

Message #11

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Life of David

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DAVID AND DEALING WITH FEAR

1 SAMUEL 21-22

INTRODUCTION

USC sociologist Barry Glassner writes in his book *The Culture of Fear* (2010), **“In the age of 9/11, the Iraq War, financial collapse, and Amber Alerts, our society is defined by fear. So it’s not surprising that three out of four Americans say they feel more fearful than they did twenty years ago.”**

Chapman University in Orange, CA, sponsors a yearly survey entitled “Survey of American Fears.” In their most recent survey (2018), they presented a sampling of American adults a list of 94 phenomena and asked them which things caused them to feel afraid or very afraid. So understand that the respondents were not being asked to rank their greatest fears. They were being presented with a long list of items and being asked about which ones caused them to have a response of fear.

Number one on their list, with 74% indicating that this caused them fear, was government corruption. Number two, with 62%, was pollution. Number 64 on this list of 94 items was hell, with 24% indicating that they had fear of hell. Number 79 was God, with only 14% of respondents saying that they had a fear of God.

Few of us know the daily terror that Syrian refugees do in the northwestern part of that country where bombs may fall on their heads at any moment, or the weekly fear that Christian worshipers in western Burkina Faso or northern Nigeria have where terrorists have attacked Sunday services and killed pastors and parishioners in recent weeks. But we Americans do have issues and challenges that cause us fear.

I don’t consciously go through my daily life experiencing very much fear. But my wife will tell you that I occasionally have nightmares where I am thrashing around on the bed and fighting bad guys. So perhaps I have sublimated, or hidden, fears.

Our passage this morning involves a guy who had legitimate reasons to experience fear. How he handled his fear has lessons for us about how we should handle our own fears.

In our study of the life of David we have seen that King Saul has lost favor with God because of His disobedience to divine commands. David has been anointed by the prophet Samuel to replace him. David's behavior, however, has been nothing but exceptional. He has served the king by playing music to calm his nerves when an evil spirit plagues him. David has fought the nation's battles. He has married the king's daughter. Jonathan, the king's son, has become David's best friend. But all of this has made Saul jealous, and he is out to do in David. We saw last week from #20 in 1 Samuel that this murderous intent has become clear to both David and Jonathan. David is now going to be on the run and treated as an outlaw for several years. He is going to learn to deal with fear.

I.

So in vv. 1-9 of 1 Samuel #21, which is found on p. 244 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs, we find that YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS TO DECEIT. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS...) David has done nothing to deserve the treatment that he is receiving, but God has a program for David to undergo to prepare him to be a great leader. Trials and difficulties are necessary for us to develop character. Such is part of the reason that He allows His people to experience fearful circumstances.

According to v. 1, **"Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, 'Why are you alone, and no one with you?'"** (NOB MAP) David has just left his friend Jonathan in the capital city of Gibeah. Jonathan has confirmed to David that his father is out to kill him. So David flees a few miles south to Nob to see if he can get some help from the priests.

At the beginning of 1 Samuel the worship center was at Shiloh to the north. Now the tabernacle has been moved to Nob, which is closer to the capital in Gibeah. In #14 the chief priest was identified as Ahijah. "Ahimelech" is either a different name for the same person, or the brother of Ahijah. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Notice in v. 1 that it is Ahimelech who is experiencing fear. He is concerned that David, whom he recognizes as a young Israelite general, is showing up alone. It is perhaps unusual that David would come to the tabernacle and that he would come without other military assistants. Perhaps Ahimelech is concerned that there is trouble in the capital.

Verse 2: **“And David said to Ahimelech the priest, ‘The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, “Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.” I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place.’”** This is all a lie. Why does he not tell Ahimelech the truth? Perhaps he is afraid that the priest will not help him if he knows what is going on. Perhaps he is afraid that Ahimelech will tell the king about this meeting. Perhaps he is thinking that he is protecting Ahimelech by not telling the truth. But clearly it is fear that leads to this deceit.

Back in #20 v. 3, when David was beginning to recognize that Saul was out to get him, he told Jonathan toward the end of the verse, **“But truly, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.”** Was that description true? Yes and no. Outwardly Saul was plotting to kill David. He was using all of the power of the national government to get him. But God had also promised David that he would be king some day. If that promise was true, then David was indestructible.

David was beginning to cave in to the power of fear. He has shown great faith up to this point. But many of the heroes of the Bible have had their difficulties in handling fear. Abraham tried to pass off his wife Sarah as his sister because of fear. Jacob was known for his deceit. Elijah fled Ahab and Jezebel because of fear. The Apostle Peter denied that he knew Jesus because of fear. Most of us have likewise had moments when we have given in to the power of fear.

In v. 2 David has lied about having a commission from the king. He claims that there are other young men who are with him. But we see no evidence of that. David wants weapons and food.

The story continues in vv. 3-6 with David speaking: **“Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here. And the priest answered David, ‘I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women.’ And David answered the priest, ‘Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?’ So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.”**

Every Sabbath day twelve fresh loaves were laid out on the table in the holy place in the tabernacle. The old bread was taken away and set aside for the priests to eat. (Exodus 25:30; 35:13; 39:36) Ahimelech may have some doubts and questions about this request, but he gives David the bread.

In the New Testament in Matthew #12 vv. 1-8 Jesus makes reference to this incident and approves of the decision made by the priest to give the bread to David. His point seems to be that human need takes precedence over the ceremonial law. Ahimelech's actions are approved, not necessarily David's.

Verse 7 contains this foreboding note: **"Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen."** This guy is a foreigner. He is a descendant of Esau. Edom is a country to the south and east of Israel. Perhaps he is bringing animals to the priests for sacrifices. Perhaps he has a religious reason for being there.

Verse 8: **"Then David said to Ahimelech, 'Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.'" David is continuing to be deceptive. He feels a need to have weapons to defend himself. People are after him. But if God's promise to him is true, is such weaponry necessary?**

Verse 9: **"And the priest said, 'The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here.' And David said, 'There is none like that; give it to me.'" The question that we might ask is this: Is David trusting more in God's word and promise to be king, or in Goliath's sword?**

Fear often leads to deceit. David may justify his story in his own mind by thinking that he is protecting Ahimelech by keeping him out of the loop. If there is any trouble, the priest can rightly claim that he knows nothing about any animosity between Saul and David.

We know from our own experience that giving in to fear often leads to deceit. We are trying to protect ourselves from being caught or being hurt or being embarrassed or falling short of what we perceive to be the expectations of others. (TAD WILLIAMS QUOTE) A science fiction writer by the name of Tad Williams correctly observes, **"We tell lies when we are afraid... afraid of what we don't know, afraid of what others will think, afraid of what will be found out about us."** Deceit, however, can lead to further problems.

II.

In vv. 10-15 of #21 we find that YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS TO CONTROL BY THE ENEMY. (PROJECTOR ON-- II. YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS...) According to v. 10, **“And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath.”** So David leaves the tabernacle at Nob and heads to Philistine territory and the city-state of Gath about thirty miles away.

(NOB GATH MAP) Gath is one of five of the Philistine city-states. It is the one closest to the territory of Judah. Do you remember what Gath is famous for? It is the hometown of Goliath. David is also carrying Goliath’s sword. How do you suppose his appearance will go over in Gath? There are bound to be gold star moms and widows who have lost loved ones in battles against the Israelites. David has led the Israelites in some of these battles.

How will news of this move go over in Israel? David is supposed to be the future king of the Israelites. Is he going over to the Philistines to help them? This is as bad as Green Bay quarterback Brett Favre going over to play for the Vikings. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Desperation and fear has led David to this situation. As bad as it is for David to go over to this pagan, enemy king, at least he will have relief from the pursuit of King Saul and his government. Maybe he will get better treatment from the Philistines than from his own people. But is it wise to entrust himself to the enemy?

Verse 11: **“And the servants of Achish said to him, ‘Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’”** Apparently the Philistines are able to pick up Israelite radio stations and hear their top forty hits. They seem to have more respect for David than for King Saul. They call David “the king of the land.”

Verse 12: **“And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.”** Notice that David’s fear has only increased.

Verse 13: **“So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard.”** David’s fear produces more deception. It puts him in a situation where he is described as being “in their hands.” He has come under control of the enemy of Israel and an enemy of God. David is hardly acting like God’s anointed king. He is acting like he is being controlled by an evil spirit rather than the Spirit of the living God. And

where did David learn this kind of behavior? By observing the behavior of Saul when he was under the influence of an evil spirit.

We read in vv. 14 & 15, **“Then Achish said to his servants, ‘Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?’”**

Achish says that he has enough crazy people around. He doesn't need another one. David is not perceived as a threat who needs to be killed. He just needs to be shown the door. David is hardly an impressive representative of the true God. His fear has placed him in a situation where he has been controlled by the enemy.

I was reading this week about an evangelistic campaign that Franklin Graham is planning for the United Kingdom this summer. It turns out that LGBTQ groups have pressured arenas and convention centers to cancel his appearances because of Graham's Biblical positions on marriage and sexuality. All eight venues have backed out of hosting these appearances. These LGBTQ groups are using intimidation to keep these Christian events from happening. Yielding to fear lets enemies of the gospel have control of the situation.

In a Facebook post last Sunday, Franklin Graham wrote, **“Opposition to the Gospel shouldn't really surprise us. Jesus warned that it would come. As you may know, my eight-city evangelistic tour across the UK has been met with resistance by LGBTQ activists who inaccurately claim that I am homophobic, Islamophobic, and say that I speak hate. Anyone who knows me or has heard me speak knows that this really isn't true--- but, I DO Preach the TRUTH of the Gospel. Could it be, rather, that these folks are truthophobic or free-speech-ophobic?”** (Christian Headlines, 2/18/2020)

In this country groups like the Human Rights Campaign have tried to create fear in Christian groups who seek to promote traditional marriage and Biblical views of sexuality. Most of you heard how Chic-fil-A recently dropped its support of the Salvation Army and Fellowship of Christian Athletes as a result of such pressure. Yielding to fear and intimidation leads to a certain control by enemies of the gospel.

The Apostle Peter experienced such fear when he denied that he knew Christ. He was afraid of being captured and killed. He overcame that lapse and later wrote this warning to fellow believers in 1 Peter

#5 v. 8. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 PETER 5:8) He said, **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”** The devil wants control.

In the verse before that Peter explained how Christians should avoid yielding to such fear. (1 PETER 5:7) He penned these words: **“...casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”** In times of fear we need to trust God and His promises.

III.

From vv. 1-5 of #22 we learn that YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS TO OPPORTUNITIES TO TRUST GOD. (III. YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS TO OPPORTUNITIES...) According to v. 1, **“David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father’s house heard it, they went down there to him.”**

The cave of Adullam (DAVID 7B ADULLAM MAP) is believed to be ten or twelve miles to the south and east of Gath, just inside the territory of Israel and the tribe of Judah. There is a hill there with an extensive cave system.

It is there that the family of David from Bethlehem shows up. Why? Probably they are feeling threatened by Saul and his government. Saul is seeing conspiracies everywhere. David’s extended family faces danger. David must have felt some comfort in having his family join him. He had lots of brothers. Until then David had been very much alone. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Verse 2 says, **“And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.”** This is quite a crew that David is acquiring. They are people who have problems. Some have perhaps been unfairly treated by Saul’s government. They are the dregs of society. But there is a hint that David’s fortunes are changing.

Notice also that David has been hidden in a cave. He is the anointed king who is waiting to establish his kingdom. He has been rejected by the leaders of the Hebrew people. He is attracting people who are burdened and heavy laden. David is preparing a people who will rule with him in the coming kingdom. Does this sound like anyone else whom you know?

We read in vv. 3 & 4, **“And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, ‘Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me.’ And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.”** (PROJECTOR ON--- MIZPAH MAP) The exact location of Mizpah is unknown. It was somewhere in the territory of Moab. We also don’t know the site of the stronghold to which the author is referring.

David’s great grandmother was Ruth, who was a Moabite. David uses that ancestry to give his parents a safe place to stay. They are elderly, and the life of a fugitive would be difficult.

In v. 5 we read, **“Then the prophet Gad said to David, ‘Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.’ So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.”** Perhaps this prophet Gad is part of the disaffected crowd that shows up. He will remain as a long time advisor for David. The Forest of Hereth is somewhere in the land allotted to Judah, but we do not know exactly where.

David’s arrival in the cave was a low point in his life. But it was also an opportunity for a renewal of David’s faith. We know this from Psalms which he wrote. Turn with me for a moment to Psalm 142, which is found on p. 523 in the black Bibles. The forward is part of the earliest copies that we have of the Psalms. It is regarded as part of the inspired text. Notice that it says, **“A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer.”** The reference is to the situation described in our passage.

Look at vv. 5 & 6: **“I cry to you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.’ Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!”** David’s situation of fear is finally driving him back to trust in God.

Turn back to Psalm 56. That is on p. 476. Look at the second part of the forward to that Psalm: **“A miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.”** What has happened in David’s spiritual life as a result of this difficult trial? Look at vv. 1-4: **“Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long for many attack me proudly--- I think that the Hebrew here would better be translated as “O Most High,” instead of “proudly.” When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, In God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”**

What can flesh do to David? Nothing, if God's word is true. God has promised David that he is going to be king some day. So these persecutors cannot ultimately hurt him. David is beginning to overcome his fear.

We Christians may not have the specific promise that David did. But we have other promises in God's word. Will we believe them? Will we overcome our fear by trusting in God and His word?

Skip down to v. 13 in Psalm 56: **"For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life."** David's confidence and trust in God is being overcome. His fear is being dissipated.

There are times in life when our fears put us in a cave like David's cave. We feel alone. We feel abandoned by others. We feel attacked. We are afraid. The challenge is to grow in faith and to learn to trust God. The Apostle Paul describes our responsibility in Philippians #4 v. 6. (PROJECTOR ON--- PHILIPPIANS 4:6). He writes, **"...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."**

IV.

In the rest of #22 we learn that YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS TO NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR OTHERS. (IV. YIELDING TO FEAR LEADS TO...) The story unfolds in vv. 6-8: **"Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, 'Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day.'" Saul sees conspiracies where there are none. He has become isolated. He threatens his fellow Benjamites with the prospect of David becoming king and giving special privileges to fellow members of the tribe of Judah. The people of Benjamin will lose out.**

Verses 9-11: **"Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, 'I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, and he inquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.' Then the king sent to summon**

Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king." The priests live just a couple of miles away at Nob.

Continuing in vv. 12 & 13: **"And Saul said, 'Hear now, son of Ahitub.' And he answered, 'Here I am, my lord.' And Saul said to him, 'Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?'"** Saul is living in a false reality.

Verses 14 & 15: **"Then Ahimelech answered the king, 'And who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and captain over your bodyguard, and honored in your house? Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? No! Let not the king impute anything to his servant or to all the house of my father, for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little.'" What Ahimelech is saying is true. David has withheld the true story from Ahimelech. He knows nothing of any conspiracy. But David's deception has created a big problem.**

Verses 16 & 17: **"And the king said, 'You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house.' And the king said to the guard who stood about him, 'Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David, and they knew that he fled and did not disclose it to me.' But the servants of the king would not put out their hand to strike the priests of the Lord."** Saul's military aides have a different kind of fear. They have fear of God. What might God do to them if they kill the priests of the Lord? That fear outweighs their fear of what Saul might do to them.

Verses 18 & 19: **"Then the king said to Doeg, 'You turn and strike the priests.' And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword."** This foreigner, with some kind of help, proceeds to kill all of these people. He not only does in the priests before him, but he leads a group of others in going to Nob and devastating the entire place. What an evil thing! David's deceit has resulted in horrible consequences to innocent people.

It should be noted that forty or fifty years earlier, as recorded in #2 vv. 30-36, God had pronounced judgment upon the descendants of Eli the priest because of the waywardness of the priestly sons of Eli. That prophecy is being fulfilled here. Nevertheless, Doeg is guilty of evil in carrying out this devastation. David's fear and his deceit which resulted from it have contributed to these negative consequences.

The chapter concludes in vv. 20-23: **“But one of the sons 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. And David said to Abiathar, ‘I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house. Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.”** David acknowledges his responsibility for what has happened. Yielding to fear leads to negative consequences for others.

Fear is endemic to the human condition. Over eighty times in the Bible God’s people are told not to fear. Giving in to fear too often leads to deceit, which too often leads to negative consequences for others. (PROJECTOR OFF) We have a gracious God, however, who wants us to learn to trust Him. As with David, He often brings us to low points to get us to turn to Him in trust.

There is another kind of fear that is a good fear. We see it referenced once in our passage where the aides of Saul refuse to kill the priests. This is an example of the fear of God. Oswald Chambers writes, **“It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God’s grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics.... The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.”**

Fearing God requires a view of the big picture. It requires an eternal perspective. John Stonestreet says, **“So much of our culture is driven by two different but related things that are antithetical to a Christian worldview: fear and hype. Both derive their power from the underlying assumption that life is fully based in the here-and-now, that there’s no larger story we’re part of that secures our hope or significance. This practical atheism, as one writer has called it, leaves us vulnerable to pitches based in fear, whether from advertisers or politicians, and we fall for hype out of fear of being ‘left out’ or seeming ‘out of step.’ But Christians are to remind themselves, and each other, that none of this is true. We are part of a grand story whose end is known to us: the restoration of all things through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Breakpoint, 12/31/2015)

So the bottom line is that to deal with fear we should trust God and His promises. We should keep an eternal perspective. As a Catholic theologian by the name of William Cavanaugh has put it, **“we should insist on living as if we were acting in a comedy--- in the original sense of that word which was a story with a happy ending--- while the world insists on staging a tragedy.”** (*Migrations of the Holy*, 2011)