attended a party at which one individual had a hidden agenda. I went there on behalf of my daughter, whom I felt was caught in an abusive situation. Before long, that controlling, angry individual took over. After a while, I realized that I had to say something. I asked two questions — and then came the spear. In his response, this individual revealed for all to see what he had long been doing privately. When I got home, my daughter hugged me and said, "Daddy, I love you." Love is willing to take the other's place and see life from his point of view. And sometimes, as we have seen, this takes blowing up a party.

Jonathan now takes his stand.

(d) Jonathan Takes His Stand as a Man (20:34)

What do you do with a father who has disowned you in both speech and action? Jonathan, who rose up at the beginning of the feast to honor his father's general, now rises up in fierce anger, breaking fellowship with Saul, because his father has dishonored David. The break in relationship between father and son is now completed, while the loyalty between David and Jonathan is perfected.

Becoming an adult means giving up trying to serve competing loyalties. Serving Christ is a liberating, exhilarating calling. No longer will you have to labor under the burden of competing loyalties. Making peace is no longer your goal. Being at peace while serving the one Master is your goal now that you are free to serve but one.

Having just graduated, Jonathan leaves the family party and goes out to the field to fulfill his commitment to David..

II. An Archery Lesson: David Becomes A Man (20:35-42)

(a) The Method of the Arrows (20:18-24)

Jonathan's task is to communicate faithfully what he knows about Saul's intentions for death. The method that he and David selected in advance for their secret communication was the symbol of archery, where arrows would be sought after by a youth. This was explained earlier in this chapter, in verses 18-23:

Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed because your seat will be empty. When you have stayed for three days, you shall go down quickly and come to the place where you hid yourself on that eventful day, and you shall remain by the stone Ezel. And I will shoot three **arrows** to the side, as though I shot at a target. And behold, I will send the **youth**, saying, 'Go, find the **arrows**.' If I specifically say to the **youth**, 'Behold, the **arrows** are on this side of you, get them,' then come; for there is safety for you and no harm, as the **LORD** lives. But if I say to the **youth**, 'Behold, the **arrows** are beyond you,' go, for the **LORD** has **sent** you away. As for the agreement of which you and I have spoken, behold, **the LORD is between you and me forever**."

In Hebrew, the verb "to shoot" has the same root as the

verb “to teach.” (The noun form of the word is “Torah.”) The Hebrews regarded teaching as anything but random and casual. To them, teaching was to be specific and directive (like shooting an arrow at a target) and penetrating (it should go deep). Thus, through the symbol of archery, Jonathan acts out the role of spiritual director for David, communicating with him directly but secretly.

Notice that Jonathan has changed from being the naive peacemaker to being the spiritual director, imparting a vision for David that presses home the deep implications of the truth.

(b) The Message in the Arrows (20:35-40)

Now it came about in the morning that Jonathan went out into the **field** for the appointment with David, and a little **youth** was with him. And he said to his **youth**, “Run, find now the **arrows** which I am about to shoot.” As the **youth** was running, he shot an arrow past him. When the **youth** reached the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the **youth**, and said, “Is not the **arrow** beyond you?” And Jonathan called after the **youth**, “Hurry, be quick, do not stay!” And Jonathan’s **youth** picked up the arrow and came to his master. But the **youth** did not **know** anything; only Jonathan and David **knew** about the matter. Then Jonathan gave his **weapons** to his youth and said to him, “Go, bring them to the **city**.”

When David hears Jonathan’s words “*Is not the arrow beyond you?*” he learns that his destiny lies down the uncertain road of exile. The cry, “Hurry, be quick, do not stay!” conveys that the situation is extremely dangerous. David must depart without further delay. Then comes the center-line: “*But the youth did not know anything; only Jonathan and David knew about the matter.*” The text is a whirl of activity and movement, but the stillness of this verse, the center-line, speaks volumes. Here the innocence of youth gives way to the manhood of weighty revelation. At last, Jonathan is united with David in his full understanding of Saul’s intent on death.

“*Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the youth.*” Again, as he did in chapter 18, Jonathan strips before David, thereby renouncing his right to the throne. Jonathan adds, “*Go take them to the city,*” meaning, “David, go to your destiny.” Purified by his stay in the wilderness, David will one day return as king to this city.

All that is left for the friends is a last good-bye.

(c) The Impact of the Arrows

When the **youth was gone**, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David more. And Jonathan said to David, “Go in safety (*shalom* - peace), inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the **LORD**, saying, ‘The **LORD will be between me and you**, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.’” Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the **city**.

Notice the plaintive message of verse 41: “*When the youth was gone.*” The time of innocence is over. These two youths, Jonathan and David, have become men. David realizes that Jonathan is willing to die for him, while Jonathan realizes that David must be banished to the wilderness. Yet, in this moment of painful parting, they hold on

to the one thing that is eternal, their covenantal love and loyalty: “*The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.*” Each will go his chosen, separate way. Ironically, the one banished to the wilderness will find safety, while the one consigned to the city will find death.

This poignant scene will be played out again in the Upper Room as the disciples learn that their King David must die. There, in the inauguration of the new covenant, love is born as the bread is broken and the wine is poured: The Lord will be in their midst forever. The switch in the story is that Jesus so loves the disciples, he becomes the Jonathan who will die for them, while they take the Messiah’s stage. Oh, the enormity of it. Christ died for us that we may get to play his role in the Kingdom.

Reflecting on these two scenes, George Herbert (1593-1671) penned these lines in *The Church Porch*:

*Thy friend put in thy bosom: wear his eyes
Still in thy heart, that he may see what’s there.
If cause require, thou art his sacrifice;
Thy drops of blood must pay down all his fear:
But love is lost; the way of friendship’s gone,
Though David had his Jonathan, Christ his John.*

As we conclude this morning, I have four reflections I want to share with you about growing up.

III. Reflections On Growing Up

1. Maturity Demands Undivided Loyalty *One God, One Loyalty (Deut 6:4-5)*

Being a Christian demands undivided loyalty to Jesus Christ. The great Shema of Deuteronomy 6 declares: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” To be a man means that we no longer can serve competing loyalties. We will be holding a baptism later this afternoon, and many from this congregation will be buried in the water to be raised, connected only to Christ, freed from all competing loyalties. All competing ties, with parents, mothers, bosses, coaches, will be severed. This is freedom indeed. No longer will you feel constrained to keep the peace at any cost. No longer will you feel obligated to get people to like each other.

Just before Thanksgiving last year, I noticed that one of my friends seemed depressed. She told me that she was not looking forward to the feast because every time she went home she had to put up with verbal abuse from her father. I told her she did not have to go home and face that anymore. As a Christian, she had a new family in Christ. If God was prompting her to go home, she should do so, but only on the basis that she now had different loyalties. She had been linked to Christ.

As I look at Jonathan’s single-mindedness and devotion, my prayer is, “O Lord, make me like Jonathan: willing to be a bastard for Christ’s sake, renouncing my earthly citizenship, that I might follow Christ with my whole heart” (Phil 3:2-8).

2. Maturity Demands Truth over Peace *Be Not Placaters by Truth Tellers*

Maturity demands we make truth, not peace, our primary goal. This is the correct order, as James points out, "The wisdom from above is *first* pure, *then* peaceable." We are tempted to reverse these, aren't we? We want peace first, and then truth. But if we are to be a mature people we can't stand by passively when people seek to further their evil agendas. Rather, we must act to uncover and expose evil intentions. Well crafted questions unravel abusive behavior. We can't always maintain the peace, with happy homes and neat, tranquil workplaces. We have to confront with the truth. And things will often get worse before they improve. This is what caused Jonathan to make a preemptive strike at the meal, and what moved Christ to blow up several parties with his questions. Speaking the truth in love. This is what will help us grow up, as Paul says in Ephesians: "Speaking the truth in love we grow up in all aspects into Him."

3. Maturity Demands Letting Go

"Behold, the arrows are beyond you"

Becoming adults means we don't possess people, we direct them. Children and friends alike, we must give them up, as Jonathan did with his closest friendship. This is what we must do so that each person can serve God where he or she is called. And growing up means being faithful to serve in whatever sphere we are called. Jonathan was called to the city, to face certain death, while David, who would find his destiny in a wilderness, was called to be the future leader.

I keep a photograph on my desk of the first ten men I had a Bible study with here in this church. We loved each other. We traveled to many places, at home and abroad, together. Five of them are gone now. The arrow flew beyond them, and they had to leave, to Oregon, Michigan, Coeur d'Alene, Pleasanton, and Romania. Their leaving was hard for me, and especially so the one who would be called to Romania. During communion at his wedding ceremony there, we decided that the Americans would serve the Ro-

manians, while the Romanians would serve us. We set a table, with the bread and wine, and two Bibles, one in English, the other in Romanian. When my turn to serve came, I looked up and there, across the table from me, was Jim Foster, the new Romanian son. That was the day we became men. We had to let go even in the tears. He was called there, I am called to be here. Maturity means letting go.

4. Maturity Means Finding God

"The LORD will be between me and you"

And what is out there in the wilderness? Nothing but God. That was why Jonathan directed David to the Lord. A friend of mine called this text "Alone in the knowledge of the Lord." There is something about the kingdom of God that each person must be established in some degree of isolation before he or she can become useful. We have the book of Psalms today because there, in the wilderness to which he was banished, David learned to pray.

A couple of evenings ago, Emily and I visited our elder, Don Gruelle, in the hospital. His new kidney is being rejected by his body and he is undergoing extensive anti-rejection treatment. He told me he was learning something new about God. He had known God, the Creator of the universe, he said, but he always had a hard time comprehending that the Creator loved him personally. His recent experiences, however, had taught him of that great love. By his bedside he had a paper setting out every verse in the book of Psalms that applied to him personally. He had gone through the entire Psalter and typed the verses. As he read them to us, he kept saying, "This is me." "This is me." When he read the words of Psalm 50:1, "The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken," he began to weep with joy. Here is a man who is cast in the wilderness, pressed up against the breast of God.

That is where God is to be found, and that is what David will learn.

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A SWORD AND FIVE LOAVES

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 957

1 Samuel 21:1-9

Tenth Message

Brian Morgan

August 7, 1994

This morning we return to our studies on the life of King David from the book of First Samuel. When he was a mere boy, David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel and thrust into the court of King Saul. The suspicious Saul became mad with envy and rage at the very sight of the shepherd boy. In our last study, from chapter 20, Saul's resolve to kill David was revealed to Jonathan, the king's son and David's loyal friend. Following their prearranged code, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond David, who was hiding in a field. The command to David, voiced by Jonathan, was, "Go, for the Lord has sent you away."

In chapter 21, to which we come today, we find that David takes his first steps into the wilderness. He is embarked on a holy journey to meet God. There, in the wilderness, he will enter the school of spirituality, the very school of Christ. It is the school that all who want to follow the Lord must attend.

This text unearths the very heart of godly spirituality. David has fled in haste from the king's court in Gibeah. As a fugitive, lacking food and a weapon, his most pressing need is to make provision for his journey into the wilderness. Setting out, he has his first encounter about two miles southeast of Gibeah, in Nob. There, with great cunning and skill, he secures aid from Ahimelech, the high priest to King Saul, as we learn in these opening verses from chapter 21.

Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the **priest**; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David, and said to him, "Why are you alone and **no one** with you?" And David said to Ahimelech the **priest**, "The king has commissioned me with a matter, and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.' Now therefore, what do you have **on hand**? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found." And the **priest** answered David and said, "There is no **ordinary** bread **on hand**, but there is **holy** bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women." And David answered the **priest** and said to him, "Surely women have been **kept** from us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were **holy**, though it was an **ordinary** journey; how much more then today will their vessels be **holy**?" So the **priest** gave him **holy** bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away.

Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained (*kept*) before the LORD; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds.

And David said to Ahimelech, "Now is there not a

spear or a sword **on hand**? For I brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's matter was urgent." Then the **priest** said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take it. For there is **no other** except it here." And David said, "There is **none like it**; give it to me." (1 Sam 21:1-9, NASB)

In narrative passages such as this it is sometimes difficult to grasp what the author is conveying. Biblical narrative can be viewed on many different levels, because the details are seldom presented in simple, black and white terms. In the literary structure, however, the repetition of various words, etc., the author gives clues as to the spiritual principles he is making. As far as structure is concerned, we have already seen that most of these narratives proceed from a beginning to a center line, where everything turns, and then the text returns to where it began.

We will begin by establishing the story line of this text. All Christians would do well to learn to become story tellers. Stories are the most effective means of declaring the gospel and changing the hearts of people. Actually, stories make up more than half of the Scriptures.

I. The Story Line¹ (21:1-9)

If you remember, the last scene in this narrative concerning the life of David was played out around a family feast at the king's court. On that evening everyone was present, everyone, that is, except David. The irritated Saul demanded, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to the feast (lit. bread)?" (20:27). The answer was that the king's table had become a dangerous place for David. But, of course, no one offered this as a reason. Instead, Saul was misled by Jonathan, who said that David had left to attend another holy feast in Bethlehem.

David was not so foolish as to return to his birthplace. Bethlehem ("house of bread") was no longer a safe house of bread for him, so he deliberately chose another "house of bread" — Nob — the leading sanctuary of the country. Arriving at Nob, he immediately consults the priest. But this man, Ahimelech, is not just any priest. He is the high priest to the king. What a daring move by David! The fugitive was looking for food and a weapon. And he was not seeking ordinary bread, but holy bread; and not just any weapon, but the king's trophy, the sword which was used in the victory over Goliath. Can you imagine the leader of the French Resistance during World War II requesting provisions for his men from Hitler's chief of staff? That, in a sense, is similar to what David is doing here, asking for provisions from Ahimelech, Saul's high priest.

So here we have an encounter between a fugitive, who is in fact the newly anointed king, and the priest of the reigning king. The word repetition identifies the key

players in the text as the priest and the king. (The word “king” is “melech,” thus the name Ahimelech actually means “my brother is king.”) What happens when the fugitive king of the new order meets the high priest of the existing king, the old order? This encounter builds on the interplay of the exchanges between these two.

To help us discover what is happening, we need to observe who speaks the most. David, we see, speaks four times. He has 5, 4, 3, and 2 lines (vv 2, 3, 5, 8, and 9). Ahimelech speaks three times, with 1, 3, and 4 lines. At the beginning of their conversation, David has a story to tell, thus he has to work hard to overcome Ahimelech’s anxiety. Then, as the fears of the priest are assuaged, David speaks less, and Ahimelech is free to speak more.

Notice that when Ahimelech comes to meet David, he is “trembling,” according to the text. He was suffering from the same kind of terror that the elders of Bethlehem felt when Samuel first came to anoint the new king (1 Sam 16:4). Certainly the high priest was not ignorant of the deterioration in the relationship between David and Saul. That is why he asks David, “Why are you alone and no one with you?” David replies that “the king” has commissioned him on a matter of utmost secrecy, and that he has directed his men to a certain place.

Then he presses Ahimelech with his request: “What do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.” On the surface, his requirements sound rather innocuous. Have you ever done that to someone? They had something you wanted, but rather than asking for it, you pressed your case with an open-ended question. But David is eagerly seeking the holy bread. That is what he wants. The priest answers by saying there was no “ordinary” bread on hand, only “holy” bread. This is the job of a priest, to distinguish between that which is holy and that which is profane, and to protect the holy from the profane.

Ahimelech says while there was no ordinary bread on hand, there was consecrated bread, “if only the young men have kept themselves from women.” David’s men had to be consecrated, i.e., to not have had sexual relations with women (cf. Uriah, who refused to have sexual relations with a woman during holy war, 2 Sam 11:11). However, in his reply to David’s request for bread, Ahimelech is not really dealing with the issue at hand. According to Leviticus 24:5-9, David could not have this consecrated bread under any circumstances. Once the holy bread was replaced by new bread, it was to be eaten only by priests. But David responds, “The men were clean when they began the journey, though it was an *ordinary* journey, how much more now that they are on the king’s mission of a *holy* journey will they be *holy*?” David’s statement, that the holy journey that he was embarked upon had made him “exceptionally” clean, is the center line of the text. With these words, Ahimelech’s anxiety is overcome and he gives to David what is holy.

But a much bigger issue lurks behind these words. Which one of the kings, Saul or David, was clean? Verse 6 gives us the answer:

So the **priest** gave him **holy** bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away.

What was true of the shew bread was also true of the two kings. Saul was “removed from before the LORD, in order to put (a new king) in his place when he was taken away.” This symbolizes the fact that, because of his disobedience, Saul no longer had access to God through the priesthood.

An ominous note is struck in verse 7 with the introduction of a word concerning Doeg, the Edomite. He is described as the “chief (the word can mean “powerful, violent, or tyrannical”) of Saul’s shepherds.” Doeg, one of Saul’s hired guns, has heard everything that has passed between Ahimelech and David. For some strange reason, Doeg is detained (*kept*) before the presence of the Lord. The question arises, what is an Edomite doing in God’s sanctuary? As we will learn later, between Doeg’s betrayal and Saul’s rage, the entire priesthood will be destroyed.

David, having acquired holy food, now desires an appropriate weapon for his journey. So he inquires once again of Ahimelech: “Is there a sword or spear on hand, for... the king’s matter was urgent.” In reality, it was David’s own urgency in having to flee that led to his forgetting to take a weapon with him, not the urgency of the king’s matter. David wants *the* trophy, the spoils of war that rightfully belong to him.

The relieved Ahimelech, who now feels free to speak, responds with a ring of pride in his voice. He tells David that the trophy has been carefully kept, “wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod,” actually. He gives full freedom to David to avail himself of it, saying, “if you would take it for yourself, take it. For there is no other except it here.” Thus does the weapon, the spoils of holy war, return from God to the conqueror, David, through the agency of a priest.

I will make three reflections on this incident.

II. Reflections

(a) Is deception ever appropriate?

Obviously, the first question raised by this text is, Was it proper for David to deceive the priest? Notice what David said: “The king has commissioned me” (v. 2); “the king’s matter was urgent” (v. 8). Was he being truthful? Before we jump to conclusions, I think we need to look at the context of his statements. Remember that David’s anointing was a threat to the powers that be. God was overthrowing the old order and instituting the new. The war was on, lives were at stake, and David was being careful not to expose himself by placing all his cards on the table.

Secondly, a careful reading of the text demonstrates that what David said was not a direct lie. I would describe it as a statement cloaked in ambiguity. He had been sent out on a mission, commanded by the King of kings, in Jonathan’s words, to “go, for the Lord has sent you away” (20:22). His was a secret, urgent mission. Jonathan had admonished him, “Hurry, be quick, do not stay!” (20:38). David’s own reign as King over Israel would be the final end of this matter.

The principle here is this: When there is a war on, being truthful does not necessarily imply you have to disclose all your motives and strategies to those who would wish to use you, abuse you, or kill you.

There are striking similarities in this story with certain

incidents in the life of Jesus. From the beginning, our Lord's anointing was a threat to the powers that be. He was on a secret mission, so he kept his identity secret until his hour had come. He was unwilling to let anyone and everyone know the whole truth about him. That is why he silenced the demons who wanted to identify him early in his ministry (Mark 1:25). Oftentimes he was ambiguous with his enemies. Asked by Pilate, "Are you the King of the Jews?" he replied, "You say it." We learn in John 7 that he even worked a little deception with his brothers. During the Feast of Booths, although the Jews were seeking to kill him, his brothers told him to go and show himself in Judea. The reason behind their suggestion, they said, was that "no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If you do these things, show Yourself to the world." But Jesus replied, "You go. I do not go up" (some manuscripts add the word *yet*). The text goes on to say he did go up publicly but, as it were, in secret.

Many thousands of Jews were saved from the Holocaust by courageous people who did not place all their cards on the table. During my trip to Israel earlier this year, I visited a street called the Avenue of the Righteous, an avenue of trees planted in memory of people who helped save Jews during the Holocaust. We saw trees dedicated to Corrie Ten Boom and to Oscar Schindler, both of whom, through deception of the enemy, saved the lives of many innocent Jews. There is no doubt that Christians should not involve themselves in outright lying, but there may come times when they have to answer ambiguously and play their cards very carefully because of spiritual warfare.

The text raises a second question.

(b) What constitutes holiness? Is it ritual, or something deeper?

We have already seen that the job of a priest is to discern between what is holy and what is profane, and to protect that which is holy from becoming profane. While it is true that David violated the laws of holiness concerning the shew bread, which only members of the priesthood were to eat (Lev 24:5-9), yet Jesus himself commended David's actions as exemplary and spiritually perceptive. Our Lord used this very text to answer the Pharisees, who accused the disciples of violating the Sabbath by picking heads of grain. Jesus said: "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions: how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he gave it also to those who were with him?" (Mark 2:25-26).

On matters of ritual, David had an astonishing freedom that Saul never had. What gave David the insight to declare himself clean and be free to eat the holy bread of the priests? The answer, I believe, lies in the nature of the journey. By God's command, David had set out on a holy journey through the wilderness where he would meet with God. No ordinary food, but only holy food would suffice for that journey, which would so intensify his holiness that he would become a priest of a higher order than the priesthood of Aaron. David, in the words of one commentator, was invigorated by "sacred things, by nothing less than the Bread of the Presence. Just as God has looked benevolently on that food, so, the implication is, he will also

'make his face shine' on this refugee" (Fokklemann). David's holy journey made him a priest, with direct access to God.

We see parallels in the life of Jesus. Following our Lord's anointing at his baptism, he headed straight for the wilderness. Following forty days and nights of fasting, he refused earthly bread when tempted by the devil, who said to him: "Turn these stones into bread." "Feed yourself," was what the devil was suggesting. But Jesus refused, saying, "Man shall live by the word of God." He was waiting for God to feed him nothing less than heavenly manna. Mark says that later, Jesus was "ministered to by the angels." This word "ministered" is the same word used in Acts 6 of the deacons who served tables. The angels fed Jesus heavenly manna. Later still, during his ministry, Jesus would take his disciples into the wilderness, bypassing all the ritual of Jerusalem, and there give them "bread from heaven."

In Jerusalem I found it hard to visit many of the holy places because of various restrictions involving dress codes, times, etc. One day we were unsuccessful in getting to see the Temple Mount, and I decided to take time out to rest. I found a little archway in a schoolyard where a cooling breeze was filtering through. I sat there a while, and then decided to squeeze into the archway and lie down to rest. Just when I succeeded in doing so, I heard a voice saying: "It is forbidden!" It was a holy place, and lying down was forbidden. The same thing was true of another building across the street where I sat down to rest. I remembered the words of Jesus, "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Things were different in Galilee, however. There we sat on the hill where the feeding of the five thousand took place. Jesus had bypassed the intermediaries of Jerusalem and gone out into that simple place where he called down bread from heaven to feed his disciples. There is no place for ritual in the wilderness. There the Messianic King makes all things holy.

The New Testament injunction to us comes from Hebrews: "The Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year...make perfect those who draw near." Then speaking of the new order brought about in Christ, the author exhorts us, "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with sincere heart in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb 10:1, 19-22).

Charles Wesley put it this way in his hymn *Arise My Soul, Arise*:

Arise, my soul, arise.
Shake off thy guilty fears.
The bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety stands,
Before the throne my Surety stands;
My name is written on His hands.

My third and final reflection is this:

(c) What happens when two world orders collide?

At Nob, David, the fugitive king, came into contact with the high priest of Saul, the king according to the old order. God orchestrated the scene so that the priest did not merely give aid to the king, he gave him holy bread and a holy sword. This meeting became in a sense a special ordination ceremony by God. It was the occasion when the fugitive became a warrior and a priest.

Secondly, we see how the old priesthood was set up for future judgment by the presence of Doeg, the Edomite, who spied out the whole incident. (Thus the words of the prophet in 1 Samuel 2:31-33 would be fulfilled concerning the house of Eli.) This new kingdom is not only consecrated by the old order, it unravels it. Following this event, David wrote these words in Psalm 52:8-9:

But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of
God;
I trust in the loyal-love of God forever and ever.
I will give You thanks forever, because You have done
it,
And I will wait on Your name, for it is good,
In the presence of Your godly ones. (Ps 52:8-9).

So it was with Christ. God so orchestrated his life and ministry, he received the unsolicited, spontaneous testimony of others, even his enemies, as to who he was. His enemy, Pilate, put a sign above his head on the cross in full public view. He wrote these words in three languages: *King of the Jews*. A little later that day, the Roman centurion uttered his unsolicited testimony: "Truly, this was the Son of God."

Ahimelech's ordination of David, therefore, sealed the downfall of his own entire order and marked the end of the priesthood. As these two orders, the old and the new, collide, we see both the judgment and the grace of God at work. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the fate of both Israel and Rome were sealed. Neither nation would stand, but the church of Christ would stand forever.

Are you on a holy journey in the wilderness? Then seek what is holy, and allow God to ordain you.

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1. I have depended much on the great insights of J.P. Fokkemann's classic work, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, Volume 2, *The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986).



REAL DRAMA IN GATH

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 958
1 Samuel 21:10-22:1
Eleventh Message
Brian Morgan
August 14, 1994

A few years ago, I took a trip to Colorado with about twelve men from this church. During the long drive, I sat in the passenger seat of a pickup driven by a new friend. As we crossed the Nevada desert, I asked this man to share his story with me. Looking out at the desert that surrounded us, he began by saying that he felt he was living in a spiritual desert. He had come from a Christian home, but he had drifted from the faith, he said. He had married an unbeliever, and they became involved in a lifestyle of partying and drinking. They had two children, but that didn't inhibit their lifestyle. Then his brother became a Christian, and he invited him to church one day. Shortly afterwards, he came to Christ. He said he felt his sins were forgiven, his soul cleansed, and he found he had new appetites and affections.

His new life created dissonance in his home, however. His wife wanted to continue to party and drink (by now she was an alcoholic), but he refused to go along with her. She would go out by herself and stay out until all hours of the morning. At the time of the trip to Colorado they were separated, and she already had a boyfriend. I asked him what he was going to do. "As a Christian, where do you turn when your whole world blows up and you are attacked by those closest to you?" I asked him. He told me that the first piece of advice he got came from Christians. They told him to get the best attorney possible and go after his wife in court. I asked him if he intended to follow their advice. "If I do, I might win the battle," he said, "but would I win the war? What effect would that have on her soul?" He said that one of the reasons he was going on the trip to Colorado was to help him discover what to do with his life. A few years later as our men's group was studying this passage, he testified that it was this text from First Samuel, which we will look at today, that told him exactly what to do.

This morning, we pick up the story of David once more, from the narrative account in 1 Samuel. Having received practical help from the priest at the sanctuary of Nob, David now flees due west. Wanting to get as far away from Saul as possible, he arrives in Philistine territory, of all places. Why does he choose to go there? It is because both he and the Philistines are enemies of Saul. Perhaps David is thinking that if he makes an alliance with Achish, the king of Gath, by selling his military services, he will find safety.

The question raised by this text is this: What happens when we flee to the world and make alliances with it to do for us what God has promised to do in the wilderness? Let us see what happens as we accompany David on his flight to Gath. Our text is 1 Samuel 21:10-22:1.

Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. But the servants of Achish

said to him, "Is **this not** David the **king of the land**? Did they **not** sing of **this one** as they danced, saying,

'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands?'"

And David took these **words to heart**, and greatly **feared** Achish king of Gath. So he **disguised his sanity before them**, and acted insanelly in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man behaving as a **madman**. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack **madmen**, that you have brought this one to act the **madman** in my presence? Shall **this one** come into my house?"

So David departed from there and **escaped** to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father's household heard of it, they went down there to him. (NASB)

The Story Line¹

At the scene opens, David is making a beeline directly west from Nob. He arrives in Philistine territory, in the land of Achish, king of Gath.² Notice that the action is framed by geographical details. The scene begins with David *fleeing* to Gath; and ends with him *escaping* to Adullam. In these six verses we see what happens when a believer wanders into foreign soil (represented by Gath) to seek aid, and the consequences that result until he undertakes the journey home (represented by Adullam).

So David arrives in Goliath's home turf, carrying the sword of the slain champion. It is obvious that he wants to come to a political accommodation. But before negotiations can begin, the politically savvy servants of Achish give David's identity away. (In this book, the servants always appear to be blessed with more insight than the kings.) Here is what they chant:

"Is this not David the king of the land?
Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying,
'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands?'"

The song of the women of Israel, repeated word for word, following David's astonishing victory over Goliath, has made it all the way to foreign soil. The refrain resonates with implications as to the destiny of David. It was these very words that caused Saul to ponder who David really was, when he reflected, "What more can he have but the kingdom?" (18:8). But the Philistine servants see David in even larger terms. They refer to him as "King of the land." J.P. Fokklemann makes the point that "the text gives us the surprise that we meet no less than three kings within the scope of a mere four lines...There are two kings

with land, Saul and Achish, and the third, David, shuttles back and forth between them. It is precisely this king without land who is now called 'the king of the land.' Land is an open-ended designation with no boundaries, and the servants leave it to their King to draw the right conclusion and take the appropriate action." The servants prove to be a first-class intelligence source. And they have the right view of David, too. Twenty years later, this king will be more powerful than all the Philistine city princes put together. Isn't it ironic that the messianic king's destiny is better understood in gentile lands than in Israel?

These servants' words penetrate deep into David's soul and he becomes terrified. It was fear that drove him to foreign soil, and now fear turns to terror³ when he finds that he is trapped. The phrase "in their hands" (v 13) may indicate that David was actually arrested by Achish's secret service. He has no avenue for escape. How ironic, when we remember that before his departure into the wilderness, he was given all kinds of support — supernatural protection by the prophets (19:19-24), spiritual encouragement and loyal-love from Jonathan (20:42), and practical help from the high priest at Nob (21:6, 9). A fugitive in foreign soil now, he finds no help or support.

So David throws off all his inhibitions. Feigning the role of a madman before Achish, the text says, "He changed his sanity (discernment, understanding, suitable behavior) in their eyes." This scene is reminiscent of Saul, whose behavior was changed as he approached the prophet Samuel, and he prophesied. The difference is that "David, unlike Saul, always operates with great intentionality" (Walter Brueggemann). As I was studying this text, David Roper sent me a note that said: "Have you noticed Achish's odd word for madman (*shaga'* - *be mad, rage, or howl*)? (21:16). I understand the cognate Akkadian word suggests a *violent, dangerous* man. It suggests that David played the role to the hilt, acting in such a way that he scared the living daylights out of Achish and his courtiers!" David puts on an Academy Award-winning performance. He is playing the role of his life, acting for his very life. Truly, this scene is *Real Drama in Gath!*

Notice the twin actions of David. He "scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard." These two actions are symbolic of what happens to our souls when we seek alliances with the world. To scribble on the gate "is a picture of sorrow, impotence and longing. Behind the gate lies freedom, and he himself is locked up. He wants to leave this palace which has become a prison, but he does not know how to and, just like a real madman, falls back on the secret language of insanity in order to express his despair and his longing to escape. At the same time, the picture contains the inexorable hardness of the great gate and the walls next to it, against which the weak efforts of a poor madman can avail nothing. The next line is a clearer sign of madness, for the saliva dribbling into his beard implies an elementary loss of control...The madman has left the plane of communication which makes us all human...this idiot can no longer be spoken to...His world is one of total isolation and his universe is completely inaccessible" (Fokklemann). David cannot get out of his world and no one can enter his.

This text is a dire warning of what can happen to us when we make an unholy alliance with the world to fight our battles for us. We think we will gain freedom, but all

we succeed in doing is compromising our real identity. Thus we create a prison for ourselves where we can no longer communicate who we really are. Shut out of the real world, we feel frustrated, and we may end up going insane.

David's acting job is very successful. While the servants of Achish assess David by what they *hear*, Achish judges by what he *sees* (just as in chapter 17, when Saul and his men assessed Goliath by what they *saw*, David assessed Goliath by what he *heard*). Achish is indignant. He thinks his courtiers are stupid, when in fact it is he who is stupid. He cries, "Do I lack madmen that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence. Shall this one come into my house?" The scene ends with David being driven out (*garash*, literally: "thrown out") by Achish (Psalm 34:1).

Narrowly escaping death, David flees to seek refuge in Judea. He goes to the cave of Adullam, about twelve miles from his home town of Bethlehem. To get there, he would have had to walk right past the valley where he killed Goliath. Reflecting on his adventure into foreign soil, there in the cave of Adullam he writes Psalm 34, one of the classic descriptions of faith under pressure.

Reflections

I will make four reflections on this account of David's compromising with the world in his efforts to seek protection for himself.

(a) Where do we turn in our wilderness?

The greatest temptation we face in our wilderness is this: Instead of waiting on God, we immediately draw on our worldly support systems and make alliances with them to do for us what only God can do. In the New Testament, Paul describes this as "being unequally yoked" with unbelievers. It is fear that drives us to seek these alliances. Fear is a powerful force that can overcome even the strongest in the faith. When David was relying on God, he confronted Goliath without fear, yet in this account so terrified is he at the thought of having to face Saul that he seeks the aid of a Philistine garrison.

We can identify our fears by asking ourselves in what arenas have we made worldly alliances to do battle for us. When do we have most difficulty waiting on God? For some, it is the fear of being single. They cannot wait for the Lord to bring them their mates, so they marry unbelievers. Others do not trust God with their finances, so they have difficulty in giving to the Lord until they achieve financial security.

(b) What happens when we make alliances with the world?

If we choose to make an alliance with the world, God will let us have our way and we will become trapped. What we may regard as answered prayer is really his wrath, and we find that instead of delivering us like we dreamed, our alliances create prisons where we can't communicate. The walls are hard; we feel impotent to do anything. So we become angry and withdraw within ourselves. We imagine that no one understands us, no one really knows us. Finally, we go mad.

Not only does this inflict personal damage on us, we also lose our ministry to the world. "Though ingenious falsehoods may seem to promote present security, yet they

insure future disgrace" (A.W. Pink). Not only was David humiliated, but the Lord was dishonored. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul applies this text with respect to the practice of lawsuits among believers. The Corinthian Christians were hauling one another into court, making alliances with unbelieving attorneys and suing one another before unbelieving judges. Reminding believers of their identity, Paul says, "Don't you know that the saints will judge the world ...do you not know that we shall judge angels...I say this to your shame...Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged?" (1 Cor 6:2-7). In reality, the Corinthians were supposed to be attorneys for Christ, men and women who would gladly give up worldly possessions and suffer wrong so that their adversaries would come to know of the Lord. When Paul himself was in court, he confronted his judges with the gospel of Christ, regardless of cost to himself. We could take a lesson here with regard to politics. When the Church makes political alliances to further its cause, it brings shame to itself and to the Lord.

(c) Does God give up on us?

Though David is on foreign soil, God reminds him of his identity by using his enemies, the servants of Achish. David was not supposed to be in Gath on these terms. After all, he was the "King of the Land." This song spreads across the winds, making the gentile nations ready for the Messianic King. "Though we are faithless, He remains faithful, because He cannot deny Himself." And second, God presses in on the situation to force the issue. Psalm 34 indicates that when David was acting like a madman, he actually was praying his heart out. Third, God delivers David by grace. He was thrown out of town by Achish the king. And fourth, God brings David home.

This is what God does with all his wayward sons and daughters: He brings them home. I had a close friend who made an unholy alliance with the world some years ago. For ten years, he disguised his identity and lived a life of deceit, carrying on an adulterous affair. When he was found out, he admitted his wrongdoing. But then his partner in adultery went overseas, and instead of staying home in Adullam, he followed her to Gath, chasing after his dream. But God set in motion a plan to bring him back. My friend's boss was a Christian man, and he reminded him of who he was in Christ. Before long, he stopped acting like a madman. He repented and came home. God gave his wife the grace to forgive him, and their marriage was restored. They now have a ministry of counseling other couples who have troubled marriages. God is faithful to recall from the world those whom he loves.

(d) Deeper reflections of faith in the cave of Adullam

When at last David was back on his own turf, resting safely in the cave of Adullam, reflecting on the events in Gath, he wrote Psalm 34. The psalm is inscribed, "*when he feigned madness before Abimelech.*" During our trip to Israel this summer, we found the cave of Adullam on the side of a forested hill. Looking west from the top of the hill to the valley of Elah, we surveyed the place where David slew Goliath. Twelve miles to the northwest we could see Bethlehem. We could even see part of the skyline of Jerusalem.

There in the cave of Adullam, God restored David to his spiritual roots. In Adullam David wrote Psalm 34, one of the classic descriptions of true spirituality. The psalm,

which is written in the form of an acrostic, is heavily quoted and alluded to in the New Testament (1 Peter 2,3). It is even prophetic of Jesus Christ. If we did not have the narrative account that we have just looked at in 1 Samuel 21, however, we would not know that the psalm was birthed in the context of fear and deceit. When we juxtapose the psalm with the narrative, we have an accurate description of how David's soul resonated between earthly fears and heavenly trust. Oftentimes our deepest and best reflections come after we have failed miserably. When we go into the wilderness, all we need to do is be willing to learn. There in the wilderness, confronted at last with his own failure, David came to grips with who God really is and what faith was all about.

The psalm opens with a word of general praise:

I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear it and rejoice.
O magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together. (1-3)

Then David refers to the specific events of his deliverance.

I sought the LORD, and He answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
They looked to Him and were **radiant**,
And their faces shall never be **ashamed**.
This poor man cried and the LORD heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him,
And rescues them. (4-7)

God heard David's cry and delivered him from all his fears. It was not his acting ability that saved him, but rather an angel sent by the grace of God. Although David had brought shame to his Maker, God saved him. That was why this restored sinner could look into God's eyes with no sense of shame, because God's love and forgiveness made him radiate his Redeemer's love.

Now a forgiven sinner, David is restored as a teacher with a passion for the truth.

O **taste** (same word as "sanity" 21:13) and see that the LORD is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!
O fear the LORD, you His saints;
For to those who fear Him, there is **no want**.
The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;
But they who seek the LORD shall **not be in want of any good thing**. (8-10)

When you are in the wilderness, you don't need anybody or anything but God. The lesson is obvious: Don't fear men; fear God.

Come, you children, listen to me:
I will teach you the **fear of the LORD**.
Who is the man who desires life,
And loves length of days that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil,
And your **lips** from speaking **deceit**.
Depart from evil, and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it. (11-14)

When David feared man, he disguised his identity and made an unholy alliance. In the wilderness, we must remain dependent and not allow fear of danger to compromise our ethics. We should learn to fear God, not men.

The **eyes** of the LORD are toward the righteous,
And His **ears** are open to their cry.
The face of the LORD is against evil doers,
To cut off the memory of them from the earth.
The righteous cry and the LORD hears,
And delivers them out of all their troubles.
The LORD is **near** to the brokenhearted,
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.
Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all his bones;
Not one of them is broken.
Evil shall slay the wicked;
And those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
The LORD **redeems** the soul of His servants;
And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned. (15-22)

This was not the last affliction that David would face. There would be many more, with death as the final affliction, but even in death, God would redeem him. David's insight became prophetic of Jesus. God kept all his bones;

not one of them was broken.

With the words in verse 21, "Evil shall slay the wicked; And those who hate the righteous will be condemned," David reaches the end of the alphabet. But he has one more thought that he wants to include, so he adds another letter. There is one word he wants to leave us with, the word "redeem":

The LORD **redeems** the soul of His servants;
And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned."

Our God is a redemptive God who redeems the souls of his servants.

This psalm of David soars to the very heights of spirituality. Every Christian should reflect on it, memorize it, and sing it.

To those of you who are in Gath today I say, come home, and God will make your faces radiant. Amen.

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1. I have depended much on the great insights of J.P. Fokkemann's classic work, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum 1986), 362-371.

2. For an outstanding history and archaeology of the Philistines see Trude and Moshe Dothan, *People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

3. Note that the word "fear" becomes a key word in Psalm 34. It is used four times (7, 9, 9, 11) with new spiritual insight. Terrors is used once v 4, "The Lord...delivered me from all my fears."



ADULLAM: GOING UNDERGROUND

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 959
1 Samuel 22:1-5
Twelfth Message
Brian Morgan
August 21, 1994

When I visited Israel earlier this year, I felt heavy of heart. During the past year, I have had to say good-bye to many good friends who were leaving this area. Five members of our staff here at PBC have left within the past twelve months. I had grown weary of seeing so many good friends depart, and my loneliness over their leaving led me to write these lines by the Sea of Galilee:

For I came across to this holy place,
Tired, weary and forlorn,
Of always having to send away those I love
To the wilderness to be born.
Why must Jonathan serve David
In another court?
Why should David play his harp alone?
My harp is broken.

One of the purposes behind my trip to the Holy Land was to find the cave of Adullam, the place where David wrote his first psalms during the loneliness of his wilderness years. I wondered what was the secret that David discovered in that cave. Upon my return, I ran into my old friend, Ari Cartun, a rabbi at Stanford University. He said to me, "You know what David found in Adullam, don't you? He found eternity" (*ad olam* — eternity). So today I'm going to take you to Adullam, where David discovered the secret to eternal life.

There are four movements to the story, found in First Samuel 22:

1. Entering into the cave: What is it that drives us there?
2. Inside the cave: What do we find once we are all alone?
3. From inside looking out: What is God creating?
4. Leaving the cave: How does the cave affect our future walk?

We will begin by reading the text. 1 Samuel 22:1-5:

So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father's household heard of it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.

And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come and stay with you until I know what God will do for me." Then he left them with the king of Moab; and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. And the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth. (NASB)

I. Entering into the Cave: A Tomb (22:1a)

In the first movement, David enters the cave:

So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam;

During our trip, we found the cave on the side of a forested hill. From the crest of the hill we could see the valley of Elah, where David killed Goliath, about four miles to the west. Fixing our gaze to the north-east, we could see Bethlehem. We could even see the tops of the buildings in Jerusalem, about twelve miles distant. This was familiar territory to David. As a shepherd boy, it was here that he cared for his father's flocks. On reaching the cave, we found a small opening, through which we made our way inside. As our eyes adjusted to the light, we discovered that the cave has several chambers, separated by narrow passageways. It could indeed accommodate and conceal 400 men, as the text says.

Entering the cave, descending into the depths of the earth, we felt as though we were descending into a grave. (The place was even littered with bat droppings.) Adullam was a symbol of rejection for David. He fled there because he could find no other safe place. Saul's royal court was fraught with danger for him; he found no resting place in the walled cities of Judah; he could not get help from the foreign powers in Gath. The only safe place was a cave, and that was what he found in Adullam. It was, for all intents and purposes, a tomb.

David describes his loneliness in Psalm 142, which he wrote while he languished there in Adullam. Verse 4:

Look to the right and see;
For there is no one who regards me;
Escape has perished from me;
No one cares for my soul.

Jesus also was born in a cave. His kingdom likewise was a threat to the powers that be, so the only safe place for him was a cave. It is the same for all who wish to follow him. Eternal life is birthed through the gateway of rejection. Being abandoned by others is a blessing, however, if that is what it takes to drive us to God.

In the next movement of the story, David learns something that will change his life forever.

II. Alone Inside the Cave: A Womb (Ps 142:1-5)

Inside the cave, disconnected from all others, David learns to pray and to connect with God. He renders his musings into music, melodies that become worship in the hands of the shepherd-poet.

Before we set out to find Adullam, we made a visit to the House of Harrari in Jerusalem, whose craftsmen have recreated the Davidic harp. The instrument, which is made

from a single piece of hollowed-out wood, makes a beautiful sound. It struck me that the soul is a lot like David's harp. It is suffering and rejection that hollows out the soul, deepening and widening the heart so that it resonates. The strings of the soul are like the poetic words in the psalms that we say, and then the wind of God's Spirit blows across the strings and our soul resonates with life as we worship and connect with God.

Psalm 142 describes how David connected with the Lord in the loneliness of this cave.

(a) His Plea

With my voice I cry aloud to the LORD ;
With my voice I make supplication to the LORD;
I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare my trouble before Him. (1-2)

His affliction pressed so heavily on his soul that it created a great outcry in his heart before God. Holding nothing back, he poured forth everything that was troubling his spirit.

(b) His Plight

When my spirit faints within me,
But You know my way.
In the way where I walk,
They have hidden a trap for me.
Look to the right and see;
For there is no one who regards me;
Escape has perished from me;
No one cares for my soul (3-4).

The Sovereign God knew all about David's spirit fainting within him, yet he allowed these terrible things to befall him. This is what drives David to say at last, in verse 5:

(c) His Portion

I cried out to You, O LORD:
I said, 'You are my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.' (5)

The cave was a shelter from the world and a sanctuary with God. In that tomb David died to others; and in that womb he was tied to God alone. In Adullam he wrote the psalms, the deepest expressions of spirituality that have ever been penned.

From the cave we traveled to another cave named Eremos (the Greek word for "desert"), beyond the Sea of Galilee. This is the cave where Jesus often withdrew to find safety and solitude. Yet we often protest that living in our fast-paced world we haven't much time for deep reflection, let alone poetic expression. Do you think David had time? His life was in danger, yet he would not go on until he worshipped God in song.

On our trip, one of the brothers felt the necessity to spend some time alone with God, and so he took a whole day to worship in solitude. At the end of the day I found him sitting by the pool at the hotel where we were staying. He face was aglow with joy; he was refreshed and renewed. He shared with me everything the Lord had taught him that day. I suggested he write a poem about it. At first he refused, but upon our return I learned that he had indeed written a poem describing his emotions. I will read three stanzas from it:

I fled to the Adullam cave, not to hide,

but to reflect and revive.
A Sabbath's rest to repair.

Adullam's shepherd sunk my roots into the Above.
I emerged with reawakened resolve
not to feed without Christ's love.

Love surrounded me, "rushing into every crack";
and habits formed to others' harm
gave way to Eremos cave by prayer charmed.

The cave is a shelter from the world and a sanctuary with the Lord, a safe haven where we disconnect from others in order to connect with God. There we can reflect on the eternal significance of what God is doing amidst the mundane things of life.

In the third movement of our text, God surprises David with something that he was doing outside the cave.

III. Looking Out From The Cave: A Gathering Place (22:1b-2)

(a) Gathering Place for a New Spiritual Family

In Psalm 142 we read David's final petition from the cave:

"Bring my soul out of prison,
So that I may give thanks to Your name;
The righteous will surround me,
For You will deal bountifully with me." (7)

David senses that although he is, in a manner of speaking, entombed in a cave, God will resurrect him. He also has the sense that the spiritual life resulting from his connecting to God will draw others to the messianic king. As he looks out into the light, here is what he sees. 1 Samuel 22:2:

And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.

In one of the most beautiful scenes in Scripture, David looks out from the cave and sees that hundreds of men have been drawn to Adullam. The cave had become the gathering place. (By the way, the word "gather" is the Hebrew word from which the word "kibbutz" derives.)

And who were those who made up this new family? "Those who are in distress" (constrained, in deep straits that caused them to wither up); "everyone who was in debt" (due to the heavy tax structure of Saul's kingdom); and the "discontented" (literally, the bitter of soul, those for whom all the simple pleasures of life had disappeared). The people who were drawn to the cave were the outcasts, those who felt heavy-laden by the old kingdom. "In English literature the term Adullam is occasionally used as a kind of shorthand for a sanctuary outcasts. Thus Thomas Hardy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* refers to Mixen Lane in the lowest section of town as 'the Adullam of all the surrounding villages. It was the hiding place of those who were in distress, and in debt, and trouble of every kind.'"¹

The spiritual life that emanated from the cave of Adullam drew others into the new family. Everyone who came was drawn; no one was coerced. Saul was seeking David, but he could not find him, but those who were internally drawn found him without any problem. In the same way,

the men and women who came to Christ were drawn to do so willingly because of their unhappiness with the old order. They gladly responded when Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28-29).

I think this has profound implications for evangelism and church growth. Much effort is spent in trying to get people to attend church, but often they find that there is nothing about the life of the church that attracts them. Believers in the early church, however, had their priorities right. They focused on worship, fellowship, communion and the apostolic teaching, and the result of these things is recorded in the book of Acts: "and the Lord kept adding to their numbers those who were being saved." Evangelism in the early church was a natural outgrowth of the spiritual life of the church. The lesson for us is this: hurting people are drawn to believers who are connected to God.

This text also identifies whom we should target in our evangelistic efforts. Oftentimes we target the wrong groups, failing to recognize that God is already at work, drawing people to himself. The church needs to reach out to the discontented, the distressed, and the debt-ridden. In our own area, this means the foreign refugees, the poor, unwed mothers, the divorced, single parents, teenagers from unhappy homes, AIDS patients and the unborn. Such are fertile fields for the message of the gospel.

This then is the vision that David sees as he looks outside the cave of Adullam. God was bringing together a new spiritual community.

But there were others who came to the cave.

(b) Reconciliation of the Physical Family

And when his brothers and all his father's household heard of it, they went down there to him. (22:1b)

God was restructuring David's family. The outcast youth, once the subject of the disdain of his brothers, is now sought after as the messianic king who will overthrow the old order. At last his family recognizes him as their new leader, and they come to him on his turf and on his terms.

Jesus was a source of dissonance in his family. His brothers refused to believe in him; his mother tried to coerce him at the wedding in Cana. At one point, they thought he was a madman, so Jesus was forced to say, "Who are my mother, brothers, and sisters, but he who does the will of God?" Jesus was creating a new family, made up of those who were drawn to him. After his death and resurrection, his family too were reconciled to the new order. They were to be found in the Upper Room, with the others, worshipping Christ.

Though at times we grow spiritually because we suffer rejection initially by our physical family, true spirituality will keep them in our hearts as a right and proper concern, and we will long for their reconciliation with God. As many of you can attest, one of the most joyful occasions in life is when a member of one's physical family is reconciled to Christ.

The goal of spirituality therefore is community. The monks sought to withdraw from the world, and in this

they were half-right. But once we have met with God, true spirituality is experienced in community. Having met with God in the cave of Adullam, David has a vision of the new community. He leaves the cave, a different man, to walk twin paths.

How did his experience in the cave affect his walk with God?

IV. Leaving the Cave (22:3)

(a) A Path of Responsibility

And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come and stay with you until I know what God will do for me." (22:3)

In David's great hour of testing, having no home to call his own, he made it a top priority to honor his parents by providing a home for them. What a tribute to his heart, especially when we remember that in former times he felt abandoned by his own. As he wrote in Psalm 27:9,10: "Do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my Salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me..." David takes his family to Moab, right into the presence of the king (perhaps because Moab was the birthplace of his great-grandmother, Ruth). Note how he expresses his faith in God to the foreign king, in contrast to his behavior when he disguised his identity in front of Achish, in Gath.

Jesus had the same heart for his family. In his hour of trial and testing, he cared for his mother and provided for her future. The gospel records: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household" (John 19:26). While Jesus was being "cut off" from the earth, he made sure his mother was not cut off and abandoned.

It might not be convenient to care for your parents, but it is the biblical thing to do. My wife Emily cared for her dying father for the last year of his life. She moved him to an apartment across the street from our home and took care of him until cancer took him. Then her sister was diagnosed with AIDS, and she cared for her until she died. The new family transcends the old, but it still honors and cares for the old. Never forget those who bore you. Honor them to the grave. This protects us from the phenomenon of the cults, which are extremely destructive of families.

Spirituality is a path of responsibility.

There is a second path.

(b) A Path of Mobility

And the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth. (22:5)

By means of the direct voice of the prophet Gad, David was told to not attempt to create security for himself by turning the cave of Adullam into a permanent fortress. (The word for "fortress" is the same as the word for "Masada.") He would find security in his constant obedience to go wherever the Lord sent him ("they went wherever they could go", 1 Sam 23:13). David would find no perma-

nent place to settle as long Saul remained in power. That is why he continued to depend upon God.

Our Lord likewise could find no safe place to settle down during his ministry on earth. To those who naively wanted to follow him, he said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20). If this was the fate of David and Jesus, how can Christians expect to find a permanent, safe abode in this evil world? Let us not try to find safety in fortresses built by men, but rather in our constant abiding in the will of God.

The history of the Jews should serve as a warning to Christians today. In the first century, the sects who fled to fortresses like Masada or tried to put their security in the temple were destroyed. When the church adopts a fortress mentality and hides in structures of worldly security, whether buildings or political structures, we not only lose our effectiveness, we also forfeit our true security, making us an easy target for the enemy.

So I found the secret to spirituality in the cave of Adullam. I went to Israel suffering from the pain of losing close friends, but Adullam taught me that by letting people go, I am allowing them to enter into the most important aspect of spirituality: that they may "know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

O what Joy is this, what pleasure,
To find you all again,
And sing life's sweet Davidic song,
For those who trek to Adullam's den.

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1. David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 22.



DEATH OF THE INNOCENTS

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 960
1 Samuel 22:6-23
Thirteenth Message
Brian Morgan
August 28, 1994

One of the questions that has haunted believers for centuries is this: If God is sovereign, why does evil seem to run rampant in the world? This issue was tackled by one rabbi in his study of the book of Job. The result was his popular book, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" He concluded that God cares, but he is not sovereign.

How would you answer that question? Most Christians, unfortunately, have an inadequate theology, one that does not allow for all the complexities of things like evil, sin and death. Some Christians don't even bother to address such weighty matters. They skirt around the issue of evil as though it does not exist. For them, Christianity is hardly anything more than a ticket to heaven. But a glance at the newspaper or the nightly television news convinces that evil is an issue that cannot be avoided. Think of places like Rwanda, Croatia, Cuba and Haiti. Think of names like Nicole Simpson and Polly Klaas.

A brother from Eastern Europe who has seen much suffering wrote the following in a letter to me after he had spent a year in a men's Bible study with us:

My dear brothers in Christ,

I feel good among you and I like your gladness
I like to see you happy, laughing with jokes.
This is a blessed land, with no war for centuries,
Many generations you have lived in peace and wealth.

But I have come from the communist hell
And I can't forget the horrors I've lived and seen;
I cannot forget the hate sown between all men
And the desperate struggle in which I have been.

So, you mustn't be surprised when you are joking
And laughing; I can only be smiling!
Sorrow is marked on my mind and my face
Because my life was stolen and in slavery placed.

Brothers, forgive me, I can't laugh with you
From the whole body and heart like you!
I think about my people and I cannot enjoy
While they die by starvation, men, women, and boy.
(Aurel Stancu)

Evil does seem to have free rein, doesn't it?

If we read our Bible carefully, however, we will discover that Scripture does indeed deal forthrightly with the issue of evil. Today's text is a good example. We are going to look at a passage from 1 Samuel that deals with the slaughter of innocent men, women and children. At first, I wasn't eager to preach on this "dark side" of the Davidic narrative in our studies on the life of David. But as I studied, I found that this text began to unlock the great mysteries of evil and the sovereignty of God. So today we will

seek answers to the following questions: What is God doing when the devil seems to have free rein to practice evil in society? Can any good come of this in the end? If God is sovereign, is man culpable for his choices? What do the righteous do in the meantime?

The evil in 1 Samuel 22:5-23, gathers around the actions of King Saul as he takes vicious revenge against the priesthood in Nob for what he believes to be treason in Ahimelech's allegedly aiding David in his escape. The entire chapter is dominated by six speeches by Saul, utterances which are very revealing as to his character. In his first speech, in verses 6-8, the king reacts to information he has received as to David's whereabouts.

I. A Pity Party¹ (22:6-8)

Then Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered. Now Saul was sitting in Gibeah, under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. And Saul said to his servants who stood around him, "Hear now, O Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse also give to all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? For all of you have conspired against me so that there is no one who discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you who is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me to lie in ambush, as it is this day." (NASB)

This scene has two movements. First, we have a visual aid of Saul's state of mind as he positions himself; and then we hear his speech. Both movements depict a man who is paranoid, fearful, and extremely arrogant. In this formal meeting Saul has positioned himself at the center of everything. He sits higher than everyone else ("Gibeah" means "height"). All of life, he imagines, revolves around him. He sits under the tamarisk tree, his hand gripping the inevitable spear, a symbol of his impotence. All this maneuvering to ensure that he is looked up to indicates that something is going on deep in his subconscious.

In his speech, Saul addresses those who are closest to him, from his own tribe of Benjamin, and lashes out at them for what he deems to be disloyal behavior. One commentator has this to say about his speech: "The factual content of the speech is minimal, the emotional content maximal. This is apparent from the fact that the order of the facts in the speech is exactly opposite the actual chronological order" (Fokkelman). If we read the rhetorical speech in reverse order, we can understand what Saul perceived to be the order of events around him. He thinks:

his son had made David into one who lay in wait for him;

as a result, no one had any sympathy for him;
hence none of them warned him;
they had entered into a conspiracy against him;
as a result, they were all too susceptible to bribes from
the enemy.

When the emotional content of a discussion becomes greater than the factual, reason and logic go out the window. Saul views everything in life through the lens of paranoia, thus he accuses those closest to him of conspiring against him. To the paranoid, everything looks like a conspiracy. Everyone is against him, Saul imagines. No one feels sorry for him. He has limitless compassion for himself. But that can't comfort him, so he seeks comfort from others. None of his courtiers answer his tirade, however. There is dead silence, because everyone loved David, "even Saul's servants," as we read in 18:5, 22.

Then, taking advantage of the silence, an alien informant steps forward.

II. An Alien Informant (22:9-10)

Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing by the servants of Saul, answered and said, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

After a long silence, Doeg, whom we met earlier when David visited the tabernacle at Nob, takes the floor. A foreigner, his name, ironically, means "anxious caring." "His word takes precedence; his act will end the session. He starts by informing on the events at Nob, and ends by carrying out at Saul's behest the massacre of the priesthood. As a foreigner he can skirt round the taboo which protects the priests of Yahweh and makes them untouchable, which paralyzes the Israelite courtiers" (Fokkelman).

Notice how cunning is Doeg's speech. He informs Saul of the concrete results of David's meeting with the priest, but not their conversation. By so doing he not only omits David's lies, but Ahimelech's questions which demonstrated the priest's loyalty to Saul and his nervousness before David. The result is that the triple support of the oracle, the provisions, and the sword—everything looks like treason, plain as day. "Doeg knows that these facts are grist for the mill of Saul's obsession. This incident is a good example of how 'simply stating the facts' is already a refined manipulation" (Fokkelman). Naked facts do not always reveal motives. They can mask true intent when robbed of their context. This is how our legal system seems to work, isn't it? Attorneys are paid big money to isolate whatever facts they wish to utilize, omitting others, thus creating an entirely different picture from what really happened. This is what Doeg is doing here. Things haven't changed much in thousands of years, have they?

But Doeg doesn't stop there. He adds that Ahimelech gave an oracle on that day when David visited the sanctuary. Is this statement true or is it merely an invention of Doeg?

This leads us to the next scene, a kangaroo court.

III. A Kangaroo Court (22:11-19)

(a) Saul as Court Summons and Prosecutor (22:11-13)

Then the king sent someone to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's household,

the priests who were in Nob; and all of them came to the king. And Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." Saul then said to him, "Why have you and the son of Jesse conspired against me, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise up against me by lying in ambush as it is this day?"

In another indication of his paranoia, Saul issues a summons not just to Ahimelech, but to his whole household. The priest journeys to Gibeath, escorted by an armed guard. He is unaware that there is anything wrong, but probably surprised by the summons to present himself before the king. In this court Saul plays every role: he claims to be the injured party, then he becomes the court summons, prosecutor, judge and executioner. Talk about a high control individual! When people exert total control like this, it shows they place no trust in God for justice. "Saul's feelings are utterly detached from justice and impartiality, and equally remote from reality. It is ironic that such a display of raw power as this actually is a sign of Saul's impotence, insofar as the aggression vented on the house of Eli was intended for his rival, whom he could not get at" (Fokkelman). Beware of situations where people insist on playing multiple roles in order to manipulate the outcome.

Next we come to Ahimelech's defense. Here is the center-piece of the text, the speech that the narrator wants us to attend to.

(b) Ahimelech's Defense (22:14-15)

Then Ahimelech answered the king and said, "And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, even the king's son-in-law, who is captain over your guard, and is honored in your house? Did I just begin to inquire of God for him today? Far be it from me! Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or to any of the household of my father, for your servant knows nothing at all of this whole affair."

What a brilliant and courageous defense by Ahimelech! His speech is rather surprising, because the things he says and the things he omits do not help his own chances of survival. His words are a rare display of courage in the face of raw evil.

To begin with, he elevates David to the skies. "Who among all your servants is as *faithful* as David?" he asks the king. "Faithful" here means an internal loyalty which has brought David great respect and places him above all the king's servants. Then the priest points to Saul's own actions as proof of David's good character: "You made him **your** son in law, your made him captain of **your** guard, you honored him in **your** house."

Then Ahimelech asks: "Did I just now begin to inquire for him?" He doesn't answer the charge of whether he did or not. That's not the issue. Even if he did, it would make no difference since such an act would not be treason. Thus he gets to the root of the problem and forces Saul to deal with his own guilt in the matter. He is asking the king, "Are you saying that loyalty to David amounts to treason?" There was no treason involved, of course. Ahimelech refuses to share in the attitude that says "anyone who is for David is against Saul." He considers it beneath him to answer Saul on Saul's terms. He will not crawl on his knees before this despot to cajole him. Instead he answers,

rather impertinently, "Did I just begin to inquire of God for him today?"

Here we have the center-piece of the text, the thought the narrator wants us to contemplate. What do the righteous do in the face of raw evil? Ahimelech teaches us that the primary task of godly people is to put the whole truth right out in the public arena when the pathology of the despot threatens complete obscurity. It took guts to speak the truth and brave the violent pressure that would surely result. May God give us courage when our hour comes to uncover and reveal the truth in whatever arena we find ourselves.

Rather than face his own guilt, however, Saul turns aside the testimony and in an instant becomes both judge and executioner.

(c) Saul as Judge and Executioner (22:16-19)

But the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's household!" And the king said to the guards who were attending him, "Turn around and put the priests of the LORD to death, because their hand also is with David and because they knew that he was fleeing and did not reveal it to me." But the servants of the king were not willing to put forth their hands to attack the priests of the LORD. Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn around and attack the priests." And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. And he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep, he struck with the edge of the sword.

Making no attempt to investigate the priest's claim, Saul now adopts the role of an arbitrary judge. He doesn't believe Ahimelech. Case closed. He convicts the suspect outright, and immediately commands the execution of the whole household. To Saul, the guilt of the individual automatically implies the guilt of the whole family. But when he turns to the soldiers and commands them to carry out the execution, they refuse to obey. It is unthinkable for a Jew to raise a hand against the priests of Yahweh. (We are reminded of a similar arbitrary death sentence in 14:24, which Saul imposed upon his son, but the people overruled him.)

Saul then turns to a foreigner, one who has no qualms or inhibitions. This is why dictators love to hire mercenaries. And Doeg responded in kind. He "*hewed them down*," says the text. His ethnic hatred of Jews made the killings easy for him; he delighted in his work of butchery. But it doesn't end there. The killing spree spills over into the city and climaxes with a total massacre at Nob.

Notice the extent of it. There were no sexual distinctions: both men and women were slaughtered; no age distinctions: children and infants; and all animal life. It was as if Saul were carrying out a holy war. He was commanded in chapter 15 to do this very thing to the Amalakites, but he disobeyed the command of God and spared the king and the best of the donkeys. His eye had pity on what God called evil. This was why he was rejected as king. Here he strikes back at the LORD, as if to say, "If it's a holy war you want, you can have it!" This is what lies behind much of the senseless killing that is going on around the world

today. Often the violence is not being addressed so much at the victims as at God himself.

The *Jesus* film is a very effective tool for evangelism throughout the world today. But there has been a response of evil to its showing. Last week in Rwanda, two people who were showing the film were murdered. Dr. Kassoum Keita, Campus Crusade Director for Rwanda, writes: "What's happened in Rwanda is impossible to imagine. How can people who are humans like us, dare to not only kill people who are armed but to kill the unarmed, even babies and women who are pregnant? They have no pity for them and assassinate them. You see bodies just lying around and people going by and no one taking any interest in them. Journalists usually have a reputation of exaggerating things. But in this case, they don't even have the words to be able to describe what is going on." Doeg still lives three thousand years later.

Yet, even in Doeg's massacre of the priests, Saul is unsuccessful. One son escapes.

IV. A Remnant Escapes (22:20-23)

But one son of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. Then David said to Abiathar, "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father's household. Stay with me, do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life; for you are safe with me."

We learn three things here. First, although evil is allowed to play its hand in full, God ensures that a remnant escapes. And with that remnant the kingdom of God will go on. Though the linen garments of the priests are stained with blood, there is one who escapes defilement. The future king has the future priesthood. God never needs a majority to win the battle. All he needs is one.

Secondly, while Saul unconsciously wishes to take revenge on the LORD, unbeknownst to him he is actually the instrument of God's fulfillment of the oracle of doom against the house of Eli. Under the deep-seated level of Saul's subconscious which wants to hit back lies the deeper and more powerful force of God's providence. This may be hard for us to comprehend and accept, but that is what is going on here.

I visited a friend out of state earlier this summer and he was bemoaning what he felt was the lack of wisdom of the political establishment of the state. At last he said, "I can't wait until the Lord comes back and runs this place right!" I said, "But Christ is reigning and running it right, even now." The eye of faith believes that the Sovereign God is allowing evil to run its full course, yet judgment, righteousness and salvation proceed, just as he planned from the beginning.

Thirdly, the fact that God is sovereign does not remove human responsibility and care. David is deeply pained by what has happened, and he takes full responsibility. He expresses that he felt uneasy on that day when he spied Doeg at Nob, and he promises to do all in his power to offer protection to Abiathar.

Last week the television had a program on Beethoven's

Fifth Symphony in C minor. I watched in fascination as the conductor explained the intricacies of the composer's work. This symphony changed music for all time, he said. The masterpiece does not merely utilize major and minor keys, but resonates between them, creating new chords in the process. One experiences every possible human emotion as the symphony is performed. As I listened to the music I thought, this is what biblical narrative does to our theology. Often our theology is not broad enough to embrace all that we experience in life, but the beauty of biblical narrative is that it deals with all the stories, and in the process keeps expanding our categories.

This was what happened to David. His reflections on this incident at Gibeah led him to the insights which he penned in Psalm 52.

V. David's Final Reflections (Psalm 52)

(For the choir director. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech.")

- 1 Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The loyal-love of God endures all day long.
- 2 Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.
- 3 You love evil more than good,
Falsehood more than speaking what is right. *Selah.*
- 4 You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.
- 5 But God will break you down forever;
He will snatch you up, and tear you away from your tent,
And uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah.*
- 6 And the righteous will see and fear,
And will laugh at him, saying,
- 7 "Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge,
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,
And was strong in his evil desire."
- 8 But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the loyal-love of God forever and ever.
- 9 I will give Thee thanks forever, because Thou hast done it,
And I will wait on Thy name, for it is good, in the presence of Thy godly ones.

What began with Saul sitting on the tamarisk tree in Gibeah and ended with the slaughter of the innocents, enlarged David's theology. Evil is free to play all its cards, but it will be exposed for what it is. Innocent people die, but God cares, God weeps.

Saul's kangaroo court was not the real court. By faith David saw another court, presided over by the Sovereign God. The faithful will wait for that Judge and take refuge in his great love until they are vindicated. On that day every man will give an account for every action and word. On that day the dead in Christ will come to life, and those who waited on his name will give thanks forever "because he has done it." On that day the mystery of evil will give way to a new heavens and a new earth, and the justified in Christ will be as green olive trees in the house of God, forever and ever. Amen.

Literary Outline²

- A. a) 3 lines of report (David spotted, Saul informed) 6
as an introduction to:
 - b) 7 lines of speech by Saul 7-8
Saul's paranoia causes him to disregard his best advisors.
- B. Betrayal by Doeg (mainly in speech) 9-10
- C. Saul summons Ahimelech and calls him to account 11-12
- D. Saul's accusation 13
- X. Ahimelech's defense 14-15
He is innocent, and only behaved toward David with the respect Saul had already given him.
- D'. Saul's judgment 16
- C'. Saul orders murder of Ahimelech and priests 17
- B'. Doeg acts, carries out the execution 18-19
- A'. a) 3 lines of report (Abiathar escapes, David informed) 20-21
as an introduction to:
 - b) 7 lines of speech by David:
David takes responsibility for what happened, in sharp contrast to Saul.

1. For my observations in the text I have heavily depended on the excellent insights of J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1986), 379-416.

2. Fokkelman, 412.

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WHOSE HAND WILL PREVAIL?

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 961
1 Samuel 23:1-13
Fourteenth Message
Brian Morgan
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One of the grave concerns of Christians in this country is the gradual erosion of a Christian consensus, and with it a mounting hostility against Christianity. In the past decade more and more institutions seem to be aligning themselves against Christianity. The courts, politicians, educators and the mass media are growing increasingly hostile to things Christian. Hardly a day goes by without a letter arriving in my mailbox from a Christian leader rallying believers to take back lost ground.

Whose hand will prevail in America? What do we do when we have lost consensus? Such crises ought to make us rethink the basis of our spirituality. We should ask ourselves how did our spiritual forbears operate when they were in the minority and opposition was mounting on every front.

In our study today in the life of David, from 1 Samuel 23, the conflict between Saul and David intensifies as different groups proclaim loyalty to one side or the other. The key word is the Hebrew word "yad" ("hand"), which occurs seven times in the text. As competing loyalties surface, the narrator wants us to feel the tension of whose "hand" will prevail in this struggle for the kingdom.

Humanly speaking, the battle seems unevenly matched. Saul has the upper hand. He has a sophisticated network of spies, the national army of Israel, and the loyalty of entire cities who are willing to wage war against David. But in the face of these overwhelming odds, David finds the *secret* that will give him the upper hand. I am sure that Jesus meditated and reflected on this text as he began his ministry. Perhaps this was the very text that shaped his thinking as to how he would gain the upper hand.

Our text, 1 Samuel 23:1-13, has two parts. First, David delivers the inhabitants of Keilah from the hand of the Philistines; and second, David flees Keilah as a fugitive to escape the hand of Saul. Between these scenes appears a lone priest, Abiathar the son of Ahimelech, who escaped the blood bath initiated by Saul against the priesthood in Nob. The priest arrives in David's camp, carrying the ephod in his hand.

So let us look at the first scene in the narrative.

I. David Enters Keilah as a Deliverer¹ (23:1-5)

Then they told David, saying, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and are plundering the threshing floors." So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and deliver Keilah." But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise,

go down to Keilah, for I am giving the Philistines into your hand." So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines; and he led away their livestock and struck them with a great slaughter. Thus David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah. (NASB)

(a) Seeking Divine Direction (23:1-2)

Here we come to David's first pro-active encounter in exile. The text opens with a report that the Philistines are plundering the threshing floors of Keilah. Robbed of their grain supply, the inhabitants of the city were faced with famine conditions. In David's response we see his unique spirit of faith. Just as in chapter 17 with his battle against Goliath, David's faith sets him apart from the rest of Israel. This time his faith is seen as an attribute of one who cooperates with God. David will do nothing without first seeking the divine initiative, so he inquires of God. This word "inquire" (*sha'al*) is the key term in the book of Samuel. Actually it is a word play on the name Saul, who, ironically, never inquired of God.

David's prayer is direct and concise. He asks God, "Shall I go up and attack these Philistines?" The Lord's response is equally direct and brief: "Go and attack the Philistines, and you will deliver Keilah." The Lord adds the promise that if David obeys, he will be a deliverer. The word "deliver" comes from the Hebrew root "*yasha*," from which the word "salvation" is derived. While David is in the wilderness, the Lord wants to establish him as a deliverer of Israel.

So David receives his answer from God. But in the center-line of the scene, David has to deal with the fear of his men.

(b) Overcoming the Fear of Men (23:3-4)

But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I am giving the Philistines into your hand."

This center-line expresses the fear of David's men. These men were outlaws who were living under tremendous pressure. Common sense would dictate that they would be reluctant to put their lives in double danger by attacking a international power like the Philistines while they themselves were being pursued by the crown.

Here once again David shines as the individual, the man of faith, in contrast to all around him. David prays, probably not merely to confirm the word of the Lord for himself, but as an example to his men of the role of divine guidance. We can visualize a future scene when another King prayed before his men in a garden, but alas they were asleep, and they missed the benefits of his prayer.

This text gives us three insights into the nature of praying for what we would call “guidance.” God is deeply concerned with how we function. He is intimately interested in the person we choose to marry, the career we decide to pursue, etc. Here we learn that the purpose of David’s prayer is direction. The messianic king is seeking direction as the Lord’s servant in the holy war against the Philistines who were attacking an Israelite city. All of the circumstances of this event notwithstanding, David does not assume that he is the one to go. This should encourage us. Although we may come face to face with holy wars in our daily routines, this does not necessarily mean that we are called to fight them. If we do not inquire of the Lord before we enter the fray, we may well go down to defeat.

Second, notice the method of David’s prayer. It is singular and simple. And notice how brief is the Lord’s response. His answer is but one word in Hebrew (verse 11). Interestingly, the Massorettes (the scribes who added the vowel pointing in the Massoretic text) added dramatic breaks in the Hebrew text after every request of David’s (using the Hebrew letter samek “s” vv 2, 4, 11, 12), perhaps to suggest the necessity of “waiting” for the answer to one’s prayers. At least when the text was read, they felt it necessary to pause in the reading after each request. Prayer is a two-way conversation. When we pray, we should be simple and direct, and God’s answer will be equally simple and direct.

Third, the result of prayer should be to lead us into what God is doing. The Lord again answers directly and concisely: “Arise and go.” But then he adds the promise, “for I am giving the Philistines into your hand.” These are the very words God used when he gave Joshua the promised land (Josh 1:2). God made Joshua to be the deliverer of all Israel, as his name, “Yahweh saves,” testifies. God was at work. This was a divine moment of opportunity to be seized immediately. The purpose of prayer is to open up our eyes to what God is already doing. When Yahweh directs, we must act decisively.

That is what David does.

(c) Seizing the Moment of Divine Opportunity (23:5)

So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines; and he led away their livestock and struck them with a great slaughter. Thus David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah.

The report of the battle is quite brief. There is no talk of resistance. “The carrying off of the cattle is put before the report of the defeat. That may be a sign of the ease with which David wins the battle” (Fokkelman). This is very surprising, given the international power of the Philistines. The reason is that once the key issues of trust and dependence have been established, the outcome of the battle is settled. Usually this requires more work and laborious prayer than the battle itself.

Now David is seen as a deliverer whose victory brings a restoration that is greater than the original plunder. The Philistines plundered grain, but David restores not only the grain, he takes the Philistine cattle as well, adding meat and dairy supplies to the lost grain. Here is a hint of what salvation entails. Salvation ensures not just freedom from oppression, but lavish spoils that make our latter state better than our first.

This brings us to the center-piece of the text.

II. The Center-piece: The Arrival of a Lone Priest (23:6)

Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand.

Following his delivery of Keilah, there is only a short pause before David faces a new threat from Saul. But in that quiet moment, the narrator inserts the arrival of Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech. We have already covered the conversation that took place between David and Abiathar, recorded at the end of chapter 22. But with its insertion here we learn that that was a flashback; here the conversation is placed in the chronological sequence of events.

What we learn to our surprise is that the massacre at Nob and the deliverance of Keilah took place simultaneously. So we have a scene of terror, bloodshed and cruel annihilation juxtaposed with a scene of liberation, life and salvation. “One is Saul’s doing, the other is David’s. One sends a town to its death, the other restores a town to life” (Fokkelman). If the television cameras were there, which event do you think they would report? We need to learn to read our newspapers with this in mind. When we read of evil, bloodshed and famine, we should ask, where is God working to provide salvation and deliverance? How despicable that Saul, the commander-in-chief, perverts the office for his own personal revenge. He initiates a blood bath on one of his own towns, while at the same time he leaves another town unprotected and vulnerable to the Philistine threat. Such dictatorial behavior is sowing the seeds for future revolutions.

But God always has the last word, even in life’s worst tragedies. David now receives the spoil from Saul’s campaign, the ephod. God’s counter-move against Saul is to place the ephod in David’s hand. Saul has bloodied 85 linen garments, but one man escapes to flee to David. In fact, “Abiathar” means “Father of the remnant.” With this one David can count on God’s full support. Interestingly, the ephod comes after David had already spoken directly to God. This demonstrates that God’s elect, David, is not dependent on having the priestly device; he can go to God directly. But when he has the means, he will use it.

Here is the lesson for us: Reality always precedes ritual in the kingdom of God. Once a distraught young mother asked me to come to the hospital to baptize her newborn baby who was dying of meningitis. She was terrified that her baby would not go to heaven if he was not baptized. I did as she asked, but first I assured her that the omnipotent, compassionate, loving God was not limited to saving her child merely because I had arrived in time to perform the ritual of baptism. How many dying infants does he save around the world every day? He saves countless thousands with no human intervention. As we learn here, reality always precedes ritual.

So David is victorious in holy war. He has the priest and the ephod. But the next scene brings a surprising reversal in David’s fate. Betrayal, not appreciation, is the response of the citizens of Keilah.

III. David Flees Keilah as a Fugitive (23:7-13)

When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah,

Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars." So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down."

Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you." Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

Informed of David's whereabouts, Saul immediately thinks he knows the meaning of what has transpired. He arrogantly presumes that God has delivered David into his hand. Fokkelman comments: "The reader, who is not taken in by so much display of self-assurance, realizes that Saul's speech has another side: the king is engaged in convincing himself that there has been a reversal in his barren fate. Saul is really trying to stifle his despair with the argument of David's imprisonment, and beneath it the pain of his being forsaken by God is perceptible."

Has that ever happened to you? God was speaking to you in your disobedience when events suddenly turned and seemed to line up perfectly with your vision. You thought God was on your side and you leapt into the fray. But your haste was really a cover for deeper issues you had refused to face. What looked like confidence of faith was really the blind mask of escapism. God's will is not determined by circumstances, but by ethics.

Saul immediately summons all the people to besiege Keilah, and his arrival with his army forces the hand of the inhabitants of the city. Should they align themselves with the man who proved to be their deliverer, risking the wrath of Saul and the possible destruction of their city, or should they surrender David and remain loyal to Saul? Neutrality was not an option. So it is when we come to Christ. He makes us choose new loyalties at the cost of old ones.

In the midst of Saul's plot David receives the information. He responds by saying, "Bring the ephod here!" Instead of presuming on God, he summons God and listens quietly, forcing nothing. This approach respects God's freedom of action. What a difference between Saul and David. One summons the nation, the other summons God.

David prays, "O LORD God of Israel... Thy servant has heard for certain." These matters which David was facing were bigger than himself. They involved all of Israel, and God's rule on a national level. In this scheme David is merely a servant. Knowing this should make it easy for us to pray. We are servants of God. Our reputations are not at stake. We do not control the outcome of events. As a servant David has two pressing questions: "Will they surrender me?" "Surrender" means "to enclose as in a prison."

David has no intention of committing himself to a prison. "And will Saul come down?" he asks.

Notice that God answers one question at a time. And he answers them logically, not emotionally. In his emotion, David's questions were in reverse order. So God starts with the second question, the less important one. To it he replies, "Saul will come down." This allows David the freedom to ask twice: "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" God responds: "The men of Keilah will deliver you over to Saul." Notice that although God foresaw the result, David was still free to act and change the outcome. If David withdrew in time, he could avoid capture. This demonstrates the marvelous balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Prayer gives us insight into the nature of events, leaving us with the responsibility to act.

So David and his men arise and leave Keilah. His "going out" means Saul gives up and stops "going out" in pursuit of David. Had David settled down in an armed city he would have been in prison, in effect. His wandering as a fugitive would ensure his freedom to act for the kingdom of God. Note, however, that the number of David's men increased from 400 to 600. Not all were unappreciative of David's deliverance. Two hundred men, presumably from Keilah, aligned themselves with David and were willing to give up everything, families, businesses and homes, for this new king. They found their destiny with him, wandering wherever they could, living from hand to mouth.

By means of prayer David delivers Keilah from the hand of the Philistines, and through prayer, David is delivered from the hand of Saul. In between came the mechanism of prayer, the ephod.

IV. Final Reflections: Whose Hand Prevails?

(a) What Opportunities Are There In the Wilderness?

Just because we find ourselves in the wilderness does not mean that God has set us aside to do nothing but wallow in self-pity. Whether we are out of work, or our marriage is at a low ebb, or we are feeling rejected, God does not put us on the shelf. The wilderness was a place of opportunity where God used David to bring salvation to an entire city. In our wilderness, opportunities for salvation abound all around us. When we are broken, that is when we are in the best spiritual state to offer spiritual life to others. I have seen this happen at memorial services here in this church. People who have lost loved ones take this stage and tell their stories of how God met them in their grief, in their wilderness, and delivered them. The pastors do not need to speak in such holy moments. The bereaved are the fugitives, and as such they have authority to speak. In your brokenness you will find wonderful opportunities for evangelism and encouraging others.

(b) What Are Our Long-term Expectations?

The second perspective of this text is the long-term expectations we ought to have for the kingdom of God is this life. In the first scene, the kingdom of God is at hand, and God grants victories. His hand prevails, and multitudes are in awe. In the next scene, however, the miracles are forgotten and there is little appreciation for what God has done. When the time comes to commit and consider the cost, the same multitudes who rejoiced earlier turn the de-

liverer over to the enemy. Whose hand prevails then? It is the same hand — the hand of God. Two hundred men were truly committed, and they joined David. His being forced out of the walled cities to become a wanderer placed him in direct contact with the general population, where he would gain more support.

I wondered what were the expectations of Jesus, the Deliverer of all of Israel, as he meditated on this text. He did acts of wonder, healing the sick, casting out demons, making the blind to see, but after the awe of his miracles subsided and it became time to count the cost, there was little lasting appreciation by the multitudes. Whole cities turned on him at times and tried to kill him. But in the process a remnant was birthed, a remnant that became wanderers with him in the wilderness.

In Israel earlier this year I walked along the Wadi Amud, the dry river bed that goes from Galilee north-east to Syro-Phoenicia. Jesus walked down that same river bed once with his disciples. It was too dangerous for him to stay in Galilee and he was forced out to Gentile territory. On the way he healed the Syro-Phoenician girl who was demon-possessed, and this miracle opened up a wonderful ministry to the Gentiles. What looked like failure actually was a great victory. This was the secret to evangelism in the first century. When the church was scattered and on the run, Acts 8:4 tells us, “those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.” The hand of God was prevailing amidst the persecution. A few years ago, the

people of the Eastern Bloc countries were rejoicing over their new-found freedom. They called it a miracle from God. But if you visit these countries today, you will find corruption and decay evident on every side. If the communists are not still in power, they are making a comeback. Christians are discouraged, but God’s hand still prevails. It is the deep commitment of the remnant that interests him, not the momentary awe of the multitudes.

(c) What is the Secret to God’s Hand Prevailing?

Our Sovereign God leads us directly into his rule by prayer. How did David prevail over the hand of Philistines and deliver an entire city? It was because God gave him the victory. How did David know that God would give the victory? It was through prayer. How did David escape the hand of Saul and the betrayal of an entire city? By the knowledge he gained through simple, conversational prayer. So speak to God, and wait on God. And when you hear from him, act. No matter whether you deliver a community or end up on the run, do not forget that God’s hand always prevails.

*High King of heaven, my victory won,
May I reach heaven’s joys, O bright heav’n’s Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.*

Amen.

1. For my observations I have depended heavily on the excellent insights of J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, Vol. 2, *The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986).



THE SECRET, DECISIVE HAND

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 962
1 Samuel 23:14-24:1
Fifteenth Message
Brian Morgan
September 18, 1994

When we last saw David, he was on the run from king Saul, living hand to mouth. The fugitive, together with his band of outlaws, “went wherever they could go” (1 Sam 23:13). The constant pressure resulting from these conditions created in David a desire to settle down and find a permanent solution to his dilemma.

Many Christians would wish the same for themselves. Last week I had a call from a friend in North Carolina whose wife is dying of cancer. They visited our church last year and the elders anointed this woman with oil and prayed for her. Her doctors are amazed that she is still alive. But, my friend told me, it is a day-to-day struggle. I also had a visit from a high school girl who is a friend of my daughter. She told us about a stressful situation she is facing at school because many of her friends are turning to alcohol and drugs. She wants to transfer out of that school, but it appears her request will not be granted. Another friend of mine who is studying for her doctorate has been assigned to a professor who is so abusive and controlling that my friend became physically ill last year. She sees no way out of this problem.

I feel tempted to respond to situations like these by trying to remove whatever is causing the stress. But that is not my role. That is the holy business of God. What can we do to help relieve stresses like the ones I mentioned? Our text from 1 Samuel demonstrates that what we need is the manifestation of that secret, yet decisive hand of God. In David’s case, we will see God’s hand manifested in two ways.

In 23:14, the narrator summarizes David’s wilderness wanderings.

I. Longings To Settle Down (23:14)

And David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and stayed in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand. (NASB)

David and his band of disciples were given no map or itinerary for their wilderness wanderings; they were forced to flee to wherever they could find safety. This was what brought about their longing for a permanent place so that they could settle down. This is apparent in the word “stayed” (*yashav*), used in verses 14a, 14b, 18, 25 and 24:1. The word means “to settle down, to be at rest, to stay, to remain.” This was what Israel longed for during the time of the Judges. Tired of living by faith, moment by moment, with temporary rulers, they longed for the day when the appointment of a king over them would settle their problem once and for all. It is ironic that the new king, David, is forced to live the same way as his forbears. For him there would be no settling down to create a power base within the region of his own tribe. Saul was seeking him

every day, yet Saul would not prevail. The narrator reveals the outcome of the search in this opening verse: “but God did not deliver (literally: not give) him into his hand.”

How would God manifest his hand to David and enable him to prevail? There is a hint given in verse 14 in the words “not deliver.” The Hebrew writers liked to hide word clues in their texts. In Hebrew, this term, “*lo natan*,” sounds very much like “Jonathan.” In the next scene, it is Jonathan who comes out of the blue to encourage David.

II. Jonathan Strengthens David’s Hand In God¹ (23:15-18)

Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul’s son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. Thus he said to him, “Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be second (in rank) to you; and Saul my father knows that also.” So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house.

David fled southwest from Keilah to the wilderness of Ziph. Horesh may be a place name, but its original meaning was “forested height.” David sought security in the highest terrain, places that offered good camouflage. In order to get a feel for this country during our trip to Israel in the summer, we drove south from Adullam and entered this wilderness area. Now part of the West Bank, it is hilly terrain, criss-crossed with windy roads and dotted by small Palestinian villages. Like David and his band, we didn’t feel welcome in these towns. People were observing us and our Israeli license plates. We felt an internal sense that we should leave, and about halfway through our journey we returned to Jerusalem.

In this place God manifested his hand to David by making him aware that his life was in danger. Simultaneously, in Gibeah, God moved Jonathan to go and seek out his friend David. What wonderful internal burdens God gives! “Jonathan and David cannot be driven apart by any power in the world, and certainly not the reigning king” (Fokkelman). Isn’t it interesting that Saul, with his military and his spies, cannot find David, yet Jonathan has no trouble locating him? It was because the Holy Spirit was guiding his steps.

And look at what Jonathan did for his friend: “he strengthened his hand in God.” This is the best thing a friend can do for someone who is in trouble. A friend must not manipulate the circumstances or try to force God’s hand, but rather bring one back in touch with God and his sovereignty over the affairs of men. Jonathan reassures Da-

vid, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be second to you." They would both lead the new administration. Significantly, Jonathan adds, "and my father knows that also."

Here we find three principles that will help one who is in distress. The first is this: Remind them that history is driven not by might but by morality. Jonathan's word, "the hand of my father will not find you," is the exact reversal of what Samuel prophesied of Saul when God's Spirit came upon him: "The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily...do for yourself what your hand finds to do; for God is with you" (1 Sam 10: 7). Now, because of his disobedience, Saul's "hand" is impotent. He is powerless to find David.

Here is the second thing: Remind them that history is driven by the promises of God. Jonathan says to David, "You will reign, and I will be second to you." When it comes to David's future, Jonathan is right on the mark, but when it comes to his own future, his vision is clouded. Our ability to help others spiritually is often better than our perception of our own future. Perhaps due to his consistently positive outlook, and his overhearing the secret confessions of his father, Jonathan thinks that the transfer of the kingdom will be a peaceful one.

The third thing is this: Remind them that faith looks beyond the surface things to the heart. "My father knows this," says Jonathan. He had overheard his father's confessions in the privacy of his court. The enemy had admitted defeat. The way to strengthen someone in God is take them to God's throne. God is faithful, and his promises are true. But there is no timetable. Sadly, this is the last meeting between these two friends.

A meeting like this enlarges our hearts in the love of God like nothing else. This past summer I had some deep struggles that I could not resolve. One Sunday during my sabbatical I went over to PBC/North to attend services, and as I was driving into the church I met Rich Carlson. I was surprised to see him; I did not know he was visiting from Vienna. He told me he was going to the soccer game between Romania and Sweden at Stanford, and he invited me to go along. Instead of going to church, I spent the day with Rich at the game. Afterwards over a cup of coffee, I poured out my soul to him. Because of his love for me and his understanding of what drives me, I went away from our meeting with the sense that he had strengthened my hand on God. I could not help but think that God had sent him all the way from Vienna to encourage me. That is the secret yet decisive hand of God at work.

Next, we find the second manifestation of God's hand to deliver David, when a city pledges to help Saul in his cause.

III. The Philistines Deliver David from the Hand of Saul (23:19-24:1)

(a) New Loyalties for an old King (23:19-23)

Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now then, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to do so; and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand." And Saul

said, "May you be blessed of the LORD; for you have had compassion on me. Go now, make more sure, and investigate and see his place where his haunt is, {and} who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning. So look, and learn about all the hiding places where he hides himself, and return to me with certainty, and I will go with you; and it shall come about if he is in the land that I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah."

While God secretly sends his messenger to encourage his servant, at the same time the devil is sending his messengers to the rival king. The Ziphites send a delegation to Saul in Gibeah, pledging their loyalty to him. This is the second community to come to Saul's aid and place their hopes for the future with him rather than with the outlaw king. The situation looks unevenly matched, to say the least: David and one friend against Saul and a whole city.

The Ziphites begin by overwhelming Saul with a wealth of geographical details concerning David's whereabouts. "Is not David hiding with us in the strongholds of Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon?" The expression "Is not David..." is "a rhetorical start in an information-giving situation indicating that there is a difference that must be bridged: 'what we, who are bringing news, find self-evident, is not yet so for you...'" It has the connotation of 'you must know'" (Fokkelman). Children delight in playing this "I know something you don't know" game with their parents. In my house I'm often the last one to find out what's going on.

The Ziphites tell Saul that all he need do is show up and he can have "all the desire of his soul." This is the same expression as the one used in chapter 20:4. There it is an expression of Jonathan's love to David, while here it is the expression death. The Ziphites offer to do all the work, since they know the terrain like the back of their hands. All Saul has to do is show up and get all the credit.

Saul's reply underlines his great relief. Finally he is not alone; someone feels sorry for him. During Saul's pity party in Gibeah (22:7-8), no one but Doeg, a foreigner, would empathize with him. But here he has the sympathy of the Ziphites. These are his own. They think with him. As a matter of fact, they are ahead of him. In his relief, Saul exclaims, "Blessed are you in the LORD!" Foolishly, he uses God's personal name in a matter he knows to be contrary to God's purposes, for God has blessed David. In this he commits the sin of blasphemy.

But Saul is a little less presumptuous this time. He has not forgotten how David escaped from Keilah. "This man is cunning," he tells the Ziphites. "Go back and do more homework. Then, when you pinpoint his exact location, knowing all his hiding places, I will come out with you and 'search him out among all the thousands of Judah.'" This last line reveals just how much pain that song of women of Israel following David's victory over Goliath had caused him. His jealousy over these sentiments now has become the driving force of his life.

But why does Saul hesitate? The Ziphites have already located David. Why wait now?

(b) Discovery, Pursuit, Enclosure...Checkmate! (23:24-26)

Then they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in

the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. When Saul and his men went to seek him, they told David, and he came down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard it, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon. And 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, for Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them.

In his search for David Saul is now led by the men of Ziph. David changed his location to more difficult terrain, but to no avail. He is spotted with exact precision in the wilderness of Maon. David flees and is again pursued and finally surrounded. The prey is trapped; the Ziphites have done their job. Now it's Saul's turn to act. But...

(c) But...A Messenger (23:27-24:1)

But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." So Saul returned from pursuing David, and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they called that place the Rock of Separation. And David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of Engedi.

Here is the divine moment. Suddenly an entirely new character is thrust into the drama. "A messenger came." This man comes bearing news so compelling that Saul is forced to leave immediately to protect against the Philistine invasion. God can use even our enemies to save us. This is an exact reversal of the David and Goliath story. On that occasion there were two mountains. Standing between them was a man who was ready to meet the Philistines. Now David is on the run, with Saul in the middle, and the Philistine army arrives to deliver David. Later, David would memorialize that great rock that no longer seemed to be able to hide him, naming it "The Rock of Separation" ("Slippery Rock").

The narrator leaves us with two questions hanging in the air: Who is this messenger? Who sent him? I'm sure David thought this man was a messenger sent from heaven. In fact, the word "messenger" is the same word for angel (*malak*). In Psalm 35:6, perhaps reflecting on this moment, David links both of these terms, "slippery" and "messenger or angel":

Let their way be dark and slippery,
With the angel of the LORD pursuing them.
For without cause they hid their net for me;
Without cause they dug a pit for my soul. (Ps 35:6-7)

So as to the identity of the messenger, the narrator leaves the matter ambiguous. But as far as David was concerned there was no ambiguity. Saul may have a city on his side, but David has the angels of God on his side.

The second question the narrator leaves hanging is, Why does Saul hesitate to seize David? The last time the Philistines attacked an Israelite city, Saul continued to pursue David, allowing the city to be destroyed. Why does he hesitate now, especially when he is in reach of his enemy, perhaps merely minutes from the grand moment he has waited so long to taste? It seems like rather inconsistent behavior. The answer is, it is inconsistent! Fokkelman astutely observes that there are two Sauls. Psychologists know that often there is more than one thing that drives people. If we are going to predict how people will behave,

we have to be in touch with their subconscious, often conflicting drives.

On the one hand, we see Saul, the "power-crazed dictator" (an abuser, we would say today). Jealousy has consumed him and makes him want to destroy David. This is the Saul who craves raw power, the man who will do anything to maintain his political base. On the other hand, we see Saul, the "pitiful and powerless" king. This is how he appears when he comes to grips with reality and all his insecurities float to the surface. Saul has heard the prophetic word. Deep in his heart he knows his fate is sealed. At first he couldn't face this. He denied it, and then suppressed it. But as David grew more and more successful, that force drove its way to the surface, proclaiming that Saul must one day face his destiny.

This is what Jonathan overheard in the secrecy of the king's palace. If this occasion in fact is the moment when the two kings, Saul and David, must face off, Saul has grave doubts that he will be victorious. This mysterious messenger allows him to postpone the confrontation, denying the inevitable. The reader is left wondering which force finally will have its way in Saul. This is what I see at times in counseling situations. Which force will have its way, the vulnerable, insecure person who speaks of repentance, or the abusive controller who wants to be in charge.

Psalm 36 gives some of David's deeper reflections which seem to fit well with what he learned by the secret manifestations of God's hand in this text.

IV. David's Reflections (Psalm 36:1-9)

(For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD)

**Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart;
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
For it flatters him in his own eyes,
Concerning the discovery of his iniquity and the hatred of it.
The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit;
He has ceased to be wise and to do good.
He plans wickedness upon his bed;
He sets himself on a path that is not good;
He does not despise evil (Ps 36:1-4).**

I want to leave you with two applications of the wonderful secret manifestation of God's hand in your life.

(a) Evil Is Deep and Powerful

Over the years I have come to understand that part of our wilderness experience is designed to bring us face to face with evil so that we can contemplate its power. Evil lies like a powerful prophetic oracle that is planted deep within the heart of the wicked. It operates under the guise of flattery, keeping it from self-discovery. Saul may have momentary realizations of this, and even make momentary confessions of it that convinced Jonathan. But not David. David knew that because Saul refused to face the primary issues, evil had enveloped him completely. He had turned his back on God and had never faced that issue. Thus it did not matter what the other side of his personality said. David's poetic expressions of the evil in Saul's heart have become classic expressions of evil in the soul. They are quoted by Paul in the New Testament when he speaks of the depravity of the human heart.

So part of our wilderness experience is to give us an understanding of evil and its power. We must fear God lest these forces of evil take root in our hearts.

Yet it was in the context of evil that David experienced the depths of God's love for him.

(b) But God's Love Is Deeper Still (Psalm 36:5-9)

**Your loyal-love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are like a great deep, O LORD,
You preserve man and beast.
How precious is Your loyal-love, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of
Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your de-
lights.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.**

David's external circumstances, as stressful and limiting as they were, were powerless to prevent him from experiencing God's love. In the very context of evil he finds love. While she was languishing in a Nazi dungeon, Corrie Ten Boom said, "No matter how deep is our suffering, God's love is deeper still." While evil leads down a narrow dead-end path, God's love comes from all directions. His love is "unsearchable" (it is like the heavens and the clouds); it is "impregnable" (like the mountains); it is "inexhaustible" (like the great deep); "yet, for all that, welcoming and hospitable (6c-9)."²

Here is the lesson of this text: The omnipotent, incomprehensible, unfathomable God takes a personal interest in us! In our wilderness, he will break through and reveal his love to us.

For those of you who are in the wilderness today, may this love, given by the secret manifestation of God's hand, be yours in fullest measure.

There is a light that cometh and overpowereth a man's soul and assureth him that God is his, and he is God's, and that God loved him from everlasting...It is a light beyond the light of ordinary faith...the next thing to heaven: you have no more, you can have no more until you come hither...It is faith elevated and raised up about its ordinary rate, it is electing love of God brought home to the soul. (Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

1. For my observations in the text I have heavily depended on the excellent insights of J.P. Fokklemann, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1986) 435-451.

2. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity, 1973), 147.

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EMERGING FROM THE DARKNESS

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 963
1 Samuel 24:1-22
Sixteenth Message
Brian Morgan
September 25, 1994

Our studies in the life of David have taught us that it is in the wilderness that the spiritual reformation of the soul takes place and the secrets to reigning in the kingdom of God are learned. In the wilderness David learned both how to pray and how to fight a holy war. In the wilderness he observed God create through a process of painful rejection, a new family whose bonds were stronger than death.

In our text from 1 Samuel this morning we will see that God now takes David to a new plateau of spirituality. David will have a face to face confrontation with Saul, the very one who caused him to flee to the wilderness in the first place. There is nothing I hate more than confrontation, yet I have learned that we cannot grow up spiritually unless we learn how to confront and how to accept confrontation. But how should we do this is the question. How are we to confront those in authority over us—an employer, a parent, an older sibling—who may have abused his or her power and caused us great pain?

Our text transports us to the popular tourist site of Engedi, in Israel, a lush oasis fed by underground springs that gush forth out of the deep canyon walls. This is where David and his men have found their most recent refuge.

I. David's Men: "This is a DAY for Retribution!" (24:1-8)

(a) Seeking Refuge in a CAVE in Engedi (24:1-3)

Now it came about when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. And he came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. (NASB)

Having escaped Saul's clutches at that eventful "slippery rock," David has headed as far east as he possibly can, to the wilderness of Engedi, by the edge of the Dead Sea. Saul returns with his army from fighting the Philistines and pursues David to a place named "Rocks of the Wild Goats." Here, rocky, precipitous walls make life uninhabitable for anything but wild goats (V. de Velde).

Archaeologists have found this that area is dotted with caves. One commentator wrote:

Near the ruins of the village of Chareitun, hardly five minutes walk to the east, there is a large cave or chamber in the rock, with a very narrow entrance entirely concealed by stones, and with many side vaults in

which the deepest darkness reigns, at least to anyone who has just entered the limestone vaults from the dazzling light of day. This is the largest cave in the district, if not the largest of all, and that according to Pococke the Franks call it a *labyrinth*, the Arabs *Elmaama*, i.e. hiding place, while the latter related how at one time thirty thousand people hid themselves in it "to escape an evil wind."¹

David is resting with his band of men in one of these caves. Out of all the caves in the area, Saul chooses to relieve himself in the very one where David is hiding. Temporarily blinded by the contrast between the brilliant sunlight outside and the darkness of the cave, Saul is alone and extremely vulnerable. The stage is set...

David's men have no qualms in interpreting the circumstances as a divine opportunity handed to them. "Seize the day!" is their catchword.

(b) David's Men: "A Day for Retribution!" (24:4a-b)

And the men of David said to him, "Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am giving your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it good in your eyes.'"

In this unfolding drama three nouns, "day," "hand," and "eye," and one verb, "cut off," are repeated by three different players in each scene. Each time they are uttered, the words are arranged differently, thereby giving three different points of view as to what kind of day the speakers regard it to be.

David's men are quick to interpret the events as a set-up by the LORD himself to David's advantage. "Behold, this is the day!" they cry. They determine God's will by circumstances. And they reinforce their viewpoint with words which they heard previously and which they regard as a legitimate promise of God in holy war: "I am giving your enemy into your hand" (23:4). Finally, they lure David by appealing to his own personal desires. They counsel him, "do what is good in your own eyes." Notice the concluding words of each phrase they use: "to you," "your hand," "your eyes." This note in the equation is to them the key, driving element, to which God's promise and providence are made subordinate. "These men hitch God to their wagon" (Fokkelman).

To the discerning ear, this is the one dissonant note that skews the entire equation. It evokes tragic memories of the days of Judges, when "there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes." Unless we are led by God's Spirit we can combine Scripture with circumstance, apply it with utter freedom, and get it all wrong,

with disastrous consequences. When friends advise you in this way, they are not doing you a favor; they are actually becoming your enemy. Eugene Peterson wrote: "Following Jesus means *not* following your impulses and appetites and whims and dreams, all of which are sufficiently damaged by sin to make them unreliable guides for getting any place worth going."

And this was David's analysis, as we shall see.

(c) David: "This is the LORD's Anointed" (24:4c-7)

Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly. And it came about afterward that David's heart smote him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed." And David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way.

Instead of cutting off Saul, all David does is cut off the edge of the king's robe. His men find his actions unbelievable: "the men can't believe their eyes when David returns with only a portion of the robe, and they can't believe their ears when they hear David's speech" (Fokkelman).

Why did David do this? The turning point of the whole scene is found in the words, "David's heart smote him." He had touched what was holy, and the result was that his heart began to palpitate. It was as if he had touched a high-voltage electric socket. If he had gone any further and killed Saul, he sensed that it might have been the death sentence (see 2 Sam 1:15-16). His heart sensitive to God, David overrules his men, forbidding them to rule over him. For David, there was only one issue. Saul was still the LORD's anointed. He was still in Holy Office, representing God, therefore it was God who had to remove him. In determining God's will it is not circumstance, which feeds personal desires, but holy ethics which must be appealed to.

Have you ever had someone in authority over you act towards you in an abusive way? There will come a time perhaps when that person, like Saul was on this occasion, is exposed and vulnerable. What do you do then? You may not have cut them off with a knife, but you have cut them off with your words, dishonoring them in the process. God's will is not determined by circumstances. Circumstances are part of the equation, but they are not all of it. His will is determined by ethics. On occasion people who have been involved in an adulterous affair have told me, incredibly, that it was God who led them into their actions by setting up the circumstance. They avoided the fact that what they were involving themselves in was sinful and wrong, but appealed to what they mistakenly discerned as God's will because of circumstances.

David will not be ruled by his men, but rather he uses ethics to overrule over them.

**II. David: "This is a DAY for REVELATION!"
(24:9-15)**

Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but my eye had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause, and deliver me from your hand."

(a) Disarming with Vulnerability

The first task in confronting a man who is driven by perverted passions is to disarm his emotions. In Saul's case, David has to disengage Saul's jealousy, at least momentarily, so as to enable him to receive the light of truth and logic. David leaves the cave as Saul entered it, alone and vulnerable.

This is the way to disarm people and get a hearing. Have them drop their guard so that they are disengaged from their emotions. When the opportunity arises we must treat even our worst enemies with dignity and respect. They are made in the image of God, and God at times places such people in authority over us. I think, as a whole, Christians have lost this skill. This is why the world pays scant attention to what we have to say when we gather in righteous indignation and shout at those whom we regard as our enemies. The words we use do not penetrate hearts or emotions. We would do far better if we acted like David acts in this situation with Saul.

Once David has the stage and has got Saul's attention, he pleads his innocence in word and deed.

(b) David Pleads His Innocence by Word and Deed

In his opening words to Saul, David asks, "Why are you ruled by the words of men?" In reality, it is the deep, deviant voices of jealousy within Saul's subconscious that control him. But by giving Saul an out, David continues to disarm him. David says, in effect, "This is a day for your eyes to see. The LORD did deliver you into my hand, but I took pity on you [just like Doeg, and the Ziphites] and I did not kill you, though I was highly exhorted to do so. You are the anointed. Look at your robe, and judge for yourself." David seizes the opportunity to grant Saul one moment in his life when the light of logic overrules the demons of jealousy and forces him to confront the naked truth.

J.P. Fokkelman makes an interesting comparison between the cave and Saul's psyche:

A clean look by Saul at himself—that is what the confrontation is aimed at...We can for a moment read the cave as picture of Saul's skull (or his subconscious): David and his men are hidden in the back of his mind like a tumor; they form a never-ending torment and obsession in the inner recesses of his brain, i.e. in the caverns of jealousy, in the darkness of madness. David has been away from Saul's vicinity for a long time now. During that period, the king, harassed as he is, has been able to build up an evil picture of David, that no one dared contradict (v. 10) and which has never been tested against reality. Now, in chapter 24, David comes forth from the cave and appears to Saul as large as life. Thus the king is given the opportunity of testing the picture of his rival against reality. David himself ensures that Saul cannot shirk such a comparison, by making a long speech as he shows the corner of the king's cloak. Saul is forcefully confronted with the innocence of a loyal, prostrate subject David.²

Having pleaded his innocence, David now indicts Saul.

(c) David Indicts Saul as the Guilty Party

With his words, "You are lying in wait for me," David turns the proverb on Saul: "Out of the wicked comes forth (*yatza*) wickedness, but my hand shall not be against you." He continues, "After whom has the king of Israel come out (*yatza*), a dead dog, a flea on a dead dog?" Has Saul come out against such an utterly insignificant thing? David is pressing Saul to search his heart and thus uncover far deeper issues. Why am I a threat? he asks.

Having indicted Saul, David now invites the Lord to be judge.

(d) David Trusts the Living LORD to Judge

We have the right to confront, indict, and force the logic in a setting of complete vulnerability but, having done that, we must let the Lord be the judge. This is exactly what David does with Saul. God put him in office, and God must remove him. Being vulnerable and respectful does not mean we have to be dishonest. We are even allowed to protest our innocence, and to confront others with an indictment of guilt, but when it is over, we must not manipulate the outcome, but rather trust God.

Now that Saul has been backed into a corner by David's display of humility and respect, and the sheer force of David's logic has dismantled his false view of him, what is the king to do?

III. Saul: This Is a DAY for Reward (24:16-22)

Now it came about when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD deliv-

ered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return 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. So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." And David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but his men went up to the stronghold.

(a) Saul Weeps

Saul weeps over David. "Beneath both tragedy and failure there is the inconsolable, inarticulate, unmeasured pathos of a life gone empty. Saul must weep. He must weep before God and before David. When he has wept, then he can speak. It is his honest, unrestrained weeping that permits him to yield to the now irresistible and obvious future, which is David."³

(b) Saul Confesses

Then Saul makes a full confession. He admits to his own guilt and affirms David's innocence. He even matches David's proverb with one of his own to show that David's goodness was an extraordinary thing.

(c) Saul Blesses and Prophecies

Then amazingly, Saul imparts his blessing to David for the establishment of his kingdom (much as a father would do for his firstborn son), and prophetically gives full acknowledgment as to the permanence of the blessing. This is reminiscent of what Hannah earlier comprehended by faith (1 Sam 2:10).

(d) Saul Cuts His Losses

Finally, realizing the inevitability of his own doom, Saul pleads with David, on the basis of David's merciful heart and his authority as the new king, to take a vow to protect Saul's descendants after his downfall. He asks David not to cut off his seed, and David pledges to do so by taking an oath. What a moment of triumph for David. What a moment of holy rebuke to his men. They wanted a dead king, but instead, Saul tearfully hands over his crown to David.

IV. Reflections on "Emerging from the Darkness"

(a) The Sovereignty of God Quiets Our Fears

Who is this God who makes even his enemies bow down at the feet of his anointed? God so orchestrated David's story that everyone in this narrative in 1 Samuel—Jonathan, Michal, the women, the people, Saul's servants, the Philistines, the priesthood, and now finally, Saul himself—recognizes and pays tribute to God's newly anointed. God will never coerce his reign on anyone. He gathers the truthful testimony of all who give assent to the king.

The same was true in the story of Jesus. At the time of his birth, people willingly came to pay tribute to the new King. At his death, even his enemy, Pilate, asks him the

question, "What is truth?" Confronted with the truth of Jesus, Pilate himself bore testimony in the sign placed above the cross, written in the three languages of the day, "The King of the Jews." The Jews protested, but Pilate said, "What I have written I have written." This is but a foretaste of what we can ultimately expect when the story is repeated and intensified in Christ, that "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-10).

(b) The Love of God Awakens Our Hearts

God is not only driven by truth, he is driven by love. It is the love of God that pursues Saul and tenaciously quiets his demons long enough for him to see the light. In a moment of divine revelation, God reaches out to Saul to repent. That same love is forever reaching out to the hearts of men and women. A millennium later, the new Davidic King would emerge out of his cave to relentlessly pursue another Saul. Like the jealous and angry Saul of old, this Saul was wreaking havoc on the early church. But, blinded by the light on the road to Damascus, he heard the words of Jesus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" and he repented. Not only was he forgiven, he went on to become the apostle Paul, the greatest spokesman for Christianity.

Perhaps there is a Saul listening to me today. You don't know why you are here, but the love of God has been pursuing you. I want you to know this: No matter what you have done in the past, God loves you. Do not refuse the

light of his love today. Your response may determine whether you become like Saul of Gibeah, and commit suicide, or whether you become like Saul of Tarsus, and become a spokesman for God.

(c) The Story of God Invites Our Participation

As we have already said, Engedi is a lush oasis set in a barren wilderness. There underground springs gush forth, creating an oasis of vineyards and date palms. Christians have the springs of the Holy Spirit flowing deep within them. When God allows us to confront our abusers we should do so by loving them and forgiving them, thus turning barren lives into oasis-like springs of Eden.

The apostle Paul admonished, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:19-21).

This is the highest call of all—turning our enemies into friends.

1. C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 2:234.

2. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, Vol. 2 (Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum 1990), 460-461.

3. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation (John Knox, 1990).

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CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO ANGRY MEN

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 964
1 Samuel 25:1-31
Seventeenth Message
Brian Morgan
October 2, 1994

Every time we turn on the television news these days it appears we are confronted with a story of family abuse played out on the screen. It seems more and more women are trapped in the grip of angry, abusive men. The media circus surrounding the O.J. Simpson case provoked an insightful letter by Dr. James Dobson. "Whatever happened to justice in America?" he asked. Analyzing our society, one columnist got it right when he said, "We are a culture seduced by fame, obsessed by violence, and overrun by the media."

Spousal abuse is not a new problem, however; it is as old as history itself. In our text this morning on the life of David, from the book of 1 Samuel, we come across just such a situation. A woman is trapped in a dispute between two angry men. The men have a high degree of potential for acting in an abusive fashion; one of them is the woman's husband, the other is the king of Israel. Abigail is the heroine of our story. Like Hannah, whom we met earlier in this narrative, Abigail will take center stage and play the lead role in preventing a crisis. We will spend two Sundays on this classic text. Today we will see how Abigail deals with an angry king; next week we will learn how she deals with an abusive fool, Nabal, her husband.

The text is a masterpiece of composition. It is exactly 144 lines long in the Hebrew, and it is composed in almost perfect symmetry. The style in which it is written offers the hope that God can bring perfect redemption in the midst of abusive situations. Through the intervention of Abigail, a situation that appeared to be escalating into a war actually turns out to be wedding.

The text opens with the report of Samuel's death.

I. A Crisis Created (25:1-13)

(a) The Setting

Then Samuel died; and all Israel gathered together and mourned for him, and buried him at his house in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. (NASB)

The death of Israel's esteemed first prophet and spiritual leader brings together all of Israel in mourning. Though Samuel has been absent from this drama for some time, his presence has hovered over the characters like the Shekinah cloud of glory that guided Israel in the wilderness. "Samuel was buried in the courtyard of his own home in Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. 'Gone, but not forgotten,' as we say. Even to this day the city of Ramah is known among Arabs and Jews as *Nebi Samwil*—the Prophet Samuel" (David Roper). One commentator wrote: "We may wonder why the death notice occurs here. It is as though Samuel has lingered over the narrative, waiting until even Saul has finally acknowledged the turn of destiny. When Saul makes his admission, Samuel's work is indeed com-

pleted and he may die. He has no more to do" (Brueggemann).

No doubt the prophet's death shocked and grieved David. What would he do now that his great intercessor was no more? Would Saul's evil intentions find their mark at last? To make sure they didn't, David headed further south, "to the wilderness of Paran, a vast, semi-arid region that stretched between Judah and the Sinai. In that place David was relatively free from Saul's insane pursuit and could be of service to his countrymen by protecting their flocks from marauding desert tribes" (David Roper).

Next, we are introduced to the abusive Nabal, and to Abigail, his wife, two of the key players in the drama. Verse 2:

Now there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel; and the man was very rich, and he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And it came about while he was shearing his sheep in Carmel (now the man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. And the woman was intelligent (literally: *good understanding*) and beautiful in appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his dealings, and he was a Calebite),

Nabal is introduced in terms of his possessions; he was a rich man. "His possessions precede his own person. His life is determined by his property. Nabal lives to defend his property, and he dies in an orgy, enjoying his property" (Brueggemann). Only after we learn of his wealth are we told his name: it is Nabal ("fool"). The Hebrew recognizes five kinds of fools, in ascending order of foolishness. The "nabal" is the composite of the grouping, the worst of all the fools. He is absolutely incorrigible and unapproachable. He is the fool who believes there is no God (Psalm 53:1, which David composed). He has no neighbor, and no social obligations. He lives by himself, for himself. He is obsessive and oppressive. He is a true Calebite (i.e. a dog).

Abigail, on the other hand, is introduced with graceful words about her physical beauty ("beautiful"), and her character ("good understanding"). This rare couplet places her in the school of the wise. As we have already seen, both of these terms were used of David earlier in the narrative.

To this home then come David's messengers, bearing an "innocent" request.

(b) An "Innocent" Request

that David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. So David sent ten young men, and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, visit Nabal and greet him in my name; and thus you shall say, 'Have a long life, peace be to you, and peace be to

your house, and peace be to all that you have. And now I have heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us and we have not insulted them, nor have they missed anything all the days they were in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we have come on a festive day. Please give whatever you find at hand to your servants and to your son David.” When David’s young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in David’s name; then they waited.

Nabal’s business was located in Carmel, north of Maon. It was sheep-shearing time, a festive occasion in Israel, much like our harvest festivals, when hearts are open and hospitality is liberally extended. In the spirit of the occasion David sends ten of his men to Carmel, bearing the message, “Peace...peace...peace.” He appeals to the hospitality of the event. (Some of the commentators, however, interpret his message as a Mafia-like threat. According to them, David was seeking protection money.)

The words “And now” (v 7) are uttered so quickly it is obvious that David wants something. Nabal would hardly appreciate the fact that the leader of the band of rogues addresses him as “father,” and attempts to manipulate him by suggesting a family relationship. He does not give a ready response, but makes David’s men wait and wait and wait. One way to intimidate people, as many of you who have traveled in Third World countries have learned, is to keep them waiting.

(c) An Angry Refusal

But Nabal answered David’s servants, and said, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men whose origin I do not know?” So David’s young men retraced their way and went back; and they came and told him according to all these words.

Nabal regards David’s band of men as outlaws and terrorists, and this proud businessman is not about to accede to their demands. His question, “Who is David?” does not necessarily imply that he is unaware of who David is (by now everyone knows about him), but that he considers him a nobody. Nabal deals in big business; he has no time for beggars and gypsies. In Hebrew, the first person ending is used seven times in verse 11 (this even comes across in the translation). Contrary to everyone else mentioned in 1 Samuel, Nabal refuses to recognize the future of the anointed one. Indignantly he denies the request of the men, so they retrace their steps and report his response to David.

David is enraged by what they tell him.

(d) The Bomb Bursts

And David said to his men, “Each of you gird on his sword.” So each man girded on his sword. And David also girded on his sword, and about four hundred men went up behind David while two hundred stayed with the baggage.

The angry David assembles his men and, girding on their swords, they divide into ranks, with specific orders,

and off they march to fight their own private, holy war. Testosterone has replaced good sense. How quickly an injustice suffered leads to rage, and rage to murder. An angry fool is about to be confronted by an angry king, and it appears nothing can prevent the looming confrontation.

At this point Abigail enters the drama.

II. Crisis Intervention (25:14-21)

(a) Abigail Hears of the Crisis

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, saying, “Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them (literally: *screamed at them*). Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we went about with them, while we were in the fields. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep. Now therefore, know and consider what you should do, for evil is plotted against our master and against all his household; and he is such a worthless man that no one can speak to him.”

The escalation of the conflict between these two angry men, David and Nabal, is interrupted by a servant. In God’s economy, only one person is needed to defuse the crisis and save the day. The young man makes a good report of David and his men to the only person he knows can intervene with authority, and that is Abigail. He knows it is useless to speak to Nabal. That approach had been tried already. “No one can speak to him,” says the young man. This was not news to Abigail. She had been living with Nabal. She knew him only too well.

So she knows she must take immediate action.

(b) Abigail Acts

Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves of bread and two jugs of wine and five sheep already prepared and five measures of roasted grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. And she said to her young men, “Go on before me; behold, I am coming after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. And it came about as she was riding on her donkey and coming down by the hidden part of the mountain, that behold, David and his men were coming down toward her; so she met them. Now David had said, “Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him.”

Abigail wastes no time in intervening. This crisis demands that immediate, decisive action be taken, and Abigail lives up to her reputation for quick decision-making. She possesses well-honed negotiating skills; she has lived with abuse her whole married life. She chooses to go to the only party, David, with whom negotiation is possible. She gathers an abundance of foodstuffs, “a feast for a king,” and wastes no time in dispatching them to David. She doesn’t tell her husband. Lives are at stake, and he has absolutely no discernment. To establish surprise, she sends the gifts ahead of her, while she remains hidden in a ravine, revealing herself only at the last moment.

Meanwhile David is fuming, muttering under his breath how vain was the good he had performed for Nabal. He is so angry he can't even mention Nabal by name. Then he binds himself by oath under God to carry out his own holy war. I was stunned when I translated the words used for "male." They form the crude, explicit comment: "those who urinate against the wall." That is how David referred to these Calebites (as dogs). The phrase was used of people who were despised.

Abigail has her work cut out for her. Can she disarm this angry king, and get him to revoke the irrevocable?

III. Disarming the Bomb (25:23-31)

(a) Abigail's Posture: Humility (23-24)

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and dismounted from her donkey, and fell on her face before David, and bowed herself to the ground. And she fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the blame. And please let your maidservant speak to you, and listen to the words of your maidservant.

Abigail approaches David with humility and tranquility. This rare combination is enough to capture the attention of any man. Notice that her every movement is downward. "Coming down by the hidden part of the mountain," at just the right moment she appears before David. She dismounts from her donkey, and falls face down upon the ground. Notice the three statements of subjection: *dismounted* her donkey, *fell* before David's face on her face, *bowed* toward the ground at his feet. Such a display of humility is so striking, it arouses a curiosity that displaces the thirst for revenge. "A gentle answer turns away wrath," says the proverb. David remembered that this had been his own posture before Saul in Engedi. Abigail takes full responsibility for what happened when David's men came seeking provisions. Taking Nabal out of the equation, she places herself at the center of the crisis.

Next, she offers good counsel to David for dealing with fools.

(b) Her Counsel Regarding Nabal: "Forget him!" (25)

"Please do not let my lord pay attention to this worthless man, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name and folly is with him; but I your maidservant did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent.

Abigail is saying, in effect, "Concerning my husband, he is a fool ('son of Belial'). You have a right to angry. But do not deal with him; deal with me. The problem was really one of miscommunication." Standing face to face with the beautiful Abigail, David's anger is thoroughly defused. Abigail offers excellent advice: leave insane people alone in their insanity. The proverb says, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself" (Prov 26:4). Chronically arrogant people are impossible to reason with. "Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him" (Prov 27:22). Let fools self-destruct. Do not be tempted to try and chasten them; life will accomplish that.

(c) Her Exhortation: "Where Is God In Your Equation?" (26)

"Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, since the LORD has restrained you

from shedding blood, and from avenging yourself by your own hand, now then let your enemies, and those who seek evil against my lord, be as Nabal.

Now that Abigail has David's undivided attention she has to convince him to take back the impulsive oath, uttered when he vowed to leave no one living who belonged to Nabal. She takes her husband out of the equation and places herself in the middle of it. And she brings the LORD back into the equation. "The LORD sent me to restrain you from taking revenge by your own hand," is her word to David. She undoes his oath with a greater oath of her own. David was on the verge of usurping the role of a Holy God. He was attempting to take vengeance, an action that God reserves to himself. God had restrained David, and God will judge Nabal, says Abigail: "May He make your enemies as Nabal!" Such confidence has she that God is going to judge Nabal, that she refers to him in the past tense. She has been living with his abuse her whole married life, yet she never took things into her own hands. She asks David to follow her example of faith.

Finally, she exhorts David to look at the big picture.

(d) Her Motivation: "Look at the Big Picture!" (27-31)

"And now let this gift which your maidservant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who accompany my lord. Please forgive the transgression of your maidservant; for the LORD will certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD and evil shall not be found in you all your days. And should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And it shall come about when the LORD shall do for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and shall appoint you ruler over Israel, that this will not cause grief or a troubled heart to my lord, both by having shed blood without cause and by my lord having avenged himself.

David's anger over Nabal's refusal to pay tribute is no longer the issue. Abigail has brought the gift he wanted. To get him back on track, she subtly reminds him of his holy calling by giving him a history lesson. She reminds him of his battle with Goliath, saying, "You are fighting the battles of the LORD, and your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling." If a history lesson was not enough to motivate David, a little forward thinking might. Abigail continues, "Look ahead to your public coronation as king over all Israel. What do you want that day to be like? Would you want this incident on your conscience when you receive that ground to all the praise of Israel?"

I like to use this strategy to encourage youngsters to sexual purity. I ask them to cast their minds forward to their wedding day, when they are making their vows to their partners. How would they feel, I ask them, if they looked out over the assembled crowd and see people with whom they already had sexual relationships? Would they want that on their conscience?

So Abigail encourages David to enlarge his perspective to embrace both the distant past and the ultimate future of his coronation.

Then she makes a personal request.

(e) Her Personal Request

“When the LORD shall deal well with my lord, then remember your maidservant.”

Abigail knows that God will exalt David, thus she throws in her lot with the new, as yet unrealized, kingdom, much like Rahab did with the spies who invaded Jericho. How intriguing. In the same way, God requires Christians to pledge their allegiance to the new King before his reign is evident.

Abigail’s words completely disarm David. Summoned back to his holy calling, he says to her, “Blessed be the Lord of Israel who sent you to me today.”

IV. Reflections

(a) The Role of Women in Samuel: Ruth, Hannah, and Abigail

Though women do not occupy the leading roles in the book of Samuel, they occupy a high place as crucial players in the kingdom of God. First Samuel emerges out of the memory of the Judges, and the only bright light of that book is the story of a Moabite woman whose tenacious loyal-love gave birth to the line of David. Then the story of Samuel opens with Hannah, whose pain over her barrenness leads to a prayer that changes the course of the nation. Through Hannah’s faithful prayers not only is a son given, but the whole prophetic office is born in Israel and light returns to a nation enveloped in darkness. The spiritual perception and prophetic insight she displays in the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) far outweigh any utterances of her contemporary male counterparts.

This same greatness is evident in Abigail. Her actions of humility and subjection, interspersed with lightning-like confrontation, disarm David’s anger and prevent his rule from turning into a disaster. Now we have the answer to the question with which we opened our text. What would David do without the prophetic words of Samuel to keep him in line? The answer is, God sent a woman. Her

words are as pure and as true as those of any prophet, and they function accordingly to restore David to his proper role as king. The result is that war is averted, and a wedding is inaugurated.

Oftentimes women are the first to anticipate the onset of a crisis. It is because they possess an intuitive instinct to act. Abigail’s ability to function as a prophet was not contingent on her husband’s support. Nor did she need official recognition to function this way. She was a prophet by divine gift and character. And after the fact she still continued to function well as a homemaker. Her prophetic gift did not impede that ability. In this she anticipates what would happen in the Jesus story. Women would be first bearers of the good news of his birth, and the first witnesses to his resurrection. Later, as the book of Acts records, women would stand as equal with men in that they too possessed the Holy Spirit, and they too would share the prophetic gift in the church.

You might ask, “What was Abigail’s secret? How did she acquire such a prophetic skill while married to the fool?”

(b) Abigail’s Secret

The answer is found in her name. Abigail means, “*My father is joy!*” As a woman, she did not place her hope in men to set things right. Her confidence rested in God. God was her Father, her perfect source of *joy*. He was the one who broke through her abusive circumstances to mold her soul, craft her life, arm her with graceful speech, and endow her with leadership skills powerful enough to correct heads of state.

Thank God we have many Abigails in this church. They appear, seemingly out of nowhere at times, to correct us and point out crises to which we are blind. I am thankful, too, that I married an Abigail. She is not afraid to speak the truth to me, yet she knows how to disarm me. No one functions better to keep me on track, help me to think clearly, and assist me to maintain my role in life on the strait and narrow path. With David, I say, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me.”

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JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF A FOOL

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 965
1 Samuel 25:32-44
Eighteenth Message
Brian Morgan
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In our studies in the life of David we have been learning that the wilderness is the learning ground for spiritual formation. One thing that makes the journey particularly difficult is that we are in unfamiliar territory and we have neither guide nor map to direct us. Situations that we once took for granted become insurmountable problems. The old ways of operating no longer apply; we are forced to make choices by trial and error. For David, this involved trying to survive the angry attacks of the demonic despot Saul, and overcoming the daily challenge of finding food to feed his band of four hundred men.

In our last study, we saw that David fled to the wilderness of Paran, a vast, semi-arid region stretching between Judah and the Sinai. In that place David was relatively free from Saul's insane pursuit. There David could be of service to his countrymen, protecting their flocks from marauding desert tribes. Perhaps he would fall into the good graces of a generous landowner who would repay him with hospitality and food for his services. But Nabal, the owner whose flocks he cared for, was a fool. He greeted with contempt David's request for support, treating the men who came to him as a band of renegade terrorists. His response so enraged David that he and his men armed themselves and set off on their personal holy war. David's knee-jerk reaction seemed inconsequential to him. He regarded Nabal and his household as Philistines and enemies of Yahweh.

But David's plan to shed innocent blood would have destroyed his future had not God intervened in the matter by sending a woman, Abigail, whose godly character and discernment qualified her to be the intermediary between two angry men. Last week we looked at the skill she displayed in this role. Today we will learn the outcome of her actions in the reception she receives first, from David, then, from her husband, and finally, from the Lord.

From David she receives blessings.

I. Blessings from the King (25:32-35)

Then David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed, and from avenging myself by my own hand. Nevertheless, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from harming you, unless you had

come quickly to meet me, surely there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light as much as one male." So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and he said to her, "Go up to your house in peace. See, I have listened to you and granted your request (lit. "lifted up your countenance")." (NASB)

David responds to Abigail's intervention with the threefold blessing: "Blessed be the Lord who sent you ...Blessed be your discretion...Blessed be you." Recognizing that God had intervened in sending Abigail to him, David begins by blessing the Lord; then he blesses Abigail's character, displayed in her discretion and diplomatic skill that so gently disarmed his anger. What a ministry this would be in our day where there is much anger manifest all around us. We need Abigails who will disarm the time bombs of anger that are ready to explode at any moment.

Finally, David blesses Abigail. She recognized the hand of God in this matter between her husband and David, and she did not wait to act. Had it not been for her, David would have killed Nabal and destroyed his own future in the process. She had helped him avoid a calamity.

Then David vents his last residue of anger. "His rage still vibrates fully in the conditional mood" (Fokkelman). He admits he is still in the cooling down mode: "Unless you had come," he said to Abigail, "there would not have been left to Nabal until the morning light [as much as] one male" (literally: "he who urinates against the wall").

Finally, David accepts Abigail's well-timed gift, and grants her request. He sends her home in peace, having "lifted up her countenance." This is a hint that more joy is in store for her. Abigail, the peacemaker, is given a well-deserved blessing by the king. A later King in Israel would say, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (a title for the Messianic King). Jesus was saying that servants like Abigail perform the royal work of kings. Jimmy Carter did just such a service a few weeks ago when he went to Haiti and intervened to bring about a negotiated settlement to the crisis there.

Abigail, the royal diplomat, the accomplished peacemaker, returns home in triumph. The Messianic king had received her tribute. His wrath had been cooled; war had been averted; peace was restored.

When she gets home, however, there is no royal reception and no giving of thanks, only silence from the fool.

II. Silence from the Fool (25:36-38)

Then Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she did not tell him anything at all until the morning light. But it came about in the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, that his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him so that he became as a stone. And about ten days later, it happened that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

Abigail returns to find Nabal making merry in his own personal orgy. Instead of paying tribute to Israel's king, he gives himself a party "fit for a king." Fools make a habit of rewarding themselves. Nabal is dead drunk, his senses dulled, his mind oblivious to the holocaust that had almost annihilated his home. What a painful return home for Abigail! But, her expectations were not very high. Nabal's drunken behavior was nothing new to her. He was best at indulging himself. How could he possibly be expected to grant his wife the honor due her in her finest hour?

Yet, in the face of this rejection, Abigail does not withdraw in pained silence. She knows her work as a diplomat is not yet finished; she has some loose ends to tie up. However, wisdom dictated that this was not the proper time to press ahead. In the kingdom of God, timing is everything. Abigail wisely restrains her emotions and her words. She decides to let the orgy continue until the final drink is consumed and the deeds of darkness have run their course. Morning would come, and with it the light of day.

Nabal awakens with a terrible hangover. Wisely, Abigail waits until the wine from the previous night's excesses had "gone out" of this male (this is reminiscent of the crude word for male "those who urinate against the wall," vv 22, 34). Now, at the opportune time, with little emotion, she conveys to Nabal the bare facts of the situation that had almost resulted in disaster. She informs him that David, the one to whom he had refused hospitality, was the anointed king of Israel, and so provoked was he by Nabal's refusal that he took an oath of holy war against Nabal. His assembled army was right at the front door when these matters came to Abigail's attention through one of the servants. Recognizing the urgency of the crisis, she had no time to speak to Nabal but, acting on his behalf, she had offered David gifts in appreciation for the protection his men had provided their flocks from marauding bands. She regarded his unsolicited protection as the gracious hand of God blessing them, and she deemed it appropriate to offer thanks out of their plentiful harvest. David had received her gift, saying that if she had not intervened, not one male in Nabal's household would have been

alive by morning.

What powerful words to receive on an empty stomach and an aching head! Suddenly, Nabal becomes dreadfully sober. Hearing the news, his heart "died within him so that he became as a stone." This phrase is reminiscent of Abigail's prophetic words in 25:29, that God would make David's enemies fit into the hollow of a sling and would fling them away. The word for "as a stone," is the same word as the name for "nabal" spelt backwards. Fokkelman comments: "The name of the man is turned upside down in an alliteration which underlines his end...As soon as he, really the only one who urinates against the wall, emerges from the night of carousal, he comes up against a wall in time and space." Ten days later, God struck Nabal and he died. "Nabal dies like someone who cannot remain sober when some of his possessions are given away" (Fokkelman).

Why did God wait ten days? He waited because he loves even fools. The purpose behind the painful exposure of fools is not to condemn them, but to warn them of the judgment to come. God in his grace gave Nabal, the fool of fools, an opportunity to repent. How different is God from Nabal! Nabal made David's men wait for an answer so as to exercise his control and dominate them, but God waits for Nabal, not to control him but to free him. With patient, forbearing love, God allows us to exercise our freedom and repent. But that window of opportunity does not remain open forever. After ten days, with no response from Nabal to the Messianic King, the waiting was over. God struck Nabal, and he died.

So Abigail receives a blessing from the king, and silence from the fool.

There is more in store for her.

III. Joy For the New Bride (25:39-44)

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept back His servant from evil. The Lord has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head." Then David sent a proposal to Abigail, to take her as his wife. When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, "David has sent us to you, to take you as his wife." And she arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, "Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord's servants." Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David, and became his wife. David had also taken Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. Now Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

When David receives the news of Nabal's death, he blesses the God who had become his advocate, judged

his cause, and vindicated his life. At the same time he is extremely grateful that God directly intervened to prevent him from sinning. So overwhelmed is he with appreciation that he does not wait for his coronation to fulfill his vow to Abigail “to remember her” with a royal gift. Now that she is a widow, he proposes to her with the same haste that she intervened for him, offering to personally care for her all the days of her life. “Levenson and Halpern propose that, with this alliance with Abigail, David claimed considerable wealth, territory, and influence, which had been Nabal’s and which helped form a political and economic base for his Hebron governance” (Brueggemann).

Abigail’s response is typical. She does not feel worthy, but welcomes the status of a female servant in the royal house, that of washing the feet of David’s servants. She has good experience for this task, having just washed the feet of the king.

The story ends much like it began, with Abigail, in haste, in a procession with her donkeys, a picture of humility, on her way to meet the royal figure. This time, however, instead of confronting a king in his wrath, she is headed to his warm embrace. A war has been averted, and a wedding inaugurated.

Lest we think that the threat of Saul is finished, or that his jealousy has been assuaged by his admission of David’s right to the crown (chapter 24), the narrator takes us back to the court. Saul is still angrily throwing spears at David. He gives away Michal, David’s wife and his own daughter. But if Saul gives away one wife, David acquires two.

Brueggemann comments: “The story is direct, candid, earthy. At the two crucial points, however, concerning Abigail’s intervention and Nabal’s death, Yahweh is the decisive actor. David’s life follows Yahweh’s faithful intention. Abigail serves that intention in everything she says and does. All her actions are informed by her conviction that David will have a ‘sure house.’ That house is made more sure by the restraint of David and the decisive work of Yahweh.”

I will conclude by giving three perspectives on this text. I will ask us all to put ourselves in the place of each of the three main characters, Nabal, David, and Abigail, that we might learn the lesson that each of them learned.

IV. Three Reflections

(a) From the perspective of the fool

First, picture Nabal, the fool, dead drunk and blind at his own party. The lesson is this: Idolatry isolates us from others. It cuts us off from life and relationships; it shuts our eyes to what the Messianic King is doing all around us. Yet God waited ten days for Nabal to see the light and repent. Some of you may be like Nabal. You come to church, but you leave unmoved. You go home and embrace your own wealth, your own idols, and in-

dulge your own pleasures. You regard all that you have earned as rightfully yours, for your private indulgence. Like Nabal, you hold your own private orgies in the night, and nothing happens. If this describes you, the psalmist has a word for you:

**“These things you have done and I kept silent;
you thought I was altogether like you.
But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.”**
(Ps 50:21)

You may be as blind as Nabal, and the angel of death may have come close to annihilating you, but you are alive today because an Abigail was praying for you. One day the waiting will come to an end. And do not be deceived into thinking that this is merely an Old Testament story of a God of judgment; that in the new order, everything is forgiven I remind you of Paul’s word to the church in Corinth. Some of the believers there were participating in the LORD’s feast in an unholy manner. The rich were indulging themselves in an orgy of their own, gorging themselves before the poor arrived at the love feast. Listen to the apostle’s sober words to them: “That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 11:30). If this description fits you, I say, with Paul, “Wake up O fool! Arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

(b) From the perspective of the King

What did David, the Messianic king, learn from all of this? Was it proper for Israel’s king to “save” himself, or to take vengeance? The answer is no. David confessed, “Blessed be the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept back His servant from evil. The Lord has also returned the evil-doing of Nabal on his own head.” Just as David was restrained from taking vengeance on Saul, so also he was restrained from taking vengeance on a fool. The message is clear: Never repay evil for evil. “‘Vengeance is Mine,’ says the Lord.”

The second lesson for David is this: Where and how should the king find provision for his men? In this story, two kings were living on the same land. One had Spirit, the other had land. Why not make an alliance — protection for food? That would be a wise move, wouldn’t it? No, it would not. The king of Spirit is to be provided for by the *willing* gifts of the populace as they recognize that he is the Messianic king. Gifts are to be given spontaneously, in appreciation. As witnessed in his building of the temple later, never again would David attempt coercion as a means of receiving provisions or money.

The theme continues in the story of Jesus. In the wilderness, Jesus too was tempted to use his office to feed himself. The devil tempted him, saying, “If you are the new Moses, turn these stones into bread.” But Jesus refused. (Moses, of course, used his office to feed others, not himself.) David had his four hundred men to feed, but Jesus had his five thousand. What if Jesus had made an alliance with Herod, asking for government assis-

tance to help him feed his flock? That would have destroyed his whole program, wouldn't it? Yet this is what the church continues to do again and again, seeking gifts from the world to further the work of the ministry. Jesus fed his people with bread from heaven — and there was enough left over to provide a basketfull for each of the apostles. As they used their office to serve others, there would be plenty left over for them. The Didache, a document summing up the teachings of the apostles, written about 50 A.D., stated that if a teacher even asked for money it was an indication that he was a false prophet. How the church would be cleansed if we abided by these sentiments today!

(c) From the perspective of Abigail

I am impressed by Abigail's discernment and her skill in negotiating, but I am even more impressed by how seriously she took her wedding vows. When she signed on "for better or worse," she meant it. She believed that God would work on her husband; she would do nothing to manipulate the circumstances. At the right time, the Messianic king visited her home. How tragic it would have been had she divorced Nabal! She would not have been there to intervene between these two angry men.

At times in this church we counsel separation for some couples in order to allow God to work to soften hearts and bring about reconciliation. Around this time last year a woman told me she was separating from her abusive husband. He was a controller, and a fool. I met with him, shared the gospel with him, and in time he came to Christ. But a new revelation doesn't necessarily imply an immediate change in character. His wife told me she was divorcing him. I asked her what was the hurry. They were still separated, there was time for God

to work, so why place time limits on what God was doing? A month ago, I got the following note from her: "Thank you for your advice that I not divorce my husband, but give him time for the Lord to work with him. You suggested at least a year. We ended our separation when I moved back home after eleven months. You were right." What an encouraging letter in these days of easy divorce!

Abigail took her vows seriously.

I am also impressed by her humility. She was humble enough to bow before the Messianic King and to take the blame for her husband's refusal to provide for his men. When David proposed to her, she responded by saying, "Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord's servants." This image of humility, the washing of one's feet, was immortalized by our Lord in the Upper Room (John 13) as the highest calling of saints and the supreme task of kings.

Paul offers this as one of the essential criteria for the high office of widows who would serve full-time in the church. "Let a widow be put on the list...if she has washed the feet of the saints" (1 Tim 5:10). This is what gives joy (the essence of Abigail's name) — serving the King of kings in this way, not lobbying causes, seeking one's own rights and controlling others, but taking the blame, disarming people, and reconciling them to one another and to God. This is invisible and often unrecognized work. It goes on in the privacy of homes, in counseling rooms, in hallway conversations, in the most unlikely places. The church needs more Abigails to do the work of washing feet. We need them in our schools, in our neighborhoods, in the workplace. May God grant us the grace to enter into this high calling, that we may be found among the peacemakers, "*for they shall be called sons of God.*" Amen.

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INTO THE ENEMY CAMP

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 966
1 Samuel 26:1-13
Nineteenth Message
Brian Morgan
October 16, 1994

In your wilderness wanderings, have you ever felt that you were going around in circles? You arrived at a certain place and had a strange sensation that you had been there already. In the immortal words of Yogi Berra, you were experiencing “*deja vu* all over again!” These are times when we say to God, “What are we doing here? I thought I took this test already.”

Eighteen years ago this month, Emily and I found ourselves in just such a place. It was exactly a year after the death of our son, and Emily had just given birth to our daughter, Jessica Lynne. We were in the same hospital, with the same doctor. The same kind of torrential downpour was falling outside. And the story ended with the same outcome—a grave. Never in my wildest dreams did I think this would happen again. Didn’t we respond in faith the first time? I asked myself.

*Could it be to walk this way again
Conception to pain, never to regain
When the first born, has already paid?*

An interesting phenomenon about Biblical narrative is the subtle, yet powerful use of repetition of certain stories. In our text today, at first glance David’s trial appears to be an exact repetition of the situation in chapter 24, when David confronted Saul in the cave of Engedi. The account has the same characters and the same plot. The confrontation is the same, and the outcome is the same.

We Westerners have little appreciation for repetition. It reminds us of television reruns, so we tune out. Liberal scholars since the 1800’s have treated these Hebrew stories that way. They say these texts are merely different accounts of the same story, told by different editors or redactors to promote their own biases.

Yet that approach fails to take into account the Hebrew mindset and the Biblical view of spiritual formation. The Hebrew word “to learn” (*lamad*); from which the word “disciple” comes (Isaiah 50:4; “Talmud” derives from the same word) means, to learn by repetition. Lessons are taught over and over. Like learning scales on a piano, one practices over and over until the keys seem like extensions of the fingers. When the keyboard is mastered, then the student is free to create something new. The Hebrews did not focus on what was the same in these repeated stories, but on what was new. They regarded repetition as God’s vehicle to make all things new. Repeated trials in their lives did not discourage them, but rather gave them a sense that God’s

divine hand was drawing them into the divine drama.

Spiritual formation does not occur without repetition. We ought not to regard a situation that appears to be a rerun as something to be slavishly endured, but as a sovereign twist in the divine drama, designed to make things new. That is why I do not want to rush through these stories. I want to take time to study them carefully. True learning is not just passing along information. We must take time to meditate at every twist and turn in the story and thus comprehend the divine significance of each event.

There are two movements to this story. The first brings David as close to Saul as possible, under the cover of night; in the second movement, David moves as far away as possible from Saul in the light of day. The first scene is governed by closeness of space, shrouded in silence; the second is governed by breadth of space, with speeches echoing back and forth across a valley. We will take the first movement today, 1 Samuel 26:1-23.

I. The Hunt Intensifies (26:1-4)

Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is not David hiding on the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?” So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having with him three thousand chosen men of Israel, to search for David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul camped in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, beside the road, while David was staying in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, then David sent out spies, and he knew that Saul was definitely coming. (NASB)

Chapter 26 is filled with visual imagery of height and space. The scene opens on the heights as both kings position themselves to gain the strategic advantage. (The word “Gibeah” means height; it is the same root as the word “hill.”) At first, Saul leaves his high position and descends into the wilderness; then he goes back to the hill of Hachilah. In scene 2, these same spatial movements will be matched carefully and precisely by David.

The chapter reintroduces Saul’s friends, the Ziphites, those skilled spies of his central intelligence agency. Once again they have discovered David’s hiding place. It is on the “hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon”—the same report as in 23:24. The Ziphites freely

offer this information to Saul, using the exact wording of 23:19. This time Saul does not delay. He responds in haste in an effort to capture David. The king gathers three thousand of the choicest men in all Israel, the same group who, ironically, were of little value to him during an earlier pursuit of David. Their mention in the text at this point could be a subtle clue by the narrator that Saul is doomed to failure. Just as in chapter 24, when Saul picked the exact cave where David was hiding to relieve himself, here he chooses to rest his whole camp in the exact location of David's camp, the hill of Hachilah.

"Hachilah" (the word means "dark or dull") is a pun that would not have been lost on a Hebrew audience. The term was used of blurred eyes dulled from drunkenness. This is a clue to the reader that just as drunken Nabal lacked insight to see the Messianic king, neither will Saul be able to see anything from his new vantage point. How true this is can be gauged from the fact that when David arrives in the camp, Saul is in a deep sleep, totally oblivious to David's presence.

Though Saul is shrouded in darkness, the narrator is quick to relate that David is guided by light. He has a sixth sense that Saul is hot on his trail. We are not told how David knows this, though we sense by now that his insight originates from the hand of God, so it is not necessary to document the means. In a tactical move, David sends spies to confirm his intuition, reminiscent of another great leader in Israel (cf. Num 13:1-3).

Once his suspicions are confirmed, David makes a bold move. He sneaks into Saul's camp under the cover of night.

II. The Hunted Becomes the Hunter (26:5-7)

David then arose and came to the place where Saul had camped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army; and Saul was lying in the circle of the camp, and the people were camped around him. Then David answered and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." So David and Abishai came to the people by night, and behold, Saul lay sleeping inside the circle of the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the people were lying around him.

Once David has located Saul, he decides to change roles. Retaking the initiative, the hunted becomes the hunter. David asks for a volunteer to enter into the enemy camp, and Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, David's sister, steps forward. Stealthily, in the middle of the night, uncle and nephew make their way into Saul's camp. The night is dark and eerie. The scene is deathly silent. The narrator graphically depicts Saul's "sleeping"

camp, carefully arranged in concentric circles, with Saul at the center. Here he lies, to his own misguided thinking, the center of life, with his general, his choice troops and his people all around him.

The imagery suggests a king filled with egocentricity (the whole world revolves around him), and paranoia (it takes the whole world to protect him). David penetrates each line of defense, moving closer and closer to Saul, until he arrives at the center. In the blackness of the night, everyone is in a deep sleep. What David sees is a grave. At center-stage stands Saul's spear, the symbol of death, thrust into the ground next to his skull. To David, this tableau becomes a prophetic symbol of Saul's death.

Abishai is quick to judge the significance of the moment.

III. Circling the Prey (26:8-13)

Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time." But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt?" David also said, "As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go." So David took the spear and the jug of water from beside Saul's head, and they went away, but no one saw or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a sound sleep from the Lord had fallen on them. Then David crossed over to the other side, and stood on top of the mountain at a distance with a large area between them.

Abishai catches the vision of death, plain as day. Like a drooling vulture, he hovers over Saul's body. He interprets the events as God giving David his day of opportunity, and is eager to help the prophecy along. David need not kill Saul; he will do it. And with one thrust of Saul's spear, to boot. He will not need a second. How tempting this must have been for David. The very spear, the symbol of death that twice missed its mark when it was thrown at David, stands next to Saul's sleeping skull. Abishai, David's nephew, would do the dirty work. He would not have to thrust it twice!

But once again, as was the case in chapter 24, David is ruled by theology, not circumstances. This theology is imbedded in the very core of David's being. Notice that five times in three verses he uses the name "Lord." Thanks to Abigail, the Lord is back in David's equation. He uses the Lord's name in an oath ("as the Lord lives"); and he uses the most emphatic verbal structure

("surely the LORD will strike him"); finally, the word "forbid" is a term that comes from the root meaning "to pollute, profane, dishonor" (the noun form means that some thing or thought is so profane or reprehensible to the individual that it evokes the deepest human emotions).¹ Right in the middle of the graveyard, Abishai receives from his uncle an impassioned sermon in basic theology. Abigail has had a remarkable influence on David.

David admonishes the bloodthirsty Abishai to restrain his hand. David now senses that just as the Lord struck Nabal, one day the Lord would strike Saul. How, he did not know. Perhaps like Nabal, Saul would die of a stroke; perhaps old age would take him, or he might die in battle. Whatever the circumstances, God would judge, how and when David did not know. That confidence would allow him to wait. Perhaps it was the sight of the sleeping camp, with the spear impaled by Saul's head, coupled with Nabal's death, that nurtured David's hope.

Instead of using the spear to kill Saul, David has Abishai remove the spear and pick up the jug of water by Saul's head. The spear is a symbol of death, and Saul's power; the jug of water is a symbol of life. (Anyone who travels to the wilderness in Israel knows that one must drink five liters of water a day to prevent dehydration.) David knows how to use these two things, a spear and a jug of water. Rather than killing Saul, he is going to give him the gift of life.

As both men depart the camp, the narrator points out the reason for their success: "no one saw or knew [contrast 26:4] for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them." The term "sound sleep"² was used of the deep sleep that God caused to fall upon Adam when he removed his rib (Gen 2:21). It is a sleep that was used by God on someone prior to God's imparting deep revelation (Gen 15:12; Job 4:13; Dan 8:18). In chapter 24 we might say David went unnoticed because he was lucky; here it is clearly because of divine aid that he went unnoticed.

David departs the sleeping camp and removes himself to leave as much space as possible between himself and Saul; yet he remains close enough to be within earshot of the camp. From that point, David will confront Saul and his general with their guilt over their dealings with him.

IV. Reflections: Why 'Deja vu'?

Why does the Lord take David through the same trial he experienced in chapter 24, especially when, in Engedi's cave, David seemed to exhibit perfect trust when he faced Saul? While that is true, it is also true that David had failed miserably in his dispute with Nabal by taking matters into his own hands. In chapter 24, David responded to Saul with what I would call terrified trust, but when he was confronted by a fool, Nabal, in chapter

25, he responded in anger. Is it not possible that the intensity of David's anger toward Nabal is not at least in some measure due to the pain that Saul had caused David? David retained a residue of anger that he held in check for a time. Then, his anger having been diffused by Abigail, God initiated a second face to face confrontation between David and Saul. The lessons of the first story were not merely repeated, but expanded and developed in the second.

As a result of this repetition, David grew in three areas as a leader.

1. David's Courage Is Stronger: The Hunted Becomes the Hunter

First, his courage grew stronger: The hunted becomes the hunter. No longer is David merely responding to Saul's attacks, he turns the tables on Saul and courageously retakes the initiative, entering right into the camp of his enemy. "David intentionally and self-assuredly takes over the initiative and his stalking is premeditated" (Brueggemann). Oftentimes, this is how we grow to be courageous. At first, we respond to confrontation with terrified trust; the second time we respond in anger; but the third time we respond in courageous confrontation. This was what happened with David.

Confrontations are repeated in our lives to teach us to seize the initiative. In the book of Acts, Peter had a face to face confrontation with Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, the same people who tried Jesus and put him to death. Back then Peter denied Jesus, but now, following the resurrection, all things have become new. Peter seizes the initiative and puts them on trial. Listen to the apostle's words:

"If we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 'He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone.' And there is salvation in no none else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:9-12)

Peter, the accused, becomes the accuser, summoning his judges before the court of Christ. This takes courage, but this is how God wants his people to respond. Sometimes it takes several encounters to bring this about.

David's courage is stronger.

2. David's Convictions Are Deeper: Rebuke of Abishai, son of Zeruiah

Secondly, David's convictions are deeper. We see this in his rebuke of Abishai. The same theology drives this text as that of chapter 24, but it has twice the passion

and conviction. David's nephew gets far more than he bargained for when he offers to help David by thrusting a spear into Saul. He is barraged with an arsenal of words that penetrate his own heart. We all have our sons of thunder, those who want to bring down fire upon the Lord's enemies. The value of repeated trials is that they teach us passion. We can't be leaders without it. With passion we are able to silence the sons of thunder.

In the wilderness we learn one outstanding lesson, and it is this. If we have a ministry, it is by the gift of God. No one creates his own ministry in the church. If we are going to work with the Messianic King, it is he who grants us ministry. He gives the gifts and sets the stage. But we must learn this lesson a few times in order to gain passion. Let God handle the sword. Our job is to grasp the jug and bring life to thirsting souls.

David's convictions are deeper.

3. Nightly Visions of Encouragement: Hope Is Brighter

Finally, David's hope is brighter. As he walked through Saul's camp in the eerie blackness he observed the highly unusual, deep sleep of everyone in the camp. Then he saw the sword thrust into the ground next to Saul's skull. David realized that he was walking in a graveyard. He had seen how everything would end. It had been decreed. Saul was finished. His reign was over.

David's vision came right on the heels of Nabal's death. This, coupled with God's vindication of him in the matter with Nabal, gave birth to his hope. God would judge. Yet, notice that David will express only what has been clearly revealed to him, nothing more.

He is not presumptuous. Christians today presume far too much. David ventures nothing more than what the Lord has taught him. Saul would die, either by the direct intervention of the Lord, through old age or in battle. How he would die David did not know, but die he would.

May God give us such a hope, coupled with humility, not to take the Lord's name in vain.

The day after my daughter died, for some strange reason hope was born in me. It was not the hope of wishful thinking, neither was it a denial of my grief. My hope was a mysterious beckoning within me that God was up to something. When we arrived home from the hospital, I told Emily that we should not put our baby furniture away, We were going to pray for a baby, I said. God would provide, how or when I did not know, but he would provide. Next morning we received word that a young woman who was due to give birth the very next day, wanted us to adopt her baby. On December 18th, two weeks after Jessica died, we adopted Becki. Our lives would never be the same again.

Last week, Becki brought home her senior portraits from high school. How quickly the years have flown! There was a time when I thought we would never have children, but today, eighteen years later, thirty seniors from Becki's high school class are building their homecoming float in my driveway. Becki has always made our lives new.

My friends, do not be discouraged if God repeats a trial in your life. Do not regard it as a rerun. It is a sign that his hand is upon you, and he is about to make all things new.

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1. The term is also used also of God in Genesis 18:17, when Abraham asked if he would destroy Sodom if fifty righteous men remained. His response: "*Far be it from me!* Will not the judge of all the world do what is right?" For other uses see 1 Sam 2:30; 14:45; 20:2, 9; 22:15; 26:11; 2 Sam 20:20; 23:17.

2. For a complete listing of this term as a noun, see Gen 2:21; 15:12; Isa 29:10; Job 4:13; 33:15; Prov 19:15; as a verb, see Judg 4:21; Jonah 1:5, 6; Ps 76:7; Prov 10:5; Dan 8:18; 10:9.



ECHOES OF ACCUSATION AND INNOCENCE

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Catalog No. 967
1 Samuel 26:14-25
Twentieth Message
Brian Morgan
October 30, 1994

On a warm summer evening in Romania in 1989, Claudia, a young girl from a devoutly atheistic home, had a disturbing dream. A week earlier, her friend had invited her to act as an interpreter for a team of foreigners who would soon be arriving in her village. This would be a dangerous undertaking. Contact with foreigners was forbidden by law. Her whole family was Communist, while these foreigners were Christians. Acting as their interpreter would be tantamount to treason. Her family, especially her sister, regarded the venture with great suspicion. They could easily have turned her over to the authorities. What should she do?

In her dream, Claudia was sitting in a chair in her living room. Behind her was standing a man with a beard. His outstretched arms beckoned to her. The dream made a deep impression on her. She took the risk, joined the foreigners, and headed up to the mountains for a week of Bible teaching. Never before had she heard of the name Jesus, but now she was translating amazing words from the Bible, coming from the lips of a foreigner. This man's words were striking, but she was taken even more by his obvious integrity. She returned home, bubbling over with new life, singing the songs she had learned during the week. A few months after the Romanian revolution, Claudia and her sister came to Christ. She is now a full-time missionary, working for Operation Mobilization. The "foreigner" she interpreted for was our own Bill Kiefer. I will never forget seeing the reunion of these two at Jim Foster's wedding. Claudia's dream that summer evening was the catalyst that had drawn her to Christ.

This is a not a rare phenomenon. In Scripture, God frequently used deep sleep¹ to communicate to people who were alone, quiet and vulnerable in the deep of night. Elihu says as much in the book of Job:

"For God does speak—now one way, now another—
though man may not perceive it.
In a dream, in a vision of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their
beds,
he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warn-
ings,
to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride,
to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing
by the sword" (Job 33:14-18).

In our text this morning on the life of David from the book of 1 Samuel, Saul encounters God in a dream. These last two scenes in chapter 26 climax David's final confrontation with Saul in the wilderness. In our last study we saw that David changed roles: the hunted became the hunter. Aided by the divine sleep which enveloped the camp of Saul, David and his nephew, Abishai, invaded the slumbering camp and captured the spear and the jug of

water that stood by Saul's head. The two then escaped to a high vantage point, a safe distance from Saul. From that place, David confronted his nemesis.

What follows is what I have called "Echoes of Accusation and Innocence," as the speeches of the two kings reverberate back and forth across the canyon walls. In full view of both armies, the guilt of one king and the innocence of the other are revealed as plain as day. From David's point of view, in this text we learn the skill of confrontation in the kingdom of God and the freedom that results from that: we learn how to disarm our enemies and secure their confession. From Saul's point of view we learn that the relentless God never gives up his pursuit of us until we freely acknowledge our guilt and the innocence of his Messiah. What we do as a result of that confrontation, of course, determines our eternal destiny.

David first speech, uttered from the safety of his vantage point, is addressed, surprisingly, to Abner, Saul's general.

I. Echoes of Accusation (26:14-20)

And David called to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Will you not answer, Abner?" Then Abner answered and said, "Who are you who calls to the king?" So David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, all of you must surely die, because you did not guard your Lord, the Lord's anointed. And now, see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was at his head." (NASB)

Standing at a safe distance, on ground that was higher than Saul's, David condemns Abner for his failure to protect Saul. The genius of David's speech is that he not only indicts Abner for not protecting the king, but by implication he indicts Abishai, who earlier wanted to kill Saul, and also Saul's army (v 8).

David's language takes the form of a legal indictment. It is structured thus:²

(a) First, the person of the accused is introduced

"Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel?"

(b) The charge is given against him

"Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your Lord ...you did not guard your lord..."

(c) The failure is then judged

"This thing that you have done is not good."

(d) Sentence is passed and ratified by an oath

“As the Lord lives, all of you must surely die, because you did not guard your lord, the Lord’s anointed.”

(e) Finally, the condemned man may collect the evidence himself

“And now, see where the king’s spear is, and the jug of water that was at his head.”

This scene, played out in full view of both armies, publicly exposes the impotence of Abner and the superiority of David.

But why does David implicate Abner when Saul is his real target? Here we learn that the best way to reach someone is not to come knocking on the front door in a confrontation; it is much more effective to sneak in the back door in a surprise attack. I once heard Ray Stedman counsel a man who was bothered by the legalism which the man was encountering in the church he attended. Ray asked how he was responding. The man answered that he raised his hand in Sunday School to give another opinion, but he got shot down. Ray smiled and said, “You’re like Don Quixote tilting at the windmills. The way to destroy the windmills of tradition is not to confront them straight on; you’ll just get knocked off your horse. But what you can do is get a group of commandos together, sneak inside, and blow the place up!”

David’s words to Abner subtly but powerfully implicate Saul. The phrase, “you have not guarded,” echoes a previous accusation by Samuel, thus they have a special sting to them: “You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you”; “You have not kept what the Lord commanded you” (1 Sam 13:13-14). “The double ‘you have not watched’ hits a sore spot in his memory: The unguarded king is thus at the same time the already rejected king” (Fokkelman). We can almost hear these words echoing in Saul’s heart. Part of the curriculum of the school of spiritual formation is that when we hear someone being indicted, oftentimes we must face the fact that we too are guilty. I have had experience of this. Someone was being charged with something, but God used the occasion to point out to me that I too was guilty of the same failure.

Saul, awakening from his deep sleep, now addresses David.

II. Echoes of Innocence (26:17-20)

Then Saul recognized David’s voice and said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And David said, “It is my voice, my lord the king.” He also said, “Why then is my lord pursuing his servant? For what have I done? Or what evil is in my hand? Now therefore, please let my lord the king listen to the words of his servant. If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering; but if it is men, cursed are they before the Lord for they have driven me out today that I should have no attachment with the inheritance of the Lord, saying, ‘Go, serve other gods.’ Now then, do not let my blood fall to the ground away from the presence of the Lord; for the king of Israel has come out to search for a single flea, just as one hunts a partridge in the mountains.”

The king is startled from his sleep. Half awake, with his

guard down, he begins by expressing his hidden affections for David. He says, “Is this your voice, my son?” This mode of address is a clue that Saul will acknowledge David as the rightful heir to his throne.

Now that he has Saul’s full attention, David presses the issue, probing the king with questions regarding his innocence. He asks, “Why are you pursuing me? What have I done? What evil...?” These words, which were used by Jonathan in 20:32, are painful echoes of Saul’s past. Back then, Saul hurled his spear; this time, however, David has the spear. Now, using language reminiscent of Abigail’s speech, David begs for a hearing from the king so that he can plead his case. He presents Saul with two possibilities for why he was pursuing him. The source must be either God or men. David says, “If it is the Lord, then let’s put an end to it, since he will accept an offering. If it is men, then they are under the curse of God, since they have driven me out of the land so I am unable to worship God” (see Deut 13:2).

Notice again the power of indirect speech. The motivating force behind Saul’s pursuit is neither God nor man; it is Saul himself. By being indirect, David gives Saul an out. Thus he allows him the freedom of self discovery, and elicits an uncoerced confession for his pains. This is the best way to handle someone who is defensive. Give them an out. By doing so you will give them room to discover who they really are.

David concludes by pleading with Saul to stop pursuing him. He claims that he is as insignificant as a single flea or a small partridge. The analogy has more to it than meets the eye, however. “Partridge” comes from the same Hebrew consonant as the verb, “to call.” This is an interesting play on words by the man who “stood on the top of the hill and called” (26:14). I discovered this interesting insight in an excellent book that I read during my recent trip to Israel:

The flea is notorious for its huge leaps, jumping freely between animal and human, annoying both and exceedingly difficult to catch. David must have tried, probably without much success, to kill the fleas that annoyed him in the caves where he hid...The mountain partridge is a desert bird...familiar to all hikers in the Judean Desert, especially in the area of Ein Gedi. Its coloring blends with the ground and the stones, so it is extremely difficult to spot unless it moves and sounds its unusual calls. When it feels danger approaching, it immediately takes flight very close to ground level and disappears among the rocks or behind a hummock...The picture David paints for Saul contains a double message: while emphasizing what a lightweight he is in comparison to the king of Israel, David increases Saul’s frustration by comparing his futile pursuit to trying to catch the flea or the mountain partridge, both of which are champions at quick, evasive action and skipping from one hiding place to another.³

With these echoes of accusations and innocence reverberating in his soul, Saul finally relents and makes a full confession of his sin.

III. True Confessions (26:21-25)

(a) Saul gives a confession to David (26:21)

Then Saul said, “I have sinned. Return, my son David,

for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error."

Fokkelman points out that this is the seventh and last time that Saul's sinning is the theme (15:23,23,30; 19:4,5). He admits playing the fool (finally agreeing with Samuel's accusation in 13:13), and promises to leave David alone, because David had treated his life as precious. But his repentance is like that of a child who is caught doing something wrong and blurts, "I'll never do it again!" Interestingly, Saul says, "Return, my son David." Notice that the text ends in verse 25 with the words, "Saul returned to his place." "Return" also means "repent" in Hebrew—something which Saul, ironically, never does. He admits that he has sinned, but he asks David to change his behavior. Saul said exactly the same thing to Samuel in 15:24-25: "I sinned...please...return with me." The text ends with the words, "Saul returned to his place." He has confessed, but he has not repented.

David's response follows.

(b) David invokes the LORD to do right (26:22-24)

And David answered and said, "Behold the spear of the king! Now let one of the young men come over and take it. And the Lord will repay (lit: return) each man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered you into my hand today, but I refused to stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. Now behold, as your life was highly valued in my sight this day, so may my life be highly valued in the sight of the Lord, and may He deliver me from all distress."

Fokkelman comments: "David answers Saul's 'behold' with 'behold the king's spear', meaning, 'No, I'm not returning.' There is no mention of the water jug, perhaps signifying he no longer wishes to refresh Saul by in any way feeding his illusions concerning a new cooperation." The return of Saul's spear signifies that his life is drawing to a close. (We are reminded of the opening scene with David and Saul, when David returns the king's armor, which he deemed unnecessary in the battle of faith.)

Then David confesses (four times in two verses) his trust in the Lord to return justice in this matter. Consciously, he omits Saul's name from the equation. The result is that David is set free in his spirit. He does not change his behavior in order to be vindicated; the Lord will vindicate him. There is tremendous emotional detachment between the two kings as they go their separate ways.

Saul's last words to David take the form of a blessing.

(c) Saul gives a blessing to David (26:25)

Then Saul said to David, "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail." So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

Here, in Saul's final words to David, he willingly gives him the crown. In the strongest Hebrew possible, David secures the blessing and the promise from the reigning king. What a holy moment for David. He had never sought to take the crown, yet now, in full view of both armies, he is crowned king by the rejected Saul.

III. Reflections on Echoes of Accusation and

Innocence

There is a lesson to be learned from each of three major players in the text, David, Saul, and God.

(a) David: Freedom of Confrontation

At last David has grown to the point where he is able to confront his enemy. Remember that David and his nephew had gone into the camp by night. The lesson is obvious: when we have to confront someone, we don't need an army; just ourselves and one other will do. If we barrage our enemies with an army of protest, we will never get close enough to them to secure a confession. We must wait until they are vulnerable, and then approach them alone, or in company with one other—and, of course, the Lord.

Secondly, notice that it is an act of grace, not angry demands, that prepares the ground for the confrontation to come. David discovered Saul asleep and vulnerable, yet he protected him from harm and refreshed him with life (symbolized by the jug of water). This is what loving our enemies is all about. In the New Testament, Peter commends this kind of response as the model for winning people to Christ. When you have done right and yet are wronged by someone, you have grounds to repay evil with good. The result is that you will receive a hearing to share the gospel.

Thirdly, confrontation has a freeing effect on us spiritually. This confrontation frees David to distance himself emotionally from Saul. He refuses to play on Saul's terms (and he will not play in his court), and refuses to believe Saul's promises of a change of heart. At the end, David doesn't even use Saul's name for his vindication. God, not Saul, would vindicate him. That is freedom indeed. Once when I was counseling a young couple to prepare them for marriage, the woman told me she felt repulsed by the thought of her father walking her down the aisle. She sensed that she might have been abused by him. She felt she had to confront him about this, so she and her fiancé spoke to him about it. The father did not admit he had abused her, but neither did he deny it. In the confrontation, however, she was able to distance herself emotionally from him and free herself. The thing that was beneficial to her was not her father's response; it was the Lord who would heal her. This is the freedom that confrontation brings.

(b) Saul: Tragedy of Confession without Repentance

I find it intriguing that although David gets a full and detailed confession from Saul, he still does not trust him. Saul is proof positive that confession in and of itself does not constitute repentance. In earlier days Saul was moved to tears by David's skillful playing of the harp, but in the very next scene he threw a spear at David. Here in their final meeting, Saul makes a full, orthodox confession. He makes full disclosure of his sin, followed with an admission of who the true Messianic king is, yet at the end he "returns to his place." He had not truly repented. Perhaps this is why David would later write these words in Psalm 4:

Tremble and stop sinning,
Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.
Offer sacrifices of righteousness,
And trust in the Lord (Ps 4:4-5).

David was rebuking the Israelites for their idolatry, but

rather than have them come forward and make an emotional confession, he made them go home and meditate in their beds. Having done business with God in the stillness of the night, they then could come forward in the morning and offer sacrifices.

At our newcomers class a couple of weeks ago, a man asked why we don't have altar calls in our church. I told him that I thought there was nothing wrong with altar calls, but in the New Testament it was not altar calls but baptism that was the true expression of repentance and initiation into the body of Christ. In the NT, if someone was serious about the claims of Christ, then the word to him was, "Repent, and be baptized." An emotional response and confession in themselves were not enough. First, one had to count the cost. Later, at baptism, one could make confession for sins. I have seen many people make confession only to return to their former ways, because they had never truly repented.

Thus from Saul we learn about true confession and repentance. We also learn that no one is condemned to hell except on the conviction of their own words. Saul's own confession sent him to the grave, abandoned by God.

(c) God: The Hound of Heaven

And what do we learn of God in this text? We learn that he is the "hound of heaven." God is relentless in his pursuit of us. Though Saul is adamant in his opposition of God's rule, God keeps pursuing him. Saul kept his guard up by day but, when night inevitably came, God presented to him his Messiah. While Saul slept, the Messianic king approached him on his bed and stared into his face. But he came bringing words of grace, not judgment.

Francis Thompson, in his poem, *The Hound of Heaven*, describes God's relentless pursuit in these words:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine way
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;

And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperterbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—

God wants us to behold the innocence of his Messiah, and to admit our guilt. But he knows how defensive we are. That is why he comes to us gently and indirectly. He reveals the misdeeds of others, but then our souls are forced to agree that we too are guilty. As we awaken from our dream-like state, we find Christ, in all his love, beckoning us, "Arise, clasp my hand, and come!"

This is what happened to one of my closest friends. Some years ago he awoke from sleep at 1:32 in the morning. He had a sense that God was there in the room with him, beckoning him to come. He awoke to such love that his resistance melted away and he gave his soul to Christ

*What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul.
What wondrous love is this, O my soul.
What wondrous love is this,
That caused the Lord of bliss
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.*

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1. "sound sleep": this is the deep sleep that God used on Adam to remove his rib (Gen 2:21). It is often used by God prior to deep revelation (Gen 15:12; Job 4:13; Dan. 8:18). For a complete listing of this term as a noun, see Gen 2:21; 15:12; Isa 29:10; Job 4:13; 33:15; Prov 19:15; as a verb, see Judg 4:21; Jonah 1:5, 6; Ps 76:7; Prov 10:5; Dan 8:18; 10:9.

2. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1986), 542.

3. Nogah Hareuveni, *Desert and Shepherd in Our Biblical Heritage* (Israel: Neot Kedumim, 1992), 148.



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1 Samuel 27:1-12

21st Message

Brian Morgan

January 1, 1995

SELLING OUT UNDER STRESS

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

The Christmas holidays can be a stressful time, a season when we keenly feel the tension between the way things ought to be and the way they really are. Rather than having a soothing effect upon us, the holidays often exacerbate the pain of old, unrealized longings. Today, as we embark on a New Year, many among us are more in touch with the deepest yearnings of their hearts than at any other time.

King David of Israel experienced many of the same tensions and longings during his wilderness wanderings. In the wilderness he realized he had yearnings that had never been satisfied. As a young boy, he had been consecrated king of Israel by the prophet Samuel. Life seemed to hold limitless possibilities for the boy king. In his first test, he had a glorious victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath. But shortly thereafter, David became a victim of Saul's jealousy, and he had to flee to the wilderness. Even there David could find no rest from the pursuing Saul and his armies. He found no place to call his own, no safe haven where he could settle down and live a normal life.

David's longing for a permanent home is our theme today as we take up our studies once more in the life of the Old Testament king. The key word in chapter 27, where we resume our studies, is the verb *yashab* (meaning, to sit, live, dwell, with the idea of settling down). This word is used six times in the chapter (vv. 3,5,5,7,8,11). David is driven by his desire for a permanent place to dwell. As long as Saul was king, David knew he had no hope of finding such in Israel, so he sets about finding a way to escape once and for all his stressful wilderness existence: He goes over to the Philistines to make his home among them. He decides to look to the world to meet his deep longings for a place of his own.

As we begin the New Year, I know that some of you are facing this very temptation. You feel that nothing could be worse than the prospect of another year of the same old cycle. You have lived in stressful circumstances so long you have grown weary. You are ready to go over to the other side for a while. Our text today serves as a warning when we are so tempted.

First Samuel 27, verses 1-4, sets the stage for our study.

I. Seeking a Permanent Escape (27:1-4)

Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape [*escaping I will escape*] into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand." So David arose and crossed over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow. Now it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he no longer searched for him. (1 Sam 27:1-4 NASB)

(a) Tensions of a Fugitive

What a remarkable departure this is for David from the previous chapter! He had just scored a notable victory with Saul, when the king had confessed his wrongdoing, before two armies, his own and David's. But now, just a short time later, the praise that had been heaped upon him is dampened by his own depression; the bright rays of hope are darkened by despair.

We can sense David's growing despondency in some of his songs that are assigned to this period, prior to his departure to Gath. His stress was long and drawn out, his soul downcast over the delay of the coming promised salvation. His plaintive questions, "Why?" and "How long?" are the prevalent themes of Psalms 10, 13 and 22:

Why, O LORD, you do you stand far off?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps 10:1 NIV)

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? (Ps 13:1)

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,

so far from the words of my groaning? (Ps 22:1)

Yet, in the midst of David's depression, God continued to deliver his servant in amazing ways. The voice of the Lord reminding David of the sure promises of God came through Samuel, Jonathan, Abigail, and finally Saul himself. Further, the prophet Gad had directed David to take his stand in Judah and set up his standard there (22:5). But David has had enough. Verse 1 reveals the impact of the constant stress on his soul.

(b) Too Much, Too Long!

Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape [*escaping I will escape*] into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand." (27:1)

Notice that David no longer speaks to God: "Then David said to himself." How things have changed! David now speaks not to God, but to himself (literally, "to his heart"). There is no mention of prayer in this chapter. David has had enough. He senses that God is far off. The weight of responsibility is his now, he senses, not God's. He feels abandoned. Have you ever felt that way? If you have, remember that this is part of the curriculum for the wilderness.

And notice that although God had been faithful to deliver David again and again Saul's perspective remained the same. No matter what David did, or what Saul himself agreed to do, the king was still determined to murder David. As long as Saul remained in the land, David was working from a position of weakness, so he had no way of bringing an end to Saul's pursuit.

This is what leads David to seek a permanent, once-and-for-all end to his stress. The fugitive resolves, "Escaping, I will escape." To-

day, we would say, "I'm out of here!" The Hebrew may suggest a note of haste, as well as the intensification of the verbal idea. The verb is reflexive; David feels he must act for himself.

(c) Escape to Gath

So David and his 500 men forsake Israel and set out for Gath. There they will offer their services to Achish, the king of Gath, Israel's arch enemy. "The narrator reveals the seriousness of the changeover by giving it considerable amount of space," and the fact that they take their families in tow.¹ Earlier, David had learned that Achish could be taken in. This is the same king before whom David had acted the part of the madman. So David sells himself and his men as professional mercenaries to Achish. No doubt Achish made a promise to protect David from Saul's armies. So David and his entourage move into the royal city. David's ploy is successful. Saul gives up his pursuit, and David gets the relief he so desperately sought.

Believers often adopt the same kind of solutions to their problems. Weary of walking by faith in an insecure wilderness, they make unholy alliances with the world in an effort to acquire permanent relief. Some angrily resign their jobs to seek better situations. Some unmarried believers, tiring of loneliness, marry unbelievers, hoping for relief. Others tire of marriage and make unholy alliances with the courts, which are all too eager to accommodate their plans for divorce.

There is a lesson for us here: we should never make life-changing decisions when we are depressed.

In the next scene, David makes a request of Achish.

II. Settling Down in a Permanent Home (27:5-7)

Then David said to Achish, "If now I have found favor in your sight, let them give me a place in one of the cities in the country, that I may live there; for why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" So Achish gave him Ziklag that day; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. And the number of days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months. (27:5-7)

(a) A "Humble" Move

Although Gath apparently is a safe haven, David is still somewhat uneasy. All of his movements must be made in full view of the royal court, thus his activities are a bit restricted. So he makes a request of the king to live in another city, a place more in keeping with his station in life, in more "modest" surroundings, out in the fields. Achish immediately offers him Ziklag. But Achish has an ulterior motive. He "intended to use David and his troops to protect the southeastern flank of Philistia facing the tribal elements occupying the Negeb."²

But if Achish is pleased with this arrangement, David is even more so. He too has his reasons for accepting Achish's offer. David Roper comments:

Ziklag lay close to, the southern border of the land of Israel, quite well situated for David's purposes. It had the advantage of being away from Saul's territory and isolated from Gath and other centers of Philistine population. Originally it was an Israelite city that had fallen into Philistine hands. It was one of the Canaanite cities at first given to the tribe of Judah (Josh 15:31), and then handed over to Simeon (Josh 19:5; 1 Chr 4:30). The Philistines had seized it, but apparently never inhabited it. It was an abandoned town. David and his people moved in bag and baggage.

(b) Settling Down at Last

At last, David and his men can settle down. They have their little corner of the world, far from the wilderness of fear, fright and flight to which they were accustomed. Peace was at hand. In Ziklag they could plough the fields and sow their crops. Here at last they could look forward to a hot meal. Here their children could play in safety. Here they could reflect with their wives, without fear of attack from Saul.

But paradoxically, in this safe haven David faces an even greater quandary than he ever confronted in the wilderness. As the newly acquired mercenary of Achish, Israel's enemy, would he turn on his brothers and jeopardize his destiny as Israel's future king, and with it the divine order of history? We find the answer in the next section.

III. Living on the Razor's Edge (27:8-12)

Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites and the Girzites and the Amalekites; for they were the inhabitants of the land from ancient times, as you come to Shur even as far as the land of Egypt. And David attacked the land and did not leave a man or a woman alive, and he took away the sheep, the cattle, the donkeys, the camels, and the clothing. Then he returned and came to Achish. Now Achish said, "Where have you made a raid today?" And David said, "Against the Negev of Judah and against the Negev of the Jerahmeelites and against the Negev of the Kenites." And David did not leave a man or a woman alive, to bring to Gath, saying, "Lest they should tell about us, saying, 'So has David done and so has been his practice all the time he has lived in the country of the Philistines.'" So Achish believed David, saying, "He has surely made himself odious among his people Israel; therefore he will become my servant forever." (27:8-12)

The book of 1 Chronicles says that men from all the tribes of Israel began to defect from Saul and emigrate to Ziklag and identify with David's cause. "All of them were brave warriors," the Chronicler says, "and they were commanders in his army. Day after day men came to help David, until he had a great army, like the army of God" (1 Chr 12:21-22).

David Roper's studies tell us what this great army accomplished:

From his base in Philistia David began to make sorties into the southern desert against some of Judah's ancient enemies: the Geshurites, Girzites and the Amalekites. These were aboriginal tribes who retained control of the land south of Judah, between Judah and Egypt and who were constantly harassing the Israeli settlers in the south. David plundered and looted village after village. But to keep the situation hidden from his Achish 'hosts' he had to adopt to policy of extermination, killing men, women and children, lest they inform on him. As the king's liege, David was required to give an account of his battles and share some of the booty from his victories. Achish would ask, 'Where did you go raiding today?' David would say, 'I've been raiding the Israelites and their allies, the Jerahmeelites (1 Chron. 2:9) and the Kenites (1 Sam. 30:29).' David had entered a course that demanded perpetual deceit. He had to keep lying to Achish, a deception utterly unworthy of his character. And yet, Achish is so deceived he thinks 'He has become odious to his people (literally, 'he has made himself stink'), now he will be my servant forever.'

The irony is that Achish thinks he has David as a loyal servant in *perpetuity* (Heb. *'olam*), when in fact, David has been uproot-

ing allies of the Philistines, who had been dwellers of the land from *perpetuity* (Heb. *olam*). Israelites in years to come would be stunned by David's success. Who was this David, they would ask, who could leap from the frying pan into the fire and not be scorched? Who was this man who gambled for high stakes in a foreign land and walked away a winner? Who was this man who was so confident that he manipulated Philistine cover to the advantage of Judah? This David was not just marvelously inventive, they would say, he seemed to be blessed with divine good fortune.

And how should we today regard this chapter in David's spiritual journey? Like any good accountant, at the end of the year we have to look at both sides of the ledger, the up side and the down side. Let's see how things add up.

IV. The Bottom Line of Selling Out

(a) Apparent Signs of Success

1. Saul gives up his pursuit

It is obvious that David's plan met with a large measure of success. He made an alliance with the world in order to live less stressfully, with apparent success. Saul abandoned his pursuit, and David at last had his little corner of the world where no one could harm him.

2. Achish is outwitted

David was the obvious winner in the battle of wits with Achish. Fokkelman comments: "The text...is framed by soliloquies" given over to the speeches of David and Achish. As they relate and the speeches overlap, it is clear "that the two men are by no means fighting for the same thing; each is doing his utmost to exploit the other for his own purposes." Notice that it is David takes the initiative in the speeches, and in his campaigns, and Achish only reacts to what he hears, and it is always a one-sided report.³ Clearly, Achish was outmanned and outmatched. David comes across as the clear victor over the dull-minded Achish.

3. David's campaigns are successful

David's sorties were incredibly successful. He accomplished what Saul was unable to do, that is, completely exterminate the Amalekites. Unlike Saul, who, at the cost of his own crown, left Agag alive, David took no prisoners. Notice, too, the loyalty of David's men to their leader. Not one of the more than 500 men leaked information to Achish about their exploits under David.

4. David's army grows

David's reputation and personal charisma paid huge dividends during this period. Ziklag became the gathering place for new recruits. Choice men, drawn by David's charisma and unparalleled success, defected from Benjamin (Saul's own tribe) and Manasseh. The Chronicler labels them as top leadership ("captains of thousands") and highly skilled (ambidextrous) (1 Chr 12:1-2, 20).

David also attracted defectors from Gath during this period. The narrator carefully notes that David came to Gath with 600 troops, exactly the same number as the army that would subsequently have mercenaries from Gath, under the leadership of Ittai, in the service of David. "Six hundred men who had come with him from Gath" (2 Sam 15:18). It is interesting to note that Ittai remained loyal to David through thick and thin, although David had no intention of remaining loyal to his master, Achish.

5. A permanent crown possession

Under the guise of humility, David requested permission to leave the royal court for a more "modest" city, out in the fields. Ziklag, the possession he was given, would become a permanent royal city of the kings of Judah long after the Philistines ceased to be a political factor.

If you were a stock holder in this modest kingdom you would have very little to complain about over this year-end report. The company realized more than 100% growth. It boasted rapid new developments, a corporate take over, employee advancement, and, most important of all, all of its competitors had been forced out of the market. But, there is a down side to this story of success.

(b) The Down Side of Success

1. A cost to David's soul

While we marvel at David's brazen outward speech and his bold-faced lies to Achish, we note that inwardly he was silent. This was a barren time for David's soul. He wrote no poetry and sang no songs in Ziklag. Israel's sweet singer had nothing to sing about. This is the price of deception. "David's soul could no longer sing praises to God because he had forsaken the shelter of the Lord's wings for the walls of a man-made city" (David Roper). This is what happens when Christians sell out to the world. They abandon the protection of God's loving care for the security of a man-made city. Though they may appear to have made a successful move, their spiritual silence belies the very circumstances they offer as proof of success.

2. A cost to David's community

David's past reputation as a man of faith still energized people, and a new community made up of Jews and Gentiles gathered around him in Ziklag. David was man of prayer, possessed of a gift of Spirit—a combination that led to a life of unparalleled success against impossible odds. That is why people forsook all to follow him, giving him their unreserved loyalty. But they were coming because of his former reputation, not because of his present choices. In the same way, we too may be living on a reputation which we earned in the past, not on what we are doing today. Let us beware of this temptation.

Instead of using these people as instruments of life, David led them down the road of deception and death. And no one in the crowd had the courage to question his ethics. Thus the future king began to abuse the loyalties of his servants, sowing seeds which would reap a bitter harvest. Years later, David used the loyalty of his servants to procure Bathsheba to satisfy his own lusts. Later still he perverted his office as commander-in-chief to murder his close friend, Uriah the Hittite, in an effort to cover up his own adultery. Thus the loyalty of David's community was betrayed.

3. A Cost to Israel's future

By seeking refuge outside of Judah, David unwittingly introduced his troops to the subtle seduction of the Philistines. Philistia was not a crude, barbaric culture. These people came from the Aegean, carrying with them the riches of Greek culture. They were an attractive people, gifted farmers, skilled artisans in pottery, superb tradesmen and advanced city planners. Yet their lives were permeated by idolatry. Some 600 years later, the Scriptures state because of intermarriage, the children of Israel spoke "the language of Ashdod" (Neh 13:24). They had been introduced into a pagan culture, and David, in part at least, was the trendsetter for the declension.

David paid a high price for his little corner of world peace. He forsook his worship, abused the loyalty of his friends, led them into deceit and death, and damaged Israel's future.

When you add it all up...

What good is success when your soul no longer sings?

What good are promotions when the cause has turned sour?

What good is a present peace when the price is a lost future and your grandchildren are embracing idols?

Trusting God is difficult. If we grow weary under the stress and tensions of this life, the world is eager to offer a solution for what seems like a small fee. The courts are more than eager to end your marriage. Alcohol may dull your pain for a while. You may find temporary relief, but at what a price?

This New Year's Day, I would ask you to make but one commitment. If you are under stress and if you feel abandoned by God, do not sell out to the world. Wait on God, and allow him to deliver you as he has done in the past. Then you can sing with David the words that he penned in better times:

**To Thee, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in Thee I trust,
Do not let me be ashamed.**

**Make me know Thy ways, O LORD;
Teach me Thy paths.
Guide me in Thy truth and teach me,
For Thou art the God of my salvation;
For Thee I wait all the day. (Ps 25:1-2a, 4-5)**

Amen.

1. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 560.

2. Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed., rev. by Anson F. Rainey and Ze'ev Safrai (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 73.

3. Fokkelman, *Crossing Fates*, 558.

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Catalog No. 988

1 Samuel 28:1-25

22nd Message

Brian Morgan

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THE DEAD-END OF DENIAL

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

One day, a prophet said to the king of Israel, ‘Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord?’ The king replied, ‘I did obey.’ This is a familiar response to a challenge, isn’t it? We call this denial. Denial is a self-defense mechanism whereby we refuse to face reality, admit sin, and take full responsibility for our actions. Denial is as old as the fall of man. We deny that sin exists in our homes, or that we have problems in our personal relationships. Our response to challenge is to turn our backs and attempt to function as if nothing were wrong.

Where does a life of denial eventually lead? The prophet countered the king’s defensive response by saying, ‘Disobedience is as the sin of divination.’ Denial, refusing to acknowledge our sin and take appropriate action, has the effect of splitting the personality and creating a dark underside to life. Though for a time the person in denial may appear to be functioning quite well, denial eventually gains the upper hand and drags him or her into a den of demons.

Denial is a dead-end road. This is what the life of King Saul of Israel teaches us.

Today we come one of the classic scenes in Scripture, Saul’s encounter with the witch at En-dor. *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* has this to say about the text to which we now come in our study of the life of David: ‘With its nocturnal setting, its elements of disguise and recognition, gods ascending out of the earth, Samuel in his mantle, and Saul’s abrupt collapse, the episode forms a vivid and arresting narrative.’ The imagery is so powerful it found its way into Chaucer’s *Friar’s Tale*, Lord Byron’s ‘Saul,’ in *Hebrew Melodies*, Browning’s ‘Mr. Sludge, ‘the Medium,’ Kipling’s powerful ‘En-Dor,’ Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and Robert Frost’s *Masque of Reason*. The image ‘of the witch and the ghost obsessed the young Charles Lamb (‘Witches, and Other Night Fears,’ *Essays of Elia*.)’ ‘Lord Byron called it ‘the finest and most finished witch-scene that ever was written or conceived...It beats all the ghost scenes I ever read!’¹

If we are struggling with denial today, I pray that this text will rouse us out of our refusal to face reality.

Our text, chapter 28 of 1 Samuel, opens on the eve of the Philistine campaign against Israel. In the opening verses the narrator contrasts the demeanors of Saul and David.

I. Contrasting Demeanors on the Eve of Battle (28:1-5)

Now it came about in those days that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, ‘Know assuredly that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men.’ And David said to Achish, ‘Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.’ So Achish said to David, ‘Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.’

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him and buried him in Ramah his own city. And Saul had removed from the

land those who were mediums and spiritists. So the Philistines gathered together and came and camped in Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel together and they camped in Gilboa. When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly. (1 Sam 28:1-5 NASB)

Both kings are facing danger, David in the midst of the camp, Saul outside the camp. Yet David is composed, while Saul is terror-stricken. Adding to the tension, the narrator portrays David, Achish’s bodyguard, as seemingly unable to maneuver, because he must operate under the gaze of the Philistine king. Yet, David seems remarkably self-assured and in control. Saul, in stark contrast, is painted in absolute loneliness. Overcome by his fear, the king of Israel is abandoned by all. ‘Samuel is dead, but his power lingers demonically over Saul.’² Saul has further isolated himself by this one act of obedience (which he later disregards) of ‘removing’ (a key word in the chapter; see 28:15-6) all mediums and spiritists from the land. There are no spiritual counselors, either genuine or illegitimate, left to advise Saul.

This is what denial does to us: it isolates us from reality, from family and friends, even from God himself, until at last we are left utterly alone and abandoned to our fears.

Unable to cope with his loneliness, Saul seeks help from the Lord, but to no avail. He must look elsewhere for counsel.

II. Saul’s Encounter with the Witch of En-dor (28:6-14)

When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.’ And his servants said to him, ‘Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor.’

Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night and he said, ‘Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall name to you.’ But the woman said to him, ‘Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who are mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you then laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?’ And Saul vowed to her by the LORD, saying, ‘As the LORD lives, there shall no punishment come upon you for this thing.’ Then the woman said, ‘Whom shall I bring up for you?’ And he said, ‘Bring up Samuel for me.’ When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, ‘Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul.’ And the king said to her, ‘Do not be afraid; but what do you see?’ And the woman said to Saul, ‘I see a divine being coming up out of the earth.’ And he said to her, ‘What is his form?’ And she said, ‘An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe.’ And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did homage. (28:6-14)

Here, Saul tries to inquire of the Lord through the normal channels, but God will not speak to him. Just as Samuel “did not see Saul again” (15:34) after the day of his disobedience, Saul is alone and abandoned. “A macabre silence surrounds him on all sides.”³ Silence and abandonment are the results of Saul’s denial.

Yet Saul cannot remain alone in his fear. He is driven to seek consolation by any means possible. Brueggemann says he is

like a person with a diagnosed terminal illness. First that person may try all the clinics and experts; when nothing avails, the fearful one may turn to any possible treatment, any available quack. When approved medicine will not heal, try any faint hope. So Saul, when approved religion will not reassure, goes elsewhere: against the religion of Samuel, against the prohibition in Deuteronomy, against his own royal edict. His decision to seek help from a medium is a measure of his moral exhaustion, his despairing faith, his failed life.⁴

So Saul travels north to En-dor, under the shadow of Mt Tabor, just to the south of the sea of Galilee. “According to Ps. 83:9-10, the town was near the river Kishon and thus a part of the battlefield of the Jezreel Valley; it was the scene of the defeat of Jabin and Sisera by Barak.”⁵ It will be Saul’s encampment site before his battle with the Philistines. After the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, Israel formed a settlement there and called it Ein-dor.

This is a significant place. “En-dor” means, “well of generation.” How interesting. Saul seeks counsel from the wellspring of Israel’s past generation, but he does so through illegitimate means.

Saul arrives by nightfall, in disguise. The circumstances are dark and seedy, utterly inappropriate for the king. But this is precisely the point. Saul, in fact, is no king. He had abandoned his identity years earlier. When he makes his request of the woman, she confronts him with his own royal edict. What he had once prohibited, he now authorizes. Brueggemann calls this “shamed incongruity.”⁶ Adding to his shame, Saul elicits the name of the Lord in a vow, promising the woman that the royal edict (and the Lord’s ethics) will be set aside in her case.

Saul’s vow is the center-line of the text, the point at which the story turns. This vow is the final plunge of his depravity. He has already broken several vows, promises that he made to David, Jonathan, and Michal. How perverse! The only vow Saul keeps is the one he makes to the witch at En-dor! Emboldened by Saul’s vow, the woman consents to work for her unknown guest. But, to her amazement, it is not a spirit or ghost, but Samuel who appears. The seance is shattered, and the identity of the king revealed.

Who is this God, the Lord, who can use even the occasion of a seedy witch’s seance to insert his prophet and speak his word once again? The text underlines the fact that the Lord of Hosts fits no man’s categories. He will reveal himself wherever and whenever he wishes. Brueggemann says, “Even in death, Samuel dominates the narrative. Samuel is and continues to be the most awesome force and figure in Israel since Moses.”⁷

This brings us to Samuel’s last words to the rejected Saul.

III. Last Words from Samuel (28:15-20)

Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” And Saul answered, “I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and answers me no more, either through proph-

ets or by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I should do.” And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has departed from you and has become your adversary? And the LORD has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. As you did not obey [*listen to*] the LORD and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the LORD has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!”

Then Saul immediately fell full length upon the ground and was very afraid because of the words of Samuel; also there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day and all night. (28:15-20)

Perhaps Saul hoped to hear just one word of comfort from the departed Samuel. Could it be he thought the prophet would be mellowed by death? But death has not mellowed Samuel. He is exactly as Saul remembered him in life: cantankerous, unaccommodating to sin, and uncompromising to God’s word. Samuel will not address any issue until the ultimate cause of disobedience is dealt with. How ironic, to think that in chapter 15, Samuel said to Saul, “Rebellion is as the sin of divination” (15:23). Now, Saul’s disobedience is, in fact, divination. All sin leads to the same place—to demons, witches, and finally, hell itself.

Samuel is surprised that Saul would “ask” him. (The verb “to ask,” *sh’al*, actually is Saul’s name). Reminding Saul of the word of the Lord, the prophet replies, “Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has departed from you and has become your adversary?” The word “LORD,” which is used seven times in a mere six verses, is the key word of the text. The point is, there is no division between God’s prophet and God. If you have disobeyed the word of God, no prophet can console you. This is what Paul said to the Thessalonians concerning their sexual immorality: that he who rejects this is rejecting not my word but the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 4:8). Thus Samuel, from whom Saul sought a word of comfort, can bring but a word of judgment and condemnation. “Samuel’s speech is an awesome performance. It is final and absolute. It allows no appeal, no protest, no argument, no alternative...Saul’s prospects at the hand of Samuel have not changed as much as a syllable since chapter 15. Everything in Saul’s career has, been enacted under the aegis of this irrevocable decision.”⁸ The only new word of revelation is the name of the one who would replace Saul—David—and the date of Saul’s funeral and that of his sons, in Israel, the following day. The narrative has been building to this point, the divine announcement of the new king’s name, by Israel’s first prophet.

On hearing the divine judgment, and the immediacy of his own death at the hands of the Philistines, Saul falls prostrate. He is terrified and morally exhausted. “Twice Byron invokes the ghost of Samuel with the wish that modern monarchs could be as terrified as Saul was.”⁹

The concluding verses describe Saul’s last supper, shared with the witch at En-dor.

IV. Saul’s Last Supper (28:21-25)

And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was terrified, and said to him, “Behold, your maidservant has obeyed [*listened to*]

you, and I have taken my life in my hand, and have listened to your words which you spoke to me. So now also, please listen to the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you that you may eat and have strength when you go on your way!" But he refused and said, "I will not eat." However, his servants together with the woman urged him, and he listened to them. So he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. And the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly slaughtered it; and she took flour, kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it. And she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they arose and went away that night. (28:21-25)

Following Samuel's speech of condemnation, the prostrate Saul, in fear and terrified exhaustion, cannot even eat. The woman tries to comfort him with the promise of a meal. She pleads with him to "listen" to her as she had "listened" to him. How ironic: listening to the voice of the people over the word of God was what had landed Saul in trouble in the first place (15:24). As might be expected, given Saul's pitiful record, the woman prevails, overruling his weak resolve. The witch prepares his final meal, "fit for a king," and the tragic scene ends with the two having an intimate "fellowship" meal, Saul's last supper, together.

What a depressing, terrible scene! Saul, sinking under the weight of the pronouncement of his own death, being served a meal by a witch, who hoped to comfort him on his last night on earth. Saul eats, keeping his vow to the medium. The meal is eaten, yes, but hardly tasted. Finally, he departs into the darkness of the night.

What can we learn from this sorry tale of disobedience and debauchery? I will draw four conclusions that result from a life of denial.

V. Reflections: Denial's Dead-end

1. We Are Abandoned to Our Fears

When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him.

The word "inquire" (*sha'al*)¹⁰ has the same Hebrew consonants as Saul's name. It evokes the memory of the birth of Samuel, when the word was first used by Hannah in her request to God for a child (1:17). Like Saul, Hannah was in distress, so much so that she refused to eat at the time of the feast. In her distress she *inquired* of the Lord (1:17) and when the Lord answered her *request*, Hannah used the same verb to *dedicate* Samuel back to the Lord as her gift to him (1:27-28). Ironically, when we hear this verb repeated three times in 1:27-28, we are actually hearing Saul's name (*sha'al, sha'al, sha'al*) echoing in the text. Saul would be the king the people *asked* for, yet because of his disobedience, God would no longer listen to him when he *inquired* of the Lord. At the end of his life, this king, whose very name means "*asked*," would have no access to God.

The point of the story is that it is prayer that determines the course of history. And the elements that open the door to prayer are humility and obedience, not names or titles. If you are shut out from the Lord's presence, do not blame your heritage or your dysfunctional family; it is the result of your own choices.

But, amazingly, God still pursues sinners! Deny him, and still he will pursue you. But Saul responds to God's pursuit of him, not by repentance, but by initiating a seance to conjure up Samuel one

more time, in the vain hope that the crusty old prophet would have good news for him.

2. The Relentless Pursuit of God

"What do you see?"

"I see a divine being coming up out of the earth."

Rabbis and Christian theologians have wrestled over the controversy raised in this chapter concerning the nature of the apparition. Was it really Samuel's spirit which appeared? If it was, how could it have been raised by a witch? Augustine wondered that if it was a demon in disguise, how could it have delivered a true prophecy? This story has given rise to all kinds of speculative questions on the nature of seducing spirits and summoning ghosts.

A careful reading of the text, however, leads us in an entirely different direction. The woman does not summon a ghost; rather, she is brought face to face with Samuel, who in death still speaks. The event surprises her (as it does us), but it demonstrates that God is able to speak through his prophet even in the darkest of all situations—a seedy, grotesque seance. How gracious of God, to faithfully keep reaching out to Saul with his beckoning voice, even in the hall of demons! The Lord of hosts continually invades history to shatter our normal categories of thinking and maintain the faithfulness of his prophetic word.

Many among us can testify to this. I had a friend in the 1960's who was an intern with me at PBC. He had been heavily involved in Eastern mysticism before his conversion. Actually, on the very occasion when he was being initiated into a cult, a dramatic thing happened. As the incense was burning, and he was wearing his robe of initiation and chanting his mantra, God suddenly revealed to him that everything he was doing was demonic. My friend suddenly cried out, "This is all garbage! Jesus is Lord!" Then he turned and walked out. What a merciful God we have. He can use even the darkest situations to reach us.

What a great hope this gives us. Though we run from God, and find ourselves in the darkest of circumstances, he is still faithful to pursue us and speak to us.

There is a scene in the New Testament in which another King is at the very threshold of death. He is not in En-dor, at the foot of Mt Tabor, but rather, standing in glory at the summit of a mountain. There, two prophets, Elijah and Moses, come back from the dead to meet with him and speak of his approaching death. But this scene, unlike the one at En-dor, is one of transcendent glory. Peter, James and John, the three disciples who accompanied Jesus on that occasion, heard the same call for obedience from a heavenly voice, saying, "This is my Son, listen to Him!"

3. The Consistent Prophetic Voice

"Why do you ask me, since the LORD has departed from you?"

There is no division between God's prophet and God's word. God's word holds no comfort for those who disobey him. Unless we obey him we have no relationship with him. Once more Samuel confronts Saul with his earlier disobedience. Saul's seemingly complex problems have but a single cause. Sin was destroying him because he would not destroy it. This is the role of prophetic counseling—facing people with the root causes of their problems, not soothing the pain of their symptoms.

4. The Soul's Ultimate Denial

“Behold, there is woman who is a medium at En-dor.”

In a final act of denial, Saul, hearing the words of reality, does not repent. Rather, to soothe his pain he seeks the fellowship of the world, breaking bread with a witch. This chapter is part of a larger group of “type scenes” concerning the theme of a woman at a well.¹¹ There are seven such scenes in Scripture (incidents involving Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samson, Ruth, Saul, and Jesus), in which a man leaves his home town and comes to a well in a foreign territory and there meets a woman drawing water from the well. The scene often culminates in a wedding feast. Ironically, Saul is set up for this scene in 9:11, but it is aborted when he asks to see the prophet. The scene is repeated here (En-dor means “the well of generation”). It is almost as if to say that the climactic moment of Saul's depravity, a spiritual union with a medium, is celebrated over a sacrificial meal. And this medium is the only character in the book of 1 Samuel to whom Saul keeps a vow. This, then, is Saul's wedding, in a sense, the spiritual climax of his life. He may have been king of Israel, but in his soul he was cohabiting with demons.

To whom do we really keep our vows? Are we one thing by day and another by night? It is easy for Christians to find themselves bonding with the world in intimate fellowship, when they are barred from God's presence due to their disobedience. When Jesus met a woman at a well, a woman as seedy and as dissolute as this woman at En-dor, he was not defiled by her. On the contrary, in his meeting with her he made her holy. At the wedding feast that followed, the whole city came out to meet Christ—further evidence that the transcendent God whom we serve can turn death into life, mourning into rejoicing.

As we conclude this morning it would be good for us to take a moment of silence and ask ourselves where we find our most intimate fellowship. Is our bonding with the world really a cover for the pain that we feel due of our unresolved disobedience? If that is so, then the words of John, who accompanied Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, are healing balm for our souls. We could not put it more beautifully than the beloved disciple did in these verses,

If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

If we are practicing denial today, this is what we need to do. May God grant that we will “walk in the light as He Himself is in the light.” Amen.

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1. William Kinsley, “Witch of Endor,” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 840-841.
2. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 192.
3. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 599.
4. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 192-193.
5. A. C. Schultz, “Endor,” in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), vol. 2.
6. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 193.
7. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 193.
8. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 195.
9. Kinsley, “Witch of Endor,” 541.
10. For a complete listing of *sha'al* in 1 Samuel see 1:17, 20, 27, 28; 2:20; 8:10; 10:4, 22; 12:13, 17, 19; 14:37; 17:22, 56; 19:22; 22:10, 13, 15; 23:2, 4; 25:5, 8; 28:6, 16; 30:8, 21.
11. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47-63.



Catalog No. 970

1 Samuel 29:1-11

23rd Message

Brian Morgan

January 15, 1995

TIME TO COME HOME

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

In our last study on the life of David, King Saul was eating his final meal in the company of the witch at En-dor. This morning we return to the story of David. Having grown weary of life on the run, David has abandoned his place of protection under the sheltering wings of God in Judah, and fled to a man-made city among the Philistines. For more than a year he has been living on the razor's edge, acting as a double agent under the sharp eye of Achish, king of Gath. Surprisingly, David seems to escape not only his own moral lapses but, like the patriarchs of old, Abraham and Isaac (who also dwelt as aliens with Abimelech, in Gerar), in the midst of oppression he is actually becoming a rich man.

It is now the eve of the great battle. Tension mounts as the Philistines prepare to face off once more with King Saul and his Israelite armies. David, of course, is now incorporated in the Philistine army. How will the Lord rescue this wayward son and bring him home? Our text, chapter 29 of 1 Samuel, is a wonderful testimony to the grace of God, who keeps pursuing his wayward children even when they try to run away from him.¹ How many people could offer testimony to this all-pursuing grace!

The text opens with a debate among the Philistines as to David's real identity.

I. A Philistine Debate: Angel or Adversary? (29:1-5)

Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, while the Israelites were camping by the spring which is in Jezreel. (1 Sam 29:1 NASB)

First, the narrator identifies the locations of the opposing armies on the eve of battle. The Philistines have seized the military initiative, while the Israelite army responds in a defensive posture. Yohanan Aharoni, in *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, gives us further insight:

[T]he Philistines rallied at Aphek [about a day's march north of Philistia] in the Sharon plain, as was their custom when venturing upon campaigns to the north; from there the Philistines advanced to Shunem at the foot of the hill of Moreh, while Saul deployed his army opposite them on Mount Gilboa, favoring the mountainous area as more convenient for his lightly armed Israelite warriors. He encamped at a spring at the foot of Jezreel: it was from here that Saul went to the medium of En-dor in the darkness of night.²

Having set the geographical context, the narrator next takes us to view the Philistine military parade, a procession replete with ceremonial trappings and hardware. The Philistines are marching in squadrons, an intimidating sight, not unlike the military parades in Moscow's Red Square in the time of the Cold War. Verse 2:

And the lords of the Philistines were proceeding on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were proceeding on in the rear with Achish. Then the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to

the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or rather these years, and I have found no fault in him from the day he deserted to me to this day?" (29:2-3)

Here the narrator lets us listen in on a conversation between the Philistine commanders officiating at the ceremony. Some of the generals react rather forcefully when they see David and his men bringing up the rear of the regiments. "Is there a sting in the tail?" they wonder.³ "What are those *Hebrews* doing here?" they demand. There is a definite word play in the text. The word "Hebrews" contains the exact same consonants as the words "proceeding" or "crossing over." Brueggemann comments,

"Hebrews" may also contain a derogatory reference to the scavengers who disrupt Philistine order and who threaten Philistine well-being and prosperity. The term most likely refers to those who are socially marginal and economically disadvantaged, who pose a constant threat to society. In all probability David had developed a reputation as a scavenger (cf. 22:2; 25:10), so that the Philistine characterization of David refers to his Israelite connection and to his social marginality.⁴

On hearing the complaint of the generals, Achish takes the initiative to set the record straight. But he is rather inept in presenting his case. Instead of setting the commanders at ease by saying, "these Judeans have been in service with me for a year or more already and have fought toughly in campaigns against Judah and Kain, so you needn't worry! I take full responsibility for their loyalty,"⁵ Achish draws attention to David at the front of the line, pouring fuel on the fire. "Is this not David," he says, "who once was the slave of Saul, but since their falling out is now my slave?" Achish always views David in terms of a slave/master relationship.

But the generals are not impressed by Achish's assessment of David's loyalty. Verse 4:

But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him, and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Make the man go back [return], that he may return to his place where you have assigned him, and do not let him go down to battle with us, lest in the battle he become an adversary [satan] to us. For with what could this man make himself acceptable to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of these men? "Is this not David, of whom they sing in the dances, saying,

**'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands?'" (29:4-5)**

When the commanders hear the name David, they become outraged, and order his immediate "return." This word marks the turning point of the scene. Their rage over David's presence among the ranks precludes any possibility of rebuttal by Achish. They issue the order first ("return"), then they back it up with reasons. The generals have a better memory than Achish. They are not at all impressed with

what David has done in the past eighteen months. What concerns them are David's earlier accomplishments. Was he not the youth who had beheaded Goliath, and of whom the women of Israel sang, "David has slain his ten thousands"? They feared that in the heat of battle David would turn on them and become their "adversary."

This word "adversary," transliterated as *satan*, would later be used in Hebrew theology as a title for Satan. The Philistine generals feared that David would do to them what he had done to Goliath. They felt that David could possibly court Saul's favor again, not with one head this time, but with ten thousand heads! Now we see what an impact that song of praise by the women of Israel had on Philistia. Thus, "Achish's conviction that David 'has made himself absolutely impossible with his own people' is undermined by the military perception that 'this fellow can buy his master's favor.'"⁶ Achish is left with the unpleasant task of relating this "bad" news to David, and dismissing his loyal friend, all because he himself must submit to the "powers that be."

This brings us to the second scene in the drama. Here we find Achish reasoning with David.

II. Achish's Polite Dismissal of David (29:6-11)

Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the LORD lives, you have been upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the army are pleasing in my sight; for I have not found evil in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, you are not pleasing in the sight of the lords. Now therefore return, and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines." (29:6-7)

"Achish acquits himself of the onerous task of dismissing the vassal in whom he believes, not only by praising David in detail, but also by adapting himself to David's perspective at the beginning and end."⁷ Achish even takes a vow to David's God that David has been upright all his days with Achish. But nonetheless, he must submit to the powers that be, and do the unpleasant task of dismissing his loyal friend. "The only thing that Achish can now do to sugar the pill is to add 'go in peace.' Just like David, the reader hears an irony in this, for the true David is only too glad to be spared a terrible dilemma."⁸ If David were to go into battle, of course, he would have had to choose between two impossibilities: going to war and partaking in killing King Saul, and thus disqualifying himself from the kingdom of Israel, or defecting back to Israel in the heat of battle and joining ranks with Saul, the very one who wanted to kill him! For David, either scenario was impossible, unthinkable.

How would David respond to Achish's reluctant dismissal of him? If he were to appear relieved, that would be a dead giveaway. He can't shrug his shoulders and mutter, "What a pity. But I understand; it can't be helped." Instead, the accomplished actor plays the part of the outraged innocent. Verse 8:

And David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day when I came before you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" (29:8)

Achish, feeling a bit threatened by this outburst, takes the pressure off David with a little flattery and a smile. Verse 9:

But Achish answered and said to David, "I know that you are pleasing in my sight, like an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said, 'He must not go up with

us to the battle.' Now then arise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who have come with you, and as soon as you have arisen early in the morning and have light, depart." So David arose early, he and his men, to depart in the morning, to return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel. (29:9-11)

In contrast to the view of the Philistine generals who regard David as a potential adversary, Achish compares him to "an angel of God." To Achish, David is an angel of God; to the generals, he is the devil in disguise. Yet Achish must compel David to return—and return in haste. So he adds the lengthy statement, "Return, and be quick about it. Make haste in the morning light." While the previous story ends with one king exiting the home of a witch, into the darkness of night, this story ends with another king passing unscathed through a dark tunnel, into the morning light. One king is projected for death, the other for life, and a new reign. So the Philistines head north to Jezreel, while David marches south, back to Ziklag.

This text describes how God sets about getting a wayward son or daughter to return home. I will make three reflections on this story. As we will see, there is much to encourage us here if we find ourselves living in a foreign land.

III. Reflections: Finding Our Way Home

(A) A Vision of God's Reign to Encourage Us

In our text, the narrator transports us to the strategic high command of the Philistine generals. There we overhear their conversation concerning the identity of a certain Jew whom they sense had infiltrated their ranks. We listen to the intense debate and sense the opposing emotions in the controversy created by this Hebrew. Who is this David? the generals ask. Is this Jew, who has defected from Saul and now serves Achish, king of Gath, faithful to the Philistines, or is he a subversive interloper, a double agent who poses a threat to the nation? Three times in the debate, Achish insists that David is innocent, saying, "I find no fault in him" (vv. 3, 6, 9). But Achish does not prevail; the majority view wins out. David is deemed a subversive, a potential threat to the Philistine campaign, and he is dismissed. The verdict of the generals is clear: send him home at once.

Why are we privileged to hear this conversation among the commanders of the Philistines? And what is the lesson for us? Here is yet another clue in the story of David that Israel's Messianic King was not going to be some trifling national ruler, but rather, God's representative on earth. As such he would subvert and overcome all other kingdoms, rulers and authorities. Thus we learn the identity of the real power behind history. It is God's Messianic King.

The same was true of Jesus, the greater Son of David. He, too, was a threat to the powers that be, just as he is today. He had to work to keep his identity secret until the proper time. When the demons tried to reveal who he was, he silenced them with a command. Even then, when he confronted the forces of darkness and cast out demons, there arose a great controversy as to his identity. The rulers of Israel wondered was this Jesus the "Son of David," or was he a demon in disguise, under the authority of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons (Matt 12:23-24).

But, as the story of David among the Philistines is reshaped in the life of Jesus, the debate takes place, not among the enemies of Israel, but within Israel itself. The debate escalated, the divisions became more clear cut, until at last Jesus was tried before Pilate. Was he a threat or not? Was he an adversary, or a messenger from God? In an

erie echo of the words of Achish, three times Pilate acquitted him, saying, “I find no fault in this man” (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22; John 18:38; 19:4). Walter Brueggemann explains:

We may wonder if Pilate, like Achish, worked from misleading data about Jesus. It is possible that the subtle narrative of David’s “trial” before the Philistines is echoed in the Gospel account of Jesus’ trial. In Jesus’ trial, as in that of David, there is a strange rendering of Jesus’ innocence and guilt. Jesus also is innocent, but, read another way, he is indeed guilty of the charges brought against him that he subverts the establishment. As with David, however, the people around Jesus did not regard such subversiveness as a fault, but as a cause for celebration and loyalty. The people were as celebrative of Jesus as they were earlier of David.⁹

God allowed David to hear the controversy, the fear, panic and dread his identity had caused the powers that be. God does this for his wayward children to give them hope and confidence. In the words of the psalmist,

**It is better to take refuge in the LORD
Than to trust in man.**

**It is better to take refuge in the LORD
Than to trust in princes. (Ps 118:8-9)**

The Messianic King had come to introduce his new world order. This was the vision that God gave to David by means of the debate among the Philistines.

(b) The Decisive Hand of God to Extricate Us

“Make the man *return*, that he may *return* to his place.”

“The David who is in a profound dilemma at the outset of the chapter is, by the end of the chapter, extricated, unscathed, and well thought of by all parties.”¹⁰ What lay behind David’s extrication? Was it his own cunning and skill? No. David was rescued by the sovereign grace and mercy of God, not his own scheming. He came out smelling like a rose from this disastrous scenario simply because God was with him (Rom 8:28). The anointed of God could not partake in a Philistine campaign against Saul, the other “anointed” of the Lord.

What an awesome example of God’s overriding care and skill to extricate his servant from a potentially disastrous situation! God allowed David to go into a foreign land, but only so far. Is it any wonder that Israel “had no doubt David’s future was wrought by the God of Israel, who need not be mentioned in every narrative in order to be decisively present.”¹¹

God may be orchestrating certain events in your life today, battles in which you have no part. If you were to become involved you could possibly damage your reputation, your soul—your very life. God knows that. That is why he extricates us from these situations, to our bitter disappointment at times. But the eye of faith sees the sovereign hand of God at work behind the circumstances. We make decisions, using our minds and wills, but God retains his freedom to play the trump card. What a gracious God he is! We ought to trust him more.

In New Testament times, Christians had such a keen sense of God’s sovereign hand controlling the affairs of men that they had no trouble submitting to those in authority over them. In A.D. 50, the Emperor Claudius issued an edict forcing the Jews to leave Rome. One couple, Priscilla and Aquila, ended up in Corinth as a result. They began to ply their trade as tent-makers, and one day they found themselves working alongside a tentmaker named Paul. The apostle

led them to Christ, and instructed them in the Scriptures for eighteen months. Priscilla and Aquila, one of the choice couples in the NT, went on to found churches in several cities in Asia Minor, all because a Gentile king ordered their affairs and sent them away from their home.

My wife and I learned this lesson early in our marriage. We had everything planned out for our future. I was an intern at PBC at the time, and Emily planned on getting her teaching credential at San Jose State University. Afterwards, we would move to Texas, where I would attend seminary and Emily would teach. Then, after I graduated, we would start our family. But God had better plans. My wife was refused admission to San Jose State because they misplaced her records. She was told to reapply the following year. We actually wept because all our plans seemed to be falling apart. But all the while God was protecting us. The next year we lost a baby son. We needed to be among friends, not thousands of miles away, at this difficult time in our lives. The university had lost my wife’s transcript, yes, but God was at work behind the scenes, guiding our path all the while.

(c) The Voice of God to Speak to Us

When Achish ordered David to leave, David protested his innocence and asked what had he done. As we have seen, Achish responded with flattery, a smile, and then an emphatic order. Verse 9:

But Achish answered and said to David, “I know that you are pleasing in my sight, like an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He must not go up with us to the battle.’ Now then arise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who have come with you, and as soon as you have arisen early in the morning and have light, depart.” (29:9-10)

Behind these seemingly ordinary words of an irreligious gentile king lay the powerful, unrelenting voice of God, reminding David of who he was. Each word may seem insignificant in itself, but together they created a powerful resonance in David’s soul. Two times the command “Return” was given by the lords of the Philistines to David. “Go home David,” they were saying, “you are in the wrong place.” The Hebrew word that is translated “return” is the same verb as “repent.” Perhaps this was a subtle reminder to David that he was not where he was supposed to be.

When David heard Achish say that he was like an “angel of God,” perhaps these words evoked the memory of the last time he was in Gath. Then he feigned madness before Achish, and God extruded him out. Later, David would write, in the words of Psalm 34, “the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him” (34:7). Now he heard these very words, “angel of God,” uttered by Achish, in reference to himself. Can there be any doubt that they reminded him of his true identity?

Finally, David is told to “arise” at dawn’s early light and make haste to leave. The verb “arise,” which carries the notion of diligence, earnestness, persistence and eagerness, is significant in the Hebrew Scriptures. Oftentimes it is used of arising early to get a good start on a long journey in response to a revelation from God, or in order to worship God. Morning is the time of God’s justice. When Abraham received revelation from God to sacrifice his son, he arose early in the morning in response to holy orders. Jacob rose early to worship God after his vision of the heavenly ladder, at Bethel. Joshua rose early to worship, and carry out holy war against Jericho (Gen 22:3;

Exod 24:4; Josh 6:12). David himself had written in Psalm 5 about this notion of arising early:

**In the morning, O LORD, Thou wilt hear my voice;
In the morning I will order my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch.
(Ps 5:3)**

In Achish's repeated use of this phrase, "arise...early in the morning," God was telling David in no uncertain terms that he was on holy orders to go home—immediately! After David made an alliance with worldly powers for his protection he stopped speaking to God (there is no mention of prayer in chapter 27), but though David had stopped speaking to God in a foreign land, God did not stop speaking to him. Perhaps it was this incident that inspired David to write later:

**Where can I go from Thy Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there;
If I make by bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.
If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea [in the west: Philistia],
Even there Thy hand will lead me,
And Thy right hand will lay hold me. (Ps 139:7-10)**

These then are the three gifts of grace that God gives to his children who abandon the protection of his wings for an unholy alliance with the world:

A vision of the reign of God to encourage us...
The hand of God to direct us and overrule us...
The voice of God to speak to us.

Are you living in a foreign land today? You may be here in body, but your spirit is elsewhere. If this is where you are seeking refuge, the voice of God is calling out to you, as it did to David on that day when he was found among the Philistines, "My son, it is time to come home."

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1. For my observations on this text I am heavily indebted to the excellent work by J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 569-578.

2. Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (3rd ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1993), 75.

3. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 570.

4. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 197.

5. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 571.

6. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 574.

7. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 575.

8. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 576.

9. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 200.

10. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 199.

11. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 200.



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1 Samuel 30:1-31

24th Message

Brian Morgan

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ZIKLAG: RESTORING HOME

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

Last Tuesday, the citizens of Kobe in Japan were awakened by a terrible earthquake. In twenty seconds the once bustling port city was reduced to rubble. It was the worst urban disaster in Japan since World War II. More than four thousand people died; two hundred and fifty thousand were left homeless. The television pictures of the horrific devastation evoked memories of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Homeless individuals picked through the rubble, or huddled by makeshift fires, their glazed eyes staring at the embers as they attempted to keep warm amidst the ruined buildings.

What do you do when you lose your home, your family, your entire city? What do you do to soothe the pain? In the midst of tragedy and grief, people oftentimes begin assessing blame; they look for a scapegoat. In our text this morning on the life of David we find our hero in that very position. His men turn on him when they find their city, Ziklag, in ruins, following an Amalekite raid. In our last study we saw that God sent David an urgent message, delivered through the Philistine generals, who doubted his commitment to their cause in the upcoming battle with Israel. The Philistines delivered the message in no uncertain terms: return home at once, they ordered.

As David and his band come near the end of the two-day march south from Aphek to Ziklag, they see smoke on the horizon. A feeling of terror grips their hearts. As they close in on Ziklag, their worst fears are realized. The consequences of David's living as a double agent have finally come home. The tribes to the south of Ziklag, upon whom David had been making his murderous raids, had finally retaliated, and in full measure. The city of Ziklag had been leveled, burned to the ground, and there was no sign of life rising from the ashes. The crestfallen David immediately realized that the implications of his choices extended far beyond his own life. Some six hundred families (about the same number that attend our church) had joined in the new venture in Ziklag. David felt the weight of having put every one of those families at risk, a direct result of his weak faith and poor choices.

What do you do when everything you invested in is suddenly reduced to ruins? Where do you turn when your choices result in devastation to so many? As we will see, the story of Ziklag is a story of restoration.¹

Our text opens with David and his men coming upon the devastated city, following the order to return to where they had come from.

I. Weeping in Ziklag (30:1-6)

Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; and they took captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried them off and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and

their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. (1 Sam 30:1-6 NASB)

What did David and his men do when they discovered they had lost everything? They wept "until there was no strength in them to weep." At this point neither David nor his men know that no one had been killed, that the women and children were unharmed. So they go through a hell of grief, weeping until they could weep no more.

Weeping begins the process of restoration.

Then, adding to David's stress, his men become bitter of spirit. This is the same phrase used of these men when they originally joined up with David in Adullam: "everyone who was bitter of soul gathered to him" (1 Sam 22:2). But now they become bitter toward David as they cast about for a scapegoat. The charismatic leader who had planned a new life for them becomes the object of their derision. There is even talk of stoning him. Their actions are reminiscent of the "bitter-souled" Israelites who turned on Moses and wanted to stone him for bringing them into the wilderness (Exod 15:23; 17:4). Ziklag, the symbol of their hopes and dreams, that longed-for real estate, the new Canaan, had become a place of devastation, a burned out memorial to the holocaust where they lost everything.

And what did David do when he had wept so much he could weep no more? He "strengthened himself in the Lord," says the text. How different than his men, whose weeping only resulted in bitterness. How different than Saul, who consulted a medium when he was greatly distressed. But, practically speaking, what does it mean, that David "strengthened himself in the Lord"? David sought strength from his relationship with the Lord. He fully entrusted his fate into the hands of God alone. If there was going to be any restoration, God must accomplish it.

Weeping gives birth to trust. The Hebrew word for trust is rather graphic. It means "to lie extended on the ground," "to give the ground your full weight." If we decide to lean on God we must not hold anything back. When David had done this, he was able to rise out of the ash heap. Last week I had the privilege of praying with two women from our congregation who shortly were to undergo serious surgeries. It was a very gratifying thing to see how both of these women had abandoned themselves to God before they submitted to the scalpel.

After abandoning himself thus, David is ready to consult with God about the next step. Verse 7:

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the LORD saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue all." (30:7-8)

Surrounded by these desperadoes, David asks the priest to bring him the ephod, symbolic of bringing God near. Then David inquires of the Lord. Notice how direct and simple are his requests: "Shall I pursue this band?" Shall I overtake them?" He makes the same kind of petition he made when he sought guidance for holy war in Keilah (23:2). This repetition proves that the basics of spirituality never change.

God's answer is surprisingly brief, and encouraging: "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue all." David receives more than he asks, and is promised sure success. He will overtake them, and he will rescue (all). The verbs are doubled (the English translation notes this by the word "surely") to create a construction that resembles the placing of a crown on David's work, underlining his guaranteed success.² In God's answer we hear an echo of Saul's last words to David: "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail" (26:25).

Notice that once David has wept, God does not waste one word in rebuke of his servant. The silent power of consequences had already spoken. Consequences have had their desired effect: grief expressed in weeping, and repentance evidenced in trust. The first word that David hears from God concerns his availability to direct, to help, and to restore all that David had lost. There is no tongue lashing, no call to penance. David's God is the God of restoration and renewal.

So David and his men set out in pursuit of the Amalekites.

II. Delay by the Brook Besor (30:9-15)

So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those left behind remained. But David pursued, he and four hundred men, for two hundred who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor, remained behind.

Now they found an Egyptian in the field and brought him to David, and gave him bread and he ate, and they provided him water to drink. And they gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. And David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" And he said, "I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick three days ago. We made a raid on the Negev of the Cherethites, and on that which belongs to Judah, and on the Negev of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." Then David said to him, "Will you bring me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this band." (30:9-15)

The pursuit is interrupted at the brook Besor, a small stream that empties into Gaza. Two hundred of David's men are too exhausted to continue the pursuit. (This demonstrates how difficult it was for David to mobilize an army after the three-day march home from Aphek.) So two hundred men stay behind to guard the baggage, while the four hundred continue in hot pursuit. Similar situations

had never created internal strife before, but this time "it will become a running sore, which David can remedy only by effective lancing."³

Again the pursuit is halted, this time by the discovery of an abandoned Egyptian slave. At first this occurrence seems incidental to the story, but as we shall see later, this man becomes an integral part of the narrative. The slave had been abandoned by his master because of sickness, and he had been without food for three days and nights. He was on the verge of death, and is revived only after a great deal of care, and "cakes of fruit of high food value."⁴ The mention of the three days (which occurs three times in the story) links the image of the dying slave with both David and Saul, whose crossing fates are converging in history. The sick man lay suffering all the time while David marched south from Aphek. Thus, the dying slave becomes a mirror to David of his own soul, which is in desperate need of revival. His plea to David not to deliver him into the hands of his master echoes David's prayer to God regarding his master in 23:11. Furthermore, the day and night when King Saul has fallen in exhaustion and does not eat, after which the medium feeds him, coincides with the Egyptian's third day of hunger, and the time David feeds him and revives him.⁵ At the exact time when David was feeding the Egyptian, a witch was feeding Saul, who too had fallen in exhaustion.

Fokkelman comments that the scene also takes us back to the days of the patriarchs of old who frequently traveled in this desert region, "where there has twice been a threat of a woman's dying through lack of water, together with her child... Hagar, also an Egyptian, the first person in danger of dying of hunger in the Bible, but also the first to see an angel of God, and thanks to that help, find life-bringing water, Gen. 16 and 21."⁶ In our story the slave meets his angel of life, in the form of David. When revived he gives David the vital information to the battle, thus relieving him of the fear of being stoned, and he, too, is revived. "The question which of the two men is happier with the other is fascinating, but not easily decided!"⁷

So in the image of a dying Egyptian, the destinies of two kings converge. Both are at the point of exhaustion. One seeks to be revived by being fed a meal by a witch; the other seeks reviving by loving his enemy, and in the giving, he himself is revived.

What looked like an interruption to the pursuit actually becomes the key that opens the door to victory. With the information gleaned from the slave, David is able to attack the band of Amalekites. The word "band" occurs rarely in Samuel. It is used in this sense only here and in 2 Sam 22:30. Thus we can reasonably assume that David was referring to this event in his song to the Lord, in 2 Samuel 22:

"You, O Lord, are my lamp
The Lord lights up my darkness.
With You I can attack a band,
With my God I can scale a wall." (2 Sam 22:29-30 Fokkelman)⁸

Next, we get the report of the battle.

III. Recovering All (30:16-20)

And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. And David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. So David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and rescued his two wives. But nothing of theirs was

missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that they had taken for themselves; David brought it all back. So David had captured all the sheep and the cattle which the people drove ahead of the other livestock, and they said, “This is David’s spoil.” (30:16-20)

When David and his men arrive at the camp of the Amalekites, they find their enemies caught up in a wild orgy. The narrator uses four participles (“being spread,” “eating,” “drinking,” “dancing”) to show the ongoing nature of the lengthy celebration. The text describes the intensity of the battle: “And David slaughtered them from the twilight until the evening of the next day.” The attack is fierce, and the recovery complete. To underline the point, the Hebrew word *kol*, meaning “all,” is used five times in four verses (16, 18, 19, 20). And five times the name “David,” the conqueror who restores all, is mentioned. David restored everything—sons, daughters, spoil; nothing was lost. What an amazing outcome! David’s recovery is the focal point of the chapter, the point at which the story turns. The victorious men return to Ziklag, with the spoil in the vanguard of the victory procession, announcing, “This is David’s spoil!” So returns the conquering hero.

But the war is not over yet. On the return journey, David faces a crisis that is even more threatening than the battle itself.

IV. Who Gets the Spoils? (30:21-25)

When David came to the two hundred men who were too exhausted to follow David, who had also been left at the brook Besor, and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him, then David approached the people and greeted them. Then all the wicked and worthless men among those who went with David answered and said, “Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart.” Then David said, “You must not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us. And who will listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike [lit. ‘as one’]” And so it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day. (30:21-25)

David and his men arrive at Besor and meet their brothers, whom they left behind in a state of exhaustion. As they greet one another, several of the “worthless men” (this term is reminiscent of Deut 15:9, when a “base” thought was said to prevent generosity) are greedy and want to withhold the spoil from those who remained behind with the baggage. The narrator gives more space to this crisis than the battle, to show that “the disunity in their own ranks is more important, since it is more vicious, than the entire battle with the enemy.”⁹

But David poses a question to those who would deny their brothers a share of the spoils: “Who will listen to you in this matter?” In this matter, as in so many others, David rises above Saul, who listened to the voice of the people in the battle with Amalek. David, the leader, however, will not allow the “wicked and worthless” to rule, but “stands firmly on his own feet and gives an uncompromising no.”¹⁰ Division of spoil is not based on function in the battle, but on the theology of brotherhood (“Besor” means “flesh, kinsmen”; the verb means “to announce good news”). Disunity among believers is more of a threat to the gospel than doing battle with the

enemy. The people guarding the baggage were just as important as those who did the fighting. Besides, it was the Lord who gave the victory: “[he] has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us,” says David. So after the battle there ought to be a spirit of generosity in the distribution of the spoils, with no divisions among the brethren. After David was established as king he made sure that this principle, that judgments be based on the equality of brotherhood, not on strength or weakness, was inscribed in the heart of the nation by making it an eternal ordinance in Israel.

The text ends (30:26-31) with a description of the distribution of the spoils. So touched is David by God’s grace, he gives everything away, making sure that anyone who had a share in the kingdom when he was underground receives a share in the magnificent restoration. Thus does Ziklag, the place where everything was lost, become a memorial for all time of the city where everything was restored.

In the New Testament, the story of Ziklag is repeated in the story of Jerusalem, the city where a nation invested all of its hopes and dreams. The disciples were impressed with its splendor, but Jesus wept over the city because, like Ziklag, it was built in fraud and empty faith. Jesus knew that one day it would become an ash heap. In A.D. 70, the Roman armies under Titus killed one million two hundred thousand of its inhabitants. They leveled the city and burned the temple to the ground. But out of the ashes rose the prayers of the King. He overtook the enemy by his own death, defeating the powers of sin and hell. On the third day he was raised from the dead, and he ascended into the heavens with the spoils of war. He then generously distributed these spoils (Eph 4:8) to all his elect, and through these gifts of grace, we join with him in building the new city, the heavenly Jerusalem, in a work of worldwide restoration.

The question I want to leave you with this morning is this: Are you taking part this great work of restoration of the Messianic King?

V. Reflections on the Secrets of Restoration

Our text actually raises four questions.

(a) Have You Wept?

Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. (30:4)

We do not have to wander far from our church doors this morning to witness the devastation caused by sin. We do not have to go to Kobe to see lives in ruins and desolation. Actually, we don’t even have to step outside. All we have to do is look into our own hearts. In them we will find the devastating and far-reaching consequences of our own sinful choices. If we have done this, and if we have been honest with ourselves, here is how we must begin the process of restoration: Do not hide from the devastation all around, but enter into it. It is tragic that many believers cluster together in Christian ghettos, because they can’t face reality. But the first step in restoration is to go to Ziklag, like David, and weep. Restoration can’t begin without the shedding of tears. It is a long process to get to this point, but once we have arrived there, everything else begins to fall into place. Three times in my life I have wept like this: when I lost a son, then a daughter, and third, when my actions placed a Romanian brother’s life in jeopardy. It has occurred to me that I have never wept for the devastation I have caused by my sins in the same way that I have wept over my children. But this is when restoration truly begins.

My life is but a field
stretched out beneath God’s sky,

Some harvest rich to yield.
 Where grows the golden grain?
 Where faith? Where sympathy?
 In a furrow cut by pain.

— Maltbie Babcock

(b) Are You Clinging To God?

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. (30:6b)

Having wept over the devastation at Ziklag, David prayed. He abandoned himself totally to the care of God. He did not grow bitter, like his men, consult with mediums, like Saul, or indulge in bottle or drug to soothe his pain. Let us abandon ourselves to God. There is nothing we can do that he cannot fix. And then, having wept, and abandoned ourselves to God, we must pray for “all.” This word is echoed five times in 1 Timothy 2. Paul says we must pray for “all,” including those in authority over us, because of the greater David, who died as the ransom for “all.” Christ died for “all,” therefore God is eager to redeem “all”—even the king, because God wants to restore “all.”

(c) Are You Loving Your Enemy?

On the road to restoration, God placed before David an abandoned enemy, a slave. At first glance this seemed to slow David's singular pursuit of restoration. He was tempted to pass him by, but God had placed this one before David to give him the opportunity to feed him, wash his wounds, revive him and love him. In the doing, David received a vision of himself. He was just like that Egyptian, abandoned in the desert, his soul dying and in need of revival. As David treated him with dignity and love, washing his wounds and restoring his soul, the Egyptian became the key to open the door to David's own restoration. Now God could restore him by the Brook Besor (“flesh, kinsman”). His enemy had become his brother. This is Brook Besor, the gospel. When we look with love into the eyes of our enemies, it is then we begin to see ourselves. As we heal them, God can begin to restore us and revive our souls. This text clearly shows that restoration begins with one person reaching out and loving another, a former enemy.

The New Testament saints knew how to treat servants and former enemies. They knew that servants are gatekeepers to the kingdom of God. Paul and Silas, who were in prison in Philippi, are a good case in point. These men were praying and singing hymns in their dungeon when an earthquake struck and the prison walls fell down. The suddenly freed prisoners came face to face with their jailer, who was ready to kill himself in despair. But Paul reached out to him with the word of the gospel. The jailer received Christ, and then he took the prisoners to his home and bound up their wounds and fed them. That is true restoration and redemption.

(d) Are You Preserving the Unity Among Brothers?

Once the King had secured his victory, out of a heart overflowing with generosity he gave spiritual gifts to all to enable us all to partake in the building of the heavenly city. What grieves him is internal divisions created by pride of place, like regarding the front line roles as more important than the supportive roles that take place behind the scenes, or limiting the gifts of Christ to a few “authorized” people who hoard leadership to themselves and inhibit weaker saints from ministering. This kind of divisiveness poses a greater threat to the ongoing process of redemption than the enemy that caused the initial destruction. Our King will not stand for this, and he will rebuke us for it. Paul says that the greater gifts are bestowed upon the weaker members, and more abundant honor to those who lack, so that there be no division in the body (1 Cor 12:22-25).

All Christians have a part to play in this restoration. We have all been gifted with divine gifts from Christ's spoils, so that we may take our place in this worldwide rebuilding, until that great day when the heavenly city is completed. When at last we look up and see the New Jerusalem descending from the heavens, our Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes. On that day we will see that not one of the elect is missing, because all will have been restored. This is the lesson of Ziklag.

1. For my observations on this text I am greatly indebted to the excellent work by J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, Vol. 2, *The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 578-596.

2. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 582.

3. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 583.

4. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 583.

5. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 584.

6. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 584.

7. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 586.

8. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 586.

9. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 590.

10. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 590.

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1 Samuel 31:1-13

25th Message

Brian Morgan

February 5, 1995

THE KING IS DEAD

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

On Wednesday morning last we received the news that Brenda Mathiesen had died. When we first hear that someone has cancer, we respond in shock and disbelief. But in time, denial gives way to acceptance, and finally relief. Nevertheless, when the announcement of death comes at last we are not prepared for it. We are not sure how to express ourselves about death, what emotion to evoke. The word “death” itself is too final; it betrays our hope. On the other hand, to merely say someone “is in heaven,” that he or she “went to be with Jesus,” bypasses the pain we feel and robs us of the dignity of our grief. So we have been taught to say that someone who has died has “passed away.” But this banal euphemism avoids the issue, obscuring our true feelings. As a pastor, father, and friend, I have accompanied many people to death’s door, yet I find I am still unprepared for its dreadful knock. I feel ill equipped to speak about it.

These are exactly the feelings of the narrator of the prophecy of Samuel with respect to King Saul of Israel’s inevitable end. We come now to the final chapter on the life of Saul from the book of 1 Samuel. One commentator writes,

We approach this chapter with a sense of relief. We know Saul’s demise and death are coming; they were mandated by Samuel long ago (13:14; 15:21). Saul’s end has been confirmed explicitly by ‘Samuel revisited’ (28:19). Nonetheless, we are not ready for this pitiful death when it happens... The portrayal of this death, so long in coming, so theologically assured, is wondrously understated. There is no gloating by the David party. There is no rush to move to the next stage of Israel’s history. There is no heavy verdict passed on Saul. The action is permitted to have its own say.¹

In this final chapter we hear at last the long expected cry, “The king is dead!” These words reverberate across the land of Israel, evoking mournful responses in the soul of the nation. Even David, the beneficiary of Saul’s death, does not rush to seize the crown of the fallen monarch. He, too, mourns the death of the fallen leader. He weeps, and leads the whole nation in weeping. This text is a very helpful study on the cost of life and the reality of death. It helps us learn how the majestic event of death teaches the soul to utter expressions of deep spirituality.

The chapter opens with an account of the final battle, viewed from the top of Mount Gilboa.

I. The King is Dead (31:1-7)

Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul. And the battle went heavily against Saul, and the men of the bow found him; and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor bearer, “Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and pierce me through and make sport of me.” But his armor

bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it. And when his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him. Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together [as one].

And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, with those who were beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the cities and fled; then the Philistines came and lived in them. (1 Sam 31:1-7 NASB)

In chapter 30 we read the account of David’s return to Ziklag, following his triumphant battle of restoration against the Amalekites. Here, in chapter 31, the scene shifts to Mount Gilboa, and the Philistine battle with the army of Saul. The timing is significant. While one king is victorious in the battle of restoration for Ziklag, another is slain in judgment in Gilboa. As is often the case in the story of redemption, an act of salvation occurs simultaneously with an act of God’s judgment. Life and death meet in an embrace. A new order, with its new king, is born out of the death of the old. We are reminded of Hannah’s prophetic couplet which opens this book:

“The LORD kills and makes alive;

He brings down to Sheol and raises up.” (1 Sam 2:6)

With exquisite skill, the narrator portrays Saul’s final curtain call. I will employ cinematic terms to describe the scene. First, the writer focuses with wide angle lens to survey the battle; then he zooms in with telephoto lens to focus on Saul’s inner circle of protection, his three sons. Next, at the center of the scene, we have a close-up view of Saul. He is all alone, awaiting his approaching confrontation with the Philistine enemy, and death itself. This is the focal point of the story. We hear Saul’s last speech, and see his final action as king of Israel. Next, the camera pans back to reveal Saul’s sons lying dead on Mt Gilboa; then, from the mountain top, the lens captures the plight of Israel’s army retreating in chaos. What a painful reversal is this scene from that great event of chapter 17, when David slew Goliath.

The narrator begins by relating how one-sided the battle was: “Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.” In Fokkelman’s view, this “suggests that considerable numbers of Saul’s army, which probably consisted mainly of citizens called to arms for the occasion, saw the superior might of the Philistines very quickly after the start of the hostilities and preferred survival to perishing.”² The superior Philistine forces had but one objective in the battle: to put an end to the leadership in Israel. But Saul’s inner circle fights to the bitter end. Their resistance buys time for Saul, and he flees. But, an archer’s arrow finds its mark, severely wounding the monarch. How ironic, to think that a bow, the instrument that was Jonathan’s gift to David to honor him as a warrior, is the very weapon that brings Saul to the edge of death. It is even more ironic

that Saul, the man who always relied on his own sword, will finally be killed by it. Thus he suffers the same fate that befell Goliath.

The camera now zooms in on Saul. He is utterly alone for his appointment with death. Fokkelman continues: “In the nick of time, Saul has bravely assimilated his destiny in awesome isolation. After consulting the prophet, only one job was left to him: to stay in place as the waves of war approach. And that is what he really has done. He has not run away from his responsibility as commander and has done his utmost to protect the Anointed one against sacrilege.”³ Even Saul’s last wish is tragically unfulfilled: “The one blow that he can still strike the enemy is that he can deprive them of a living Saul, but that has little effect on the fact that the Philistines track him down and ignominiously mutilate his corpse.”⁴ The narrator adds, “Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together (as one).” Brueggemann comments: “There must be a pause with each phrase to grasp the massiveness of the death, its finality, and its majesty. Saul could not live.”⁵ Neither could his heirs. Verse 7 reveals what this death meant to Israel—a total loss of confidence, a sense of hopeless abandonment. There is no king. There is no hope for the nation.

But for the enemy, there is rejoicing. Verse 8:

II. The King is Desecrated (31:8-10)

And it came about on the next day when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his weapons, and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. And they put his weapons in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. (31:8-10)

The Philistines happen on the body of Saul as they collect the spoils of war. They probably wondered why Israel’s army appeared so chaotic in battle; now they discover why: it was because Israel’s king was no more. The Philistines sever Saul’s head from his body and send it as a trophy to their house of worship. This was what they did with the ark of the covenant earlier. Then, however, their god, Dagon, lost his head, while now, Israel’s king, Saul, loses his. Saul’s weapons are put on display in the temple of Ashtaroath, in the West; while his mutilated body, and the-bodies of his sons, are hung from the walls of Beth-shan,⁶ prey to predatory birds, about six miles from Mt. Gilboa, in the east. As the king is dismembered, the news goes out that his kingdom too has been dismembered. “Strategically, the king’s death means that the military threat has lost its main force. Theologically, it means that the enemy god has been defeated, for when the king dies, the king’s god has failed...Yahweh is as humiliated as is Saul.”⁷

As the news of Saul’s death and the desecration of his body makes its way throughout the land, some of Saul’s old friends are moved to act. They embark on a raid, not unlike the Israeli raid on Entebbe, in Africa, a few years ago, when the modern nation rescued scores of hostages.

III. The King is Honored (31:11-13)

Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh, and burned

them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days. (31:11-13)

In 1 Samuel 11, Saul helped the men of Jabesh when the Philistines threatened to destroy their city. The inhabitants of Jabesh had been given seven days to react to the oppressor, but within that period came unexpected help from the charismatic new leader, Saul, who saved their city. The men of Jabesh never forgot Saul. Now, to mark his death, they observe a fast for seven days. Then with lightning speed they mount a dangerous operation into enemy territory, under the cover of night, to save whatever can be saved. History teaches that when evil desecrates the righteous, people often respond with tremendous displays of heroism.

The men of Jabesh recover Saul’s body and burn it. Then they bury his bones under a tamarisk tree, in Jabesh, possibly a holy place, as a sign of loyalty and respect. Normally Jews do not cremate bodies before burial, but Saul’s body is burned, perhaps to cleanse it from the defilement of the Philistines. Brueggemann concludes: “In the end, Saul is humiliated and then honored. Both acts are necessary to understand Israel’s pathos-filled narrative about this tall king.”⁸ The New Testament tells the story of another King. At his death, his outstretched body lay desecrated on a tree. His demise was gloated over by the onlookers, but his loved ones came by night to honor his body and give it a proper burial. So moved was the Father by the death of his Son that he made sure that once the price had been paid, no one touched that body save those who loved him.

One would think that with the death of Saul, David would rush in to take the crown, but there is no joy in David’s heart. To find his response to the death of his old enemy, we must look to the opening chapter of the book of 2 Samuel.

IV. The King is Mourned (2 Sam 1:11-12, 17-27)

(a) David Weeps

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. (2 Sam 1:11-12)

What does David do when he gets the news that his rival is dead? What does he say when the event he has been patiently waiting for all these years finally comes to pass? He did not say anything. He and his men “mourned and wept and fasted until evening.” And he weeps in community, with “all the men who were with him.” Weeping is rather foreign to us in Christian worship, but not among the Jews. Resurrection does not obliterate pain, it transcends it. Once when I attended a service in a synagogue, the leader announced that it was time for the saying of Kaddish, and people who were hurting were asked to stand to signify that they were in grief. Tears release emotion and cleanse the soul. When you have wept sufficiently, then you can speak. To speak before weeping is inappropriate and inauthentic.

(b) David Speaks

Then David chanted with this lament over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he told them to teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow; behold, it is written in the book of Jashar.

**“Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places!
How have the mighty fallen!
Tell it not in Gath,
Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;**

Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
 Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.
 O mountains of Gilboa,
 Let not dew or rain be on you, nor fields of offerings;
 For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
 The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.
 From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty,
 The bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
 And the sword of Saul did not return empty.
 Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life,
 And in their death they were not parted;
 They were swifter than eagles,
 They were stronger than lions.
 O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
 Who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet,
 Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.
 How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!
 Jonathan is slain on your high places.
 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
 You have been very pleasant to me.
 Your love to me was more wonderful
 Than the love of women.
 How have the mighty fallen,
 And the weapons of war perished!" (1:17-27)

After David has wept, then he is able to speak. And when he speaks, poetry is the only language that is adequate to express his feelings. I think poetry distills the deepest significance of a given situation. The singing of this poem of David's transcends the pain by placing his deep yearnings on the altar of God, in the presence of the congregation. In the end we are comforted not with answers, but with worship: the presence of God in the midst of his people.

I never thought I would write poetry. As a child, I didn't read a lot. Later in life it was pain that motivated me to begin writing poetry. Following the deaths of my son and daughter, fifteen and sixteen years ago respectively, my soul could find no rest until I wrote a poem for each of them. It took all those years before I could write about the significance of those events.

We will look at David's lament in greater detail later, but for now I will make three observations on the impact of this lament on David's soul.

1. Pain is Intensified

First, the poem speaks of the depth of the pain that David is feeling. Actually, the recalling of the pain intensifies it. David does not hold back. He opens with the image expressed in the words, "the beauty of Israel slain on the high places." Though David cannot bear to look at this painful image for long, he sings of "the land humiliated, deprived of its pride and ornament, the dead everywhere up there. It is, however, such a terrible sight to the poet that he cannot bear this for longer than one verse."⁹

The pain of defeat is further intensified by the remembrance of the mood in the enemy camp, the joy and gloating which David and Saul tried to prevent, but which occurred anyway. The poem dredges up David's tears. In death, weeping is all that is left to him. So David calls on the daughters of Israel to weep. But the wounds of the soul are good, for in the multitude of tears comes cleansing, comfort and clarity, and a rare and deep holiness. David's words then open us up to another image, that of the intertwined father and son.

2. Death and Life Kiss

"Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in life, and in their death they were not parted" (1:23). Two men, father and son, shaped David's life. One represented life, the other a constant threat of death. In this text the two are intertwined, placed side by side in the Hebrew text. It is as if death and life kiss.

The first time these two words are placed side by side in 1 Samuel is in Hannah's poem, the text that introduces this book:

"The LORD kills and makes alive;
 He brings down to Sheol and raises up." (1 Sam 2:6)

Death and life are inextricably linked. The last time Saul appeared in the text, God announced to him, through Samuel, whom he had raised up, that he was destined for Sheol. Now, as David is given the crown, the new king will never forget at what cost it has become his to wear—the life of the king and that of his son.

My home is filled with life today, much of it born out of memories of death. We have our adopted daughter Becky because Jessica died. Now Becky is at the age where she is ready to go off to college. This has been made possible because her great grandparents and grandparents, who are now dead, left money for her to attend college. Death and life kiss.

3. Love is Immortalized

"How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!
 Jonathan is slain on your high places.
 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
 You have been very pleasant to me.
 Your love to me was more wonderful
 Than the love of women." (1:25-26)

David ends his poem by expressing the thought that there is but one powerful emotion that drives his soul, and that is love. He could never forget Jonathan, who immediately gave up his right to the throne when he saw the beheaded Goliath; who stood up to his father's rage and endured his wrath as the price for friendship; and who sought David out to strengthen his grip on God. But above all else, Jonathan kept his vow to David, and that vow cost him his very life. That kind of love transcends any expression of romantic love.

To our surprise, the poem is silent about a corresponding emotion toward Saul. There is no expression of hate or bitterness, only love for Jonathan. It grieves me to think that some say David is referring to homosexual love here. No, this is holy love, the love that causes us to lay hold of God in the face of adversity. This kind of love purifies us from the wounds of others, heals us from all past hurts, and becomes the new driving force in our lives. This is what happened to David. Love is what drives his soul now. This kind of love can cleanse and heal us of all the wounds we have suffered in the past. It can do more to shape our souls than anything else in life.

Now another King invites us to wear his crown. But before we begin our reign, let us pause for a moment and think of what he told us to do: "Remember My death until I come." Isn't it appropriate that we weep first? Shouldn't we sing a lament about our King, slain on the heights of Jerusalem, his desecrated body outstretched, gloated over and spat upon? Isn't his love more wonderful than romantic love? When we take our crowns, let us remember that they cost the life the King's Son. It was for this reason that Ray Stedman had inscribed on the platform at PBC in Palo Alto many years ago, the words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, "You are not your own; you have been bought with a price."

“Remember My death until I come.” Let us meditate on these words as we conclude our service this morning.

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1. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 206-207.
2. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 623.
3. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 630.
4. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 627.
5. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 208.
6. Beth Shean is one the most extensive archaeological sites to visit in Israel. Archaeologists have uncovered 18 layers of cities; the most impressive is the Roman layer with its wide streets lined with marble columns, amphitheater, and the largest Roman theater in the country.
7. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 208-209.
8. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 208.
9. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 659.