

Message #16

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Life of David

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DEATH, DAVID, AND THE EASTER STORY

1 SAMUEL 29-30

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Pandemics are new to us, but they have been common to much of humanity in much of history. The Bubonic Plague ravaged England in the mid-1620s. Writer John Donne was lying sick in bed in London, as he listened to nearby church bells, proclaiming the funeral of another victim. That prompted him to write what he called a “meditation.” It went like this:

**No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine
own were; any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. (Meditation XVII)**

The church bells today have been replaced by the TV set, which brings us images of refrigerated trailers in New York City serving as temporary morgues, and cruise ships that have a difficult time finding a place to disgorge their sick passengers, and ICU rooms that don't have enough ventilators. Death has been stalking our land. Of course, it is not just our country, it is the entire world. I heard a startling statistic this week that 90% of children in the entire world are not going to school because of this virus.

What are we to make of all of this? Pillow king Mike Lindell told the President and the American public in a press conference in Washington this week that this epidemic should motivate us to turn to family and to God. Biblical faith does have something to offer, especially at times like this. We are going to take up our story today to see what relevance it has to us and to our circumstances.

Death has been stalking the two main characters in our story. King Saul's kingship over Israel had been rejected by God because of his persistent disobedience. The prophet Samuel, who originally anointed him to be king, told him that the kingdom had been torn away from him. Saul wasted his time and energy in fruitlessly pursuing David. We saw in #28 last week that a major battle was looming against the Philistines. Saul sought some kind of direction from God, but Samuel was dead, no other prophets came to his rescue, the village of chief priests had been wiped out by him, and the sacred dice gave him no response. So Saul resorted to the occult and to a medium. This woman shocked herself, as much as anyone else, by getting a response from Samuel. The prophet appeared from the dead and warned Saul that judgment was coming and that he and his sons would be joining him in the grave the next day.

David was God's man. He was the one appointed to replace King Saul. But he, like us, was not beyond going astray. He faced great pressure and strain from constantly living as a fugitive and being chased by Saul and his army, probably over a period of several years. So we saw in #27 that he and the 600 fighters with him and their families went over to the enemy Philistines and to the king of one of their five city-states, Achish of Gath. Their clan was assigned the town of Ziklag in the south of the land, near the border with Judah. From there the forces of David raided the enemies of Judah. But David lied to Achish and covered up and claimed that he was attacking the towns of Judah. Now he is being called to account for his lapse of faith.

In the first two verses of 1 Samuel 28 we were told, **"In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, 'Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army.' David said to Achish, 'Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.' And Achish said to David, 'Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.'"** I am not sure that David knows what he is going to do. He is in a tough spot. The narrator left us in suspense as he proceeded in the rest of #28 to tell us what was happening with Saul.

I.

So we pick up the story in vv. 1-5 of 1 Samuel #29. I have labeled this section Roman numeral I. THE PHILISTINES AND THE AVOIDANCE OF DEATH. According to v. 1, **"Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel."**

Most of #28 described the events the night before the big battle in the Jezreel Valley. The author is now backing up chronologically to describe what was going on with David in the action leading up to the battle near Jezreel. Aphek was roughly halfway between Gath and Jezreel. David and his men had been called to join Achish and the other four Philistine kings in this staging area.

Look at v. 2: **“As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish...”** Achish was probably the most powerful of the Philistine kings. So he was in the rear of this military group, and David and his 600 men were near him.

In #28 the narrator told us all about the thinking and motivation of Saul as death was stalking him. Here we don't know what David and his men are thinking. Did they have a plan? Did the men know what David's plan was? Was David really planning to attack Saul and his fellow Hebrews? David's best friend Jonathan was going to be fighting with them. How could David ever expect to be king of Israel if he was going to wipe out a lot of his fellow countrymen in this battle? Was David planning to turn on Achish and the other Philistines? That was risky. If that operation was successful, King Saul might still be jealous and still be pursuing David. The wives and children of these men would also be at risk if things did not turn out so well.

The story continues in vv. 3-5, **“...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, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years [according to #27 v. 7, David was with Achish in Philistine territory for a year and four months], and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day.’ But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, ‘Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances,**

**“Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands”?’**

The other four Philistine kings are upset and concerned. David has successfully led Israelite military campaigns against them. Some of these guys may have witnessed David kill the mighty champion

Goliath. They knew the song that was sung about David extolling his bravery and skill in battle. They did not trust David. They feared for their lives. As it turns out, they had a better understanding of David than did Achish. It is possible that David and his clan might have turned on them in battle. Some of them might have been killed. They felt safer having him gone. Thus the Philistines avoided the possibility of death.

II.

In vv. 6-11 we deal with DAVID AND THE AVOIDANCE OF DEATH. In 1 Samuel #20 v 3 we are told, **“But David vowed again, saying, ‘Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he thinks, “Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.” But truly, as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.’”** According to #27 v. 1, **“Then David said in his heart, ‘Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines.’”**

David felt that death was stalking him. Superficially this was true. But God had also given him a promise through Samuel that one day he would be king of Israel. If that promise was true, then David could not be killed. David gave in to the stress and pressure that he felt and went over to Achish and the Philistines. It was a lapse of faith. David covered up by lying to Achish about his activities in Ziklag. Now he was facing a tough situation. His decision to get short term relief had created a long term predicament that potentially had deadly consequences.

Thus we read in vv. 6 & 7 in our passage, **“Then Achish called David and said to him, ‘As the Lord lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.’”** David has not been honest. Achish has been fooled. The other four kings were right in their concern.

It is noteworthy that Achish refers to YHWH, the proper name of the God of Israel. Does Achish actually have some measure of belief in David’s God? I suspect that Achish is simply showing respect to David and his religious faith.

Verse 8: **“And David said to Achish, ‘But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord**

the king?" Is David sincere? I don't think so. I think that inside he is breathing a sigh of relief. There is a line in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* that seems to fit here. One of the characters says, **"The lady doth protest too much, me thinks."**

Notice the Philistine king's response in v. 9: **"And Achish answered David and said, 'I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.'"** Achish compares David to an angel of God. David is a representative of the true God. But I am not sure that David has not been a very good witness to the true God.

The Philistine king continues in verse 10: **"Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light." [Verse 11:] "So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel."** The Greek translation of the Old Testament has some additional words in v. 10. So some of your translations of v. 10 may be a bit longer. The original text is a bit uncertain.

The intentions of David and what his men expected to happen in regard to the looming battle with the Israelites are left unstated. The only reference to God in this chapter is made by the Philistine king. I suspect that David and his clan are all relieved to be sent home from the site of battle.

Their escape from this situation of danger was not the result of any good work on David's part. It was in spite of what David had done that they escaped trouble. It was the gracious intervention of God that was responsible for their escape. He is always faithful to His promises. In this case he used the pagan Philistines to accomplish His gracious purposes. We shall see soon that the Lord also will use the Philistines to remove Saul from the throne of Israel. God providentially cares for His own in tough and dangerous situations, even when we are not deserving of His care.

At the end of #28 Saul walked away into the night in despair. At the end of #29 David walks into the morning light in hope, as the result of God's gracious intervention.

III.

Roman numeral III in the outline is DAVID'S CLAN AND THE AVOIDANCE OF DEATH. That is the subject which I find in vv. 1-10 of #30. We learn in v. 1, **"Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire..."**

The exact location of ancient Ziklag is uncertain. It was probably 60 or 70 miles from Aphek. We are told that David and company arrived home on the third day. The longest hike that I ever had was an 18 mile round trip to Mt. Charleston. The altitude was high, but I had a light pack. That hike was a good challenge for me. These guys were fully armed for war. The fact that it took them three days to return home meant that they marched twenty miles or more each day for three days. They may have had some pack animals, but I suspect that each fighter was also carrying stuff.

These guys must have been tired out when they returned to Ziklag and were looking forward to home-cooked meals and a reunification with their families. Instead they found that their homes, or tents, were burned down, and their families were gone. Imagine the grief and despair that they experienced.

David and his men had made a number of raids against the Amalekites and their nomadic camps. I suspect that there was some indication in what was left behind that the Amalekites were responsible for the attack. Maybe they left swear words engraved in the sand or dirt in their language. Probably the Amalekites had some indication that the Philistine army had gone off to fight Israel. They knew that David's clan was aligned with Achish, king of Gath. So they knew that it was a good opportunity to attack Ziklag.

Verses 2-6: **"[The Philistines had] taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters."**

David and company had wiped out the villages that they raided. They killed all of the women and children. The Amalekites did not do that to the Hebrews. Why not? On the human level they were probably planning on selling the women and children as slaves in Egypt. On the divine level it was the providential care of God at work.

This must have been a very low point emotionally for David. He thought that he had just escaped from a difficult dilemma. But now he found an even worse situation at home. His family and the families of his men were gone. His stuff was gone. Their homes were burned. There were murmurings about holding David responsible for this and having him killed. Death was stalking him. But whereas Saul turned to an occultist and medium for help, David turned back to the Lord. To what, or to whom, do we turn in the hardest tests of life?

We read in the second part of v. 6, **“But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”** We are not told in the passage exactly what this strengthening himself in the Lord means. We might conclude that he confessed his waywardness in going over to the Philistines and turned in faith to God.

Back in #23 vv. 16 & 17 this same terminology was used. There it says, **“And Jonathan, Saul’s son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, ‘Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you.’”** There Jonathan addressed David’s fear. He reminded David of God’s promises. He pointed David toward faith in God. I suspect that David’s strengthening himself in the Lord involved a similar thing. He remembered God’s promises and His faithfulness. He turned in trust to God.

That is what we need when we mess up. We need to confess our wrongdoing. We need to remember God’s promises and his forgiving character and constant love. We need to turn in faith to him.

That is what we need in the face of this pandemic. We need to remember that God is in charge. We must remember that He has promised to always be with us. No matter what happens, we can be confident of a glorious future. In Hebrews #4 vv. 14 and 16 in the New Testament the author writes, **“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

Notice also in our passage that David turns next to the Lord for direction. He had not done this in quite some time. According to vv. 7 & 8, **“And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, ‘Bring me the ephod.’ So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?’ He answered him, ‘Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.’”**

The Urimm and Thummim, the sacred dice, were kept in the ephod of the priest. By asking yes and no questions the priest could obtain answers from God concerning His will for them.

Verses 9 & 10: **“So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed. But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor.”** These men had just had a draining three day march. Now they made the wrenching discovery that their families were gone and that their town was burned. Yet they took off after the Amalekites. Besor was a wadi that empties into the Mediterranean Sea a few miles south of Gaza.

While the Lord graciously got David and his men out of the difficult predicament in which they had been placed by David’s lapse of faith, there were still negative consequences to deal with. The Lord forgives His people for their wrongdoing, but there are still negative consequences which we must often face.

I also find here an illustration of an important Biblical doctrine. The women and children were seemingly innocent victims of David’s choices. Yet because of their connection with David, there was suffering which they had to experience. The New Testament describes the problem of legal guilt. In Romans #5 the Apostle Paul explains that by virtue of our descent from Adam we not only have inherited a sin nature, but we also stand guilty before a holy God. Though we did not directly participate in Adam’s sin, we suffer as a result of his disobedience. Such it was that these families suffered as a result of the sin of David. As we shall see, there is still hope in this.

IV.

Roman numeral IV in the outline is THE SLAVE AND THE AGENT OF DELIVERANCE. That is the subject of vv. 11-15. Notice vv. 11 & 12: **“They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.”**

These Hebrews, suffering from the negative consequences of sin, encounter this man who can help them in saving their people. He turns out to be a slave, a servant, who has been rejected by his people. He has been left for dead. How long has he been in this condition? For three days and three nights. Does this remind you of someone else?

As we enter this Easter week, the thoughts of many of us are turned toward the God-man who came to deal with legal guilt and with the human sin nature. He was rejected by His own people. He died and was left for dead for three days in a tomb. He rose again to provide deliverance for His people. The analogy is not perfect. This slave is not a Hebrew. He is not sinless. He did not actually die. Yet the incident foreshadows an even greater story.

Verses 13-15: **“And David said to him, ‘To whom do you belong? And where are you from?’ He said, ‘I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire.’ And David said to him, ‘Will you take 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 take you down to this band.’”** “Cherethites” was another name for the Philistines. The slave is promised protection.

The grace and providential care of God is again at work. David messed up. He was forgiven and rescued. But there were negative consequences for his lapse of faith. The families had a difficult and painful experience. A loving and gracious God intervenes and sees that these people are not harmed. He causes a slave of the Amalekites to fall sick. He causes the Hebrews to encounter him. He provides the information necessary to effect their rescue. Such is the way that our Lord so often deals with us.

V.

In vv. 16-20 we encounter THE RESCUE AND THE DEFEAT OF THE ENEMY. We are told in v. 16, **“And when he [the slave] had taken him [David] down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah.”**

The Hebrews encounter a big celebration. They have reason to celebrate. They have had successful raids upon the land of the Philistines. They have wreaked revenge upon the people of Ziklag. They have acquired a lot of stuff. They know that the Philistines have gone off to war. David’s clan has gone with them. They are safe.

But the God of Israel has a different plan. He has brought his people to the site of this drunken orgy. There are 400 trained soldiers who are intent upon rescuing their families. They are about to go to work.

According to vv. 17-20, **“And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, ‘This is David’s spoil.’”** The text in v 20 actually speaks of other livestock, implying that there were animals and property acquired from raids on other places beside Ziklag.

It is noted that 400 young men escaped on camels. David had only 400 men in his group of attackers. But they were all sober and highly motivated. They had the element of surprise. Most importantly, God was with them.

There are further hints and foreshadowings of the Good Friday and Easter story in our passage. Deliverance by a good servant left for dead is followed by a triumph over the enemy. In Hebrews #2 v. 14 the inspired author writes, **“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”** By Jesus’ death on the cross, Satan was judged and sentenced, though that sentence has not yet been fully executed. Victory is assured. In the Book of Revelation we learn that at the return of Christ Satan and his forces will be defeated and cast into the pit.

VI.

We come finally to Roman numeral VI, vv. 21-31, and THE DISTRIBUTION OF SPOILS AND THE EASTER CELEBRATION. In vv. 21 & 22 of #30 we read, **“Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people he greeted them. Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, ‘Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart.’”**

Back in #22 v. 2 we were told about the kind of people who had joined up with David. **“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.”** These were difficult characters. They were the outcasts of society.

They were sinners. Yet they were attracted to the ancestor of Jesus. What kind of people were attracted to Jesus? What kind of people are attracted to Jesus today?

These sinners in our story thought that they were being generous in letting the men who stayed behind have their families back. Their leader has a different perspective.

Verses 23-25: **“But David said, ‘You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us. Who would listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike.’ And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.”**

David has a better perspective. He recognizes the hand of God in all of this. It is the Lord who has brought about this great victory. He also promotes the idea that they are part of a big family. A big family shares in the fruits of a great victory brought about by the Lord.

The chapter concludes in vv. 26-31: **“When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, ‘Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord.’ It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir, in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa, in Racal, in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, in the cities of the Kenites, in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach, in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed.”** All of these are towns in Judah, the tribe of David. Hebron is the most prominent town among them. It was in Hebron where Abraham and Rebecca and Isaac were buried. It was Hebron which would soon become David’s capital.

Notice what appreciation of God’s grace and intervention in a tough situation produces--- generosity. David’s generosity would also produce good will when he became king in Judah. An understanding of God’s grace in the lives of any follower of the true God will tend to produce generosity. Certainly we have seen that in our congregation’s financial giving in this last month.

We also see here another glimpse, another foreshadowing of the Good Friday and Easter story, which is interwoven in the fabric of the Old Testament. What else happened as a result of Jesus’ triumph in the cross and the resurrection?

Consider Ephesians #4 vv. 8-12. The Apostle Paul writes, **“Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...”**

“He gave gifts to men.” Paul is quoting from a psalm of David, who promoted this principle in our story. The gifts which were distributed by Jesus as the fruit of his victory were spiritual gifts. They were gifted people who became essential to the growth of the church.

The Easter story is embedded in our passage, isn't it? It is a story for needy people, for people who fear that they are being stalked by death, for people who are sinners, for people who are the disenfranchised of society. It is a story of hope. It is a reminder that whatever happens to us and around us, victory belongs to us who have trusted in Jesus Christ. We will rise again. Heaven awaits us. He is risen!