

1st Samuel, Samuel to King David Chapter 21 – David flees from Saul

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Over the past few weeks we have been looking at the first book of Samuel, and in the proceeding chapters we have been following the life of David as it unfolds after he was anointed to be the future king of Israel. We first meet David as a young shepherd boy tending for his father's sheep in the fields, but now we are going to see what God must do in his life to bring him to his full calling.

In Acts chapter 13 v 22 when preaching to the Jews in Antioch, the apostle Paul uses the words from the book of Samuel, that God had found in David a man after his own heart. But when was this? It was when he was a young lad out in the fields tending his father's sheep that he learned the character of a shepherd. There he came to know and love the creator God who he communed with and sang praises to while playing his harp, all before he was anointed to be the future king of Israel. After David was anointed as the chosen one of God, even though he was a man after God's own heart, God had to begin a work in him to prepare him for becoming the leader of God's people. There were lots of highs in David's life and from an early age he learned to depend on God and to know that if God was with him then nothing would stand in his way. There were also many times in his life when he didn't take God into consideration and depended on his own abilities which usually landed him in trouble.

It was out in the barren wilderness of Judea while fleeing from Saul, that David learned through his mistakes and times of telling lies that it was only by trusting in God and following His way that he would be fully prepared for what he had to do when he became king of Israel.

Today we come to 1 Samuel chapter 21 in which we find David on the run from King Saul and his army. In the previous chapter David, with the help of his best friend Jonathan, discovered the intensity of the hatred and jealousy of King Saul and how he would not stop until David had been killed. Having fled therefore from the presence of Saul and leaving his friend behind, David finds himself with nowhere to turn. He can't go home to his family; he can't go back to the palace; and he can't go back to his job as captain of the army of Israel.

In chapter 20 we saw the power and the protection of their friendship, which was a help to David in evading Saul; but Jonathan stayed behind in the palace, so David found himself all alone. In our lives many of us can find ourselves lonely, troubled, and depressed, but where can we turn when friends can't be found? What do you do when you are all alone? Who do you turn to when you feel everyone is against you? We all have different coping mechanisms that we turn to when life becomes too much. We may immerse ourselves in work or spend all our time watching television, we may try to comfort ourselves by binging on food or exercise, or even drinking or drugs. When we get to that point where we feel that nobody cares, who then can we turn to when all seems lost? While David is on the run and going from place to place looking for a home and a place of refuge, we see from the passage before us today that he is not alone, but that God is with him

every step of the way and is looking after the one he loves and providing for the small things as well as the bigger things.

This portion of the word of God can give us some encouragement and help whenever we find ourselves in a low place spiritually or even if we do not have the peace in our souls of knowing the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

The first thing that we see in the first 14 verses of 1 Samuel 21 is that God provides for what is necessary in our lives. David in his flight finds his way to the city of Nob. Of all the places he could have gone it is remarkable that he finds his way to the city of the priests, where the tabernacle of God was set up. The Children of Israel had been a nomadic people for many years before they came into the land of Canaan and their sanctuary, or place of worship, was a tent. This tent had been placed in the city of Nob and all the priests were found there going about their daily duties. David is now in a holy city full of holy people, and it seemed to be a good place for him to go to find sanctuary.

Once in the city, David heads straight for the chief priest Ahimelech and begins to spin a lie. He tells the chief priest that he is on a secret mission from the king and that he cannot tell anyone about it. His story becomes unbelievable when he asks for food to eat as he has nothing for himself, and also for weapons as he left in such a rush that he left his behind. Ahimelech must have wondered why David, the captain of Saul's army, was sent out alone on a mission without bread and without weapons. David at this point in his life tries to do things in his own way rather than trusting in God. After having built his plan upon a lie in the previous chapter he finds it easy once again to tell the high priest a fabricated story as to why he was in Nob. Later in the book of Samuel we will see that this lie has consequences for the priests of Nob.

David's first request was for any spare food that Ahimelech and the people of the city could give to feed him and those who were with him. He was told that there was no spare food in the city, only the shewbread from the Table of Shewbread that was in the holy place of the tabernacle. This Table of Shewbread was part of the furnishings in the holy place of the tabernacle and according to the Law given, the unleavened shewbread was to be baked fresh and placed on the table every Sabbath. There were 12 loaves that were placed on the table which were to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. This bread known as "the Bread of the Presence" speaks of how God can look upon his people and have fellowship with them and can provide and protect for them. When the new bread was placed on the table the old bread was given to the priests to eat. The bread was accepted by God and before His face for the whole week, then the holy priests were provided with the old bread. In type or picture for us today it reminds us that God has provided a way through the Lord Jesus living a sinless and perfect life. He became the willing sacrifice and through his death, resurrection, and return to heaven we are able to come into the presence of God the Father and his Son the Lord Jesus and have fellowship with them. We can only enjoy this fellowship if our lives are lived according to what the Bible tells us we need to do which is having our sins forgiven. We then ought to be able to be in obedience to the words in Peter's epistle, "Be holy, for I am Holy." Ahimelech asked David if his life was clean and fit to eat of the holy bread. He discerned that after the fresh bread had been given and the old taken from the table, that human need could then take preference over Levitical observance. This was indeed confirmed by the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 12 v.7, when He told the Pharisees that the mercy of God is greater than that of sacrifice. David was not in a place spiritually at that present time to enjoy the fellowship of God, but we will see later that while God had made it possible for him to have bread to eat, it would stir his conscience to bring before him the goodness of God.

The next thing that David requests is a weapon. A priest would not normally have access to a spear or a sword, but we find again how God moves behind the scenes. After David's earlier conquest of Goliath, when God had helped him kill him with a stone from his sling, David had taken the giant's sword and cut off his head. After time had passed the sword had been taken to

the Tabernacle, covered in cloth and the high priest had hidden it away beside his priestly garment. Of all the swords that David may have acquired, there could not have been a more poignant one for him to be able to reflect on how God had been with him when he slew the giant. David would also have remembered the quality and feel of the sword when he used it against Goliath and he was able to say, "There is none like it; give it to me."

We see the wonderful grace and mercy of God as He watched over David when he was at his lowest ebb and in fear of his life. David, though he was a man after God's own heart, also had a human heart and we read how he spins a web of lies making it look like he has no thought for God at this point in his life. We too, when we go through trials and temptations in our lives, are prone to look inward and try to find our own way out of our difficulties rather than trusting in God. The Lord cares for us and watches over us like he watched over David. In His grace, God provided David and his men holy food in abundance; and the very sword that David had used to cut off the head of Goliath. The Lord provides for the small things in life. The disciples' prayer reminds us to ask, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). So the two things that David received were bread and a sword. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35); and the Bible tells us that the word of God is like a sword that pierces the heart. That which God gave to David would have touched his heart and made him ponder over how God had helped him in the past. We also need the piercing of the sword to help us to be faithful and to live holy lives so that we can enjoy what the Lord has given us and that as we feast metaphorically on the shewbread, we can enjoy the fellowship of our Lord and Saviour.

In the next section of chapter 21 from verses 10 to 15 we find David fleeing, again afraid of Saul. We are told that the man who was in charge of Saul's herds was present in Nob at that time and we know from the next chapter that he had seen David. How sad it is that in his fear and by trusting in himself, he fled to the land of the Philistines, to the city of Gath, to find safety from their king Achish. This was the home city of Goliath and David had already fought with and killed many of their people including Goliath. It shows how desperate David had become that he thought he could find refuge amongst his enemies. Immediately the people of Gath recognised David as the one who the Israelites preferred to be their king, the one who the children of Israel had made their hero and had sung about his victories. The people of Gath would have had thoughts of revenge on this person who had brought them such misery. When imprisoned there, David realising the position he was in loses all of his integrity as a human being and plays the mad man. At his lowest point in the Philistine prison David realised that God was the only One who could help him and the only One that he could trust. In Psalm 56:3 David said,

"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (ESV).

He begins to pretend to be mad and scratches graffiti on the doors of the prison and lets the saliva run down his beard. The saliva on the beard was very convincing as men in that culture would believe this was only something that a crazy person would do. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown comment that an indignity to the beard was considered an intolerable insult and would not have been permitted by a normal person. This behaviour seemed to work as King Achish said that he had enough crazy people to deal with so why would he want to bother with another, therefore he let David go.

We find that even though David in his flight from King Saul is making bad decisions by leaving God out of his plans, it is reassuring to find that his heart is open to being touched by God and his ears are open to hear His leading. Through his experiences in 1 Samuel 21 we find that David writes two Psalms which give us an insight into how he was affected by the grace and mercy of God.

What about those of us who have gone on paths that lead us away from the Lord and like David, we find ourselves at rock bottom, alone and in despair? We can surely take comfort from what

David wrote in Psalm 34 and Psalm 56 which were written while he was in the cave of Adullam which is where we find David in the next chapter of Samuel. In these Psalms we have the thoughts of David after his experience of fleeing from Saul when he had followed a course that he pursued not in faith but in terrifying unbelief. Now as he is sheltered safely in the cave of Adullam, undoubtedly having acknowledged to the Lord his shameful failure, he is filled with the spirit of praise, and bursts out in wonderful ecstasy celebrating the goodness and mercy of the Lord.

In Psalm 34 verses 1-3 David starts with praise to the LORD at all times, in good days and in bad days, and makes the LORD his boast. In verses 4-10 we get the reason for his praise. He had experienced a great deliverance. He says in verse 4,

“I sought the LORD and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears”;

and in verse 7,

“The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.”

What better way to calm the soul than to be able to say as in verse 8,

“Oh taste and see that the LORD is good.”

In verses 11-16 we see that David has learned from his mistakes of telling lies and speaking deceitfully and urges others to follow after good. We find in 1 Peter 3 verses 10-12 that the apostle Peter quotes words from this Psalm and calls for believers in the Lord Jesus to be obedient children because God demands of us that we should be holy and walk in godly fear. If we walk righteously in godly fear and make the Lord our refuge, then His eyes will always be on us, and His ears ever open to our cry.

In Psalm 56 we have further meditations of David after escaping from the Philistines. Verse 3 says,

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You”;

and in verse 4,

“I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”

In verses 5-7 he meditates upon how the things of the flesh and this world can overtake us and try to bring us down but what joy there is in verse 8 for the one who repents with tears of repentance, that they will know that the Lord cherishes it and will remember our sorrows.

In the last few verses of this Psalm we find the challenge and the hope of faith. David trusts in the LORD's words that He will keep him safe and knows that his soul and life, even though now in jeopardy, will be delivered and that he will walk before God.

As we study and learn from what David has gone through, if there are any listeners who still do not know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour then you can repent of your sins and trust Him as the One who can save and keep you in this present world, until He comes again and takes us to be with himself. And to those believers who are stumbling and walking a path contrary to what Scripture teaches, and are feeling lonely and depressed, you also need to repent but in the knowledge that you can have the full assurance that God will hear and deliver you from your present situation. Like David in verse 3, we will be able to say,

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.”

Here we have fear followed by faith and in verse 11 we have trust dispelling fear,

“In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid.”

It is far better if in our lives we continually have that trust in God and the comfort of knowing His protection with us day by day.

May the time spent considering the experiences of David’s flight from Saul and what it taught him of how God is always with us, be a blessing and encouragement to you all, that even in times of our failure, God is there - the One who we can totally depend upon.

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