



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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