

Message #31

Kurt Hedlund

Life of David

8/2/2020

DAVID AND HIS FLIGHT FOR LIFE

2 SAMUEL 17:15-29; PSALM 23

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

My father's father came to the US from Sweden via Ellis Island in 1900. He and his two brothers went to work in the West laying track for railroad companies. Somewhat later they landed a contract with the Canadian government to cut timber. They were doing that up in British Columbia until World War I broke out. The Hedlunds had a crew of men working for them, but the government, short of cash because of the country's entrance into the war, stopped paying my ancestors. Their workers became restless and unhappy. They were suspicious that the bosses were holding back their wages. The Hedlunds began to fear for their lives. So one night they left everything and fled back to the United States. They decided that they were done with Canada. My grandfather ended up in northern Wisconsin.

Many of our families have fascinating stories about how our ancestors came to this country. Some of them were escaping persecution or war or potato famines. Others of us have stories about how family members survived WW I or WW II or the Korean War or Vietnam or the Persian Gulf War or the Great Depression. Or maybe they did not survive. Someday we may be able to pass on to our descendants the story about how we survived the great coronavirus pandemic of 2020.

It is crisis events like these which tend to leave a mark upon our character and affect our direction in life. It was such a crisis event that impacted King David's character and affected the future course of his life. In the end it matured him and produced a work of literature which has positively influenced hundreds of millions of people down through the centuries. We will consider this morning what relevance that experience has to our own situations in life.

We have seen that David's crisis involved an attempt by his son to kill him and take over his position as king. Absalom was seemingly next in line to the throne. He was the oldest son, and if tradition followed its normal course, he would eventually become king. But Absalom had deep resentments. He had some awareness of his father's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. When his older brother

Amnon, the crown prince at the time, raped Absalom's sister Tamar, he was angry. His anger festered when David did nothing about it. Eventually Absalom took the reins of justice in his own hands and killed Amnon. Absalom fled the country. David again did nothing to deal with the situation.

David, at General Joab's urging, eventually brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. But he exhibited an incomplete forgiveness. Absalom's anger continued to fester and resulted in a coup. Absalom was clever. He developed considerable popularity with the masses. He gave out promises right and left and got a few of his father's key supporters on his side.

We saw last week that David and his inner circle fled Jerusalem. He was depressed and downcast, but he managed to set up an intelligence network. He sent the chief priests back to Jerusalem to keep him informed through their sons. He also sent his advisor Hushai back to Jerusalem in an effort to thwart the advice of Ahithophel. We saw in #16 and #17 that Ahithophel urged Absalom to let him pursue David immediately to catch him and kill him. Hushai objected to the advice of Ahithophel and instead told Absalom to collect a large army and lead them into battle personally against the king. We pick up the story in v. 15 of #17 in 2 Samuel, p. 269 in the black Bibles under many of the chairs, as we seek to learn how David made it through this crisis.

I.

From vv. 15-22 we learn THE STORY OF DAVID'S FLIGHT. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE STORY OF DAVID'S FLIGHT) We read in v. 15, **"Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, 'Thus and so did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and so have I counseled.'"** Hushai gives what he believes is bad advice to Absalom. He realizes that David needs time to get organized. But after he gives his advice to the coup leader, he is dismissed. He doesn't know what Absalom has decided. So Hushai passes along what he knows to the two priests.

We readers know how Absalom has decided. We read at the end of our passage last week in v. 14, **"And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.' For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom."** God's providential care is at work.

According to v. 16 Hushai advises the priests, **"Now therefore send quickly and tell David, 'Do not stay tonight at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means pass over, lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up.'"** The danger is that Ahithophel will quickly take a mobile force of troops

and pursue David before he can get across into safer territory. David is slowed down in his movement by having families on foot and carrying stuff with him.

David is taking the one route available to him to get down to the Jordan River. (DAVID 19 FLIGHT JERUSALEM) It is about twenty miles down to the Jordan River. Jerusalem has the same elevation as Boulder City, 2500 feet. The Jordan River is several hundred feet below sea level. So the path is all downhill, and this clan will pass near the ancient city of Jericho. David is hoping that he will have friends on the other side of the river.

Verse 17: **“Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at En-rogel. A female servant was to go and tell them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they were not to be seen entering the city.”** (DAVID 19 EN-ROGEL) En-rogel was just a short distance to the southeast of the wall around Jerusalem.

The chief priests Zadok and Abiathar were loyal to David. Absalom was suspicious of them. Their sons Jonathan and Ahimaaz were at En-rogel. The place name means “Spring of the Washerman.” Since the village had a spring, this female servant had a reason to go there for water. The two young men were expected to pass along the intelligence from her to David.

Verse 18: **“But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So both of them went away quickly and came to the house of a man at Bahurim, who had a well in his courtyard. And they went down into it.”** Because of Absalom’s suspicions about the loyalty of the priests, this woman may have been followed. (DAVID 19 FLIGHT BAHURIM) Bahurim was just to the east of the Mount of Olives on the way to the Jordan River.

According to vv. 19 & 20, **“And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth and scattered grain on it, and nothing was known of it. When Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, ‘Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?’ And the woman said to them, ‘They have gone over the brook of water.’ And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.”** The woman is obviously misleading Absalom’s men. Her behavior is reminiscent of what Rahab did when she hid the Hebrew spies in Jericho.

Verses 21 & 22: **“After they had gone, the men came up out of the well, and went and told King David. They said to David, ‘Arise, and go quickly over the water, for thus and so has Ahithophel counseled against you.’ Then David arose, and all the people who were with him, and they crossed the Jordan.**

By daybreak not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.” There was a substantial crowd of people with David, which included women and children and food supplies. There was no bridge over the Jordan River. So it took a major effort to cross the river, especially at night.

II.

In v. 23 we have a side note about THE OUTCOME FOR DAVID’S BETRAYER. (II. THE OUTCOME FOR DAVID’S BETRAYER) The narrator tells us: **“When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order and hanged himself, and he died and was buried in the tomb of his father.”**

Ahithophel had been a top advisor for David. He chose to follow Absalom in his rebellion. One factor that may have led to that betrayal was that his granddaughter was Bathsheba, the object of David’s adultery. Yet Ahithophel was still acting against his former friend and the one whom the Lord had appointed to be king over his people.

(DAVID 19 FLIGHT GILOH) Ahithophel was from Giloh, near to Hebron which was the place of Absalom’s birth and where Absalom began his coup. It was to Giloh that Ahithophel returned and committed suicide.

What was Ahithophel’s motivation? Probably he realized that Absalom had taken bad advice from Hushai that would lead to the failure of the rebellion. Failure of the rebellion meant that David would be restored to power and Ahithophel would be tried and killed for treason. Even if Absalom should be successful in his coup, the crown prince’s decision to listen to Hushai would mean humiliation for Ahithophel and a fall from power. He perhaps could not live with that either.

Ahithophel should have realized that it was wrong to oppose God’s anointed king. David would later refer to this betrayal in Psalm 41. Jesus, a thousand years later, would quote that Psalm in reference to the betrayal by Judas Iscariot. After Judas Iscariot’s betrayal, this betrayer would likewise go out and hang himself.

III.

In vv. 24-29 we come to THE PROVISION FOR DAVID’S EXILE. (III. THE PROVISION FOR DAVID’S EXILE) We read in v. 24: **“Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of**

Israel.” Mahanaim (DAVID 19 FLIGHT MAHANAIM), on the east side of the Jordan River, was the place where Jacob, centuries earlier, had an encounter with God before meeting up with his brother Esau. (Genesis 32:2) Esau had earlier vowed to kill Jacob. So he was very worried about this meeting.

More recently this was the place where General Abner had helped Ishbosheth become king after the death of his father Saul. Now it becomes the place where David chooses to set up camp. He had proven to be an effective military strategist. So no doubt there were good reasons to pick this location. There is always an advantage to the defender if he can pick the site where a battle is going to take place.

Verse 24 tells us that Absalom is pursuing David to the east side of the Jordan, but we know from earlier information that this rebel decided to collect a large army to go after the king. That would have required a considerable amount of time to gather the army, get organized, and be provisioned.

Verse 25: **“Now Absalom had set Amasa over the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra the Ishmaelite, who had married Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruah, Joab's mother.”** General Joab is the commander of the army which stayed with David. This new guy Amasa is part of the extended family of David. He is David’s nephew and the cousin of Joab. Without going into all of the details, you can see that there is a big division in the extended family with people now set to try to kill each other. If you think that you have ever had divisions in your family, consider what is happening here.

Verse 26: **“And Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead.** Mahanaim and surrounding area is in Gilead, which was assigned years before to the tribe of Gad.

With this battle brewing, the story backs up to describe David’s initial arrival in Mahanaim. Verse 27: **“When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim...”**

There are three key individuals who show up with supplies for David and his contingent. The first is Shobi, the son of Nahash from Rabbah. (DAVID A9 FLIGHT RABBATH) Rabbah is the same place as Rabbath shown on this map. In #10 we saw that Nahash was the king of Ammon and the friend of David. When he died, his son Hanun took over. When David sent ambassadors to Hanun to pay their respects, he dissed them. David responded by attacking them and eventually defeating the Ammonites and

capturing Rabbah. It seems likely that Shobi is another son of Nahash and the brother of Hanun. Perhaps he was appointed by David to be a vassal king in Rabbah. Thus he shows his allegiance to David here.

The second guy who is providing support is Machir. In 2 Samuel #9 vv. 4 & 5 David is inquiring about Mephibosheth, the son of Saul. (2 SAMUEL 9:4-5) The text says: **“The king said to him, ‘Where is he?’ And Ziba said to the king, ‘He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.’ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.”** So this same Machir had once housed Mephibosheth, the lame son of Saul, to whom David later gave the estate of Saul and had this Ziba manage it.

(DAVID 19 FLIGHT LO-DEBAR) Lo-debar, which means “no pasture,” was apparently on the edge of the desert. Machir was a man of considerable wealth

The third supplier for David was Barzillai the Gileadite. We will find out later that he is an older man. (ROGELIM) He is from Rogelim to the north. All three of these men were taking a risk by siding with David. If David is captured and killed, their lives might be in danger and probably their property would be confiscated. But they all showed up. There is no indication in the text that David ordered them to come or even asked them to come. Each of them could have had reasons not to help David. Shobi, for example, could have pointed to the fact that David and his army had beat up on the Ammonites. Machir could have argued that he had limited resources in Lo-debar, “No Pasture.” Barzillai could have said that he was too old to go out of his way to help David. But they showed up. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Back in vv. 28 & 29 of our text we read, **“[The three men] brought beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds and sheep and cheese from the herd, for David and the people with him to eat, for they said, ‘The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness.’”** The provisions were just what David and his people needed after a difficult and stressful trip of several days.

Fifteen years ago Jesus and Ralph and Mike and I took a trip from the South Rim to the bottom of Grand Canyon to Phantom Ranch. As I recall, it was a trip of about thirteen miles, and we each had backpacks. We fortunately had made reservations for supper at the ranch. I have had nice meals at some nice restaurants over the years. I don’t remember what I had at most of them. But I remember what I had that night. It was a simple meal of beef stew. But it was one of the best meals that I ever had because of the setting and the journey which preceded it. I suspect that such was the case for David and his people when they arrived at Mahanaim.

IV.

We come then to THE SOURCE OF DAVID'S STRENGTH. (PROJECTOR ON--- IV. THE SOURCE OF DAVID'S STRENGTH) Chapter 17 is a fact-based, third person account of the events of this crisis experience, of David's flight for life. What would be helpful for us to know is what was going on internally in David in the face of this threat to his life.

Psalms 23 is one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. It has been a stand-alone source of comfort and strength for God's people down through the centuries. We usually don't think of a particular historical setting for David's thoughts in this Psalm. The preface identifies David as the author, but there is no reference to a historical setting. A number of students of the Scriptures down through the centuries have noted references in the Psalm, especially in the second part, that fit with our story. My suspicion is that David had this crisis in his life in mind when he wrote Psalm 23. Certainly there is application from it to many of our difficult life situations because of what it tells us about God.

Verse 1 begins, **"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."** The shepherd imagery was very much part of David's life. That was his original career. It was not an especially glorious occupation. It was a difficult, 24-hour a day, 365 days a year occupation. Still today in the Middle East it is often a job relegated to the youngest in the family and sometimes to the girls in the family. Yet ancient writers saw a meaningful picture in shepherding that was descriptive of the duties of kings. Centuries earlier Hammurabi of Babylon was described as a shepherd king.

God in the Old Testament was usually addressed in a collective sense as "our God." Here He is personal: "My Shepherd." The name used here is also the personal name of God, YHWH. This name is derived from the Hebrew verb "to be," suggesting that the very nature of God is self-existence.

Verse 1 assumes that the benefits of having YHWH as one's shepherd are dependent upon a personal relationship with Him. We have a responsibility to choose Him. Back in Genesis this responsibility was described in terms of Abraham's relationship with YHWH. (GENESIS 15:6) In Genesis #15 v. 6 we are told, **"And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."** Simple belief in God as He had revealed Himself to Abraham was sufficient for Abraham to be declared righteous.

Eventually the revelation about God included Jesus. In the New Testament Jesus identifies Himself as the incarnation of this YHWH. In John #10 He calls Himself the Good Shepherd. (JOHN 10:11) In #10 v. 11 Jesus declares, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** The reference there is to His death on the cross, whereby He paid the penalty for the sins of the world. Our responsibility is to trust in this Jesus and what He did for us in dying in our place and paying the penalty for our sins. It is not a coincidence that Psalm 23 is preceded by Psalm 22. For Psalm 22 appears to describe the crucifixion of the Messiah centuries before it happened. (PROJECTOR OFF)

A key task for a shepherd is providing for the sheep. Sheep left to themselves are pretty helpless. Phillip Keller was a shepherd who used his experiences to write *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. In this book he describes a tenant shepherd who occupied territory near him. That shepherd was a hireling who did not own the flock he managed. This man's field was brown. He lost sheep to predators. The sheep drank polluted water, and the sheep looked sickly.

The good shepherd provides nourishment. He makes sure that his sheep have clean water and nutritious food. Thus David writes in v. 2, **“He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.”** Sheep need some sense of security before they feel comfortable to eat and drink. David and his people found that security in Mahanaim. There they were supplied with food and drink by their friends.

Sheep are ruminants. They chew their cud in order to digest their food. If and when they feel secure, they will lay down to do that. David found that security with his friends at Mahanaim.

In the crises of life we need spiritual nourishment which only God can provide. He does it through His word. We typically need some sense of security so that we can ruminate upon His word.

Verse 3: **“He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”** The original word *nephesh* literally means “soul.” But it often is used in reference to life. I suspect that David is saying that his Shepherd brings him back from the brink of death. He keeps him from drinking polluted water and eating poisonous plants. A big sheep with lots of wool can sometimes end up on his back. He then may not be able to get up on his own, and sometimes he will die in that position. But the good shepherd will get him back on his feet. He will also protect him from predators. Such is what the Lord is doing in his rescue of David from Absalom.

Then the good shepherd also guides his sheep. He directs them on the right path and brings them to the right place. In the summer the shepherd brings them up to the high grasslands in Israel. In the winter he guides the sheep to the lowlands to find pasture.

In the last week two people have mentioned to me that they need help with computers. They are both intelligent people who can read directions. But like me, they find reading directions to be a pain and sometimes confusing. It is so much easier to have a guide who knows what he is doing to walk us through the process. But typically we are not sure whom to trust. How much is someone whom we find online going to charge? Can we trust this person to be in our house? In both cases I offered my son, who is trustworthy and specializes in computers. He is the kind of guide whom we want.

Jesus Christ likewise gives us directions in His Word. But the additional promise He gives us is that He will be our guide. He will be with us in the crises of life. He will direct us in the paths of righteousness. David needed that help to do the right thing. In stressful situations the right thing is not always clear. We need a reliable guide. Because of the Lord's concern for His own reputation, He assures us that He will direct us in the right way.

Verse 4: **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”** David was being pursued by a son who wanted to kill him. David was unsure how far behind him Absalom was. Perhaps he would even try to get ahead of him and ambush him.

(PROJECTOR ON--- DAVID 19H WADI) There is only one route from Jerusalem to the Jordan River. It was the I-15 of Jerusalem. Zedekiah took this route when he fled from Jerusalem. Jesus took this route when he went up to Jerusalem with His parents. On His way to Jerusalem for Holy Week Jesus took this route. The story of the Good Samaritan happened on this route. Now David was fleeing down the Wadi Qelt from Absalom.

I had the opportunity to hike several miles of this trail years ago. (DAVID 20B) It has similarities to many of the washes near here that go down to the Colorado River. (DAVID 19F) When David was fleeing down this wadi, he would have obvious concern about what the shadows could be hiding. Yet David indicates that his ultimate confidence was in Him.

He speaks of God's rod and staff. (PROJECTOR OFF) The rod was a club which would be used to fend off predators. The staff was used to pull the sheep into line. Thus David sought the Lord's nourishment, guidance and protection.

Before the epidemic struck several months ago I was taking some of the kids from our Sunday school on hikes in the area. Most of them had never been on a hike before. I took them places where I have hiked a number of times. So I was able to function as a guide and a shepherd. They would tend to run on ahead. But there were places where the trail would diverge. They had to wait for me to show them which path to follow. On the hike up Fortification Hill there is one place which is a little dangerous. People have died there before. So I was strict about having them climb up together in a certain way. These kids also tended not to bring as much food and water as I told them to bring. I brought extra to make sure that they did not run out. Our Lord is like a perfect shepherd because He knows our limitations and He knows the paths which we have never travelled before. He provides us with the nourishment that we need.

V.

In vv. 5 & 6 of Psalm 23 we come to THE FOCUS OF DAVID'S HOPE. (PROJECTOR ON--- V. THE FOCUS OF DAVID'S HOPE) David writes in v. 5, **"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."**

The second image in this Psalm is a gracious host at a banquet. David's hope as he headed to Mahanaim was that he would find a place of refuge. That hope was more than met by the three friends who showed up there and provided abundant provisions in the face of a coming enemy.

Oil for the head was typically a mixture of olive oil and perfume. It was soothing to a dusty body and to dried skin. Wine was provided to quench his thirst. A gracious host always kept his cup full. The prophet Isaiah often pictured the coming millennium as a wonderful banquet that would be hosted by the Lord.

Verse 6: **"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."** The word for "mercy" is *chesed*. It is that word for God's covenant love. As David was able to catch his breath and ruminate upon God's word and His promises, he was able to regain hope. He had no guarantee of a problem-free life. But David did have the promise that God would be with him and that his house would endure forever. He had been forgiven, and God's anointing upon him remained.

The house of the Lord for David was God's sanctuary back in Jerusalem. It was the center of worship for God's people. A good Jew could not worship properly unless he had access to that house of God. David is now expressing a confident hope that he will be restored to Jerusalem. For us today, the hope of Christians is access to a heavenly home, to a place of eternal access to Him.

Hope is essential for God's people to survive in the midst of a crisis. For David there were little encouragements along the way. There were friends who showed up with him who were willing to join him in the flight from Jerusalem. There were a few who showed up with provisions as he headed down the Wadi Qelt. There were other friends who met him on the other side of the Jordan River.

For me in my crisis experience of being fired from a church there was a hope that came from support of friends. There was also hope provided in the form of the message that was preached the Sunday after I left the church. A young man was called in to preach who knew nothing about what was going on. He chose as his subject the story of Joseph surviving his imprisonment in Egypt and being rejected by his brothers to become the number two authority in all of Egypt. Friends in the congregation told me that his primary text was Genesis #50 v. 20. (GENESIS 50:20) That verse quotes Joseph as telling his brothers who had earlier rejected him, **"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."** I took that message which I learned about as divine encouragement from the Lord. It gave me hope.

David Livingston was a missionary in Africa (PROJECTOR OFF) who endured many hardships to bring the gospel to people who were not always eager to hear it. Upon a return trip to the British Isles he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Glasgow. In his acceptance speech he said, **"Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among people whose language I could not understand and whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: 'Lo, I am with you always, Even to the end of the world.' On those words I staked everything, and they never failed."**

In the face of the crises of life, that is the promise that we must likewise remember. That is the basis of our hope. The Lord has indeed promised that whatever happens, He will be with us and we have a home waiting for us in heaven.