

Message #14

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Life of David

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DAVID AND THE DANGER OF EXTENDED TRIALS

1 SAMUEL 26-27

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Several months ago my wife had a sudden bout of dizziness. She called her doctor's office and described her symptoms. Because of her medical history, they told her to go to the Emergency Room immediately. So we headed down to the Boulder City Hospital, and the doctor checked her out. Fortunately, the medical staff determined that there was nothing serious going on. No one enjoys sudden trials or emergencies or ER visits. But the sudden challenges of life are manageable when they have a relatively short resolution.

Consider another health challenge in our family. As most of you know, my mother-in-law is dealing with the ravages of Alzheimer's Disease. As that disease has progressed, it has become more and more difficult to deal with. It is difficult to see a formerly energetic and bright and capable women become less and less able to care for herself and to be in touch with reality. It has been helpful to have her become a resident of the Veterans' Home. But now it is under quarantine, and the residents there cannot receive visitors. This is the kind of challenge that is presented by cancer cases that have no quick resolution, by family breakups that have long term effects, by unemployment situations that are not resolved, and by death that takes away a loved one.

Now we have the corona virus. It is a unique situation for all of us. At first it has been interesting in a news event kind of way to see what was happening in China. Then it was intriguing to see what occurred on a cruise ship. But now it is getting close to home. Now many of our jobs have been suspended. We can't even eat at our favorite restaurant. We Christians can't even meet together. We are watching our 401ks plunge in value.

At first it is kind of nice to spend more time at home with the family. It is kind of nice not to have to go to work. Even the preacher does not have to be at church on Sunday. But how will things be after one week, and two weeks, and three weeks, and even longer. How will it be when our mate or our kids begin to drive us crazy? How will it be when our source of income starts to dry up? What happens if people

around us start to get sick? Maybe a few that we know will even die. What happens to hope, and to faith in God?

That was something of the situation that David in the Old Testament Book of 1 Samuel faced. God had promised that he was going to be king some day. David faithfully served in the court of King Saul. But when David began to experience success, Saul became jealous and began trying to take him out. Initially David was a pillar of virtue and a model of godly faith. But as the trial gets extended, David's faith begins to waver.

We saw last time, two weeks ago, that David in his fugitive status and with the six hundred men in his company encountered the clan of Nabal. David was poorly treated by Nabal, and David set out to wipe out his clan. Nabal's wife intervened and convinced David that it was the wrong thing to do to undertake a massacre. David relented and a couple weeks later he saw that God caused Nabal to die. But the pursuit by King Saul continues.

I.

So in #26 of 1 Samuel vv. 1-4 we encounter DAVID AND THE ONGOING PURSUIT FROM KING SAUL. Verse 1 tells us, **"Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, 'Is not David, hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?'"** Gibeah was the capital and hometown of Saul in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin a few miles north of Jerusalem. Ziph was in the territory of the tribe of Judah south of Hebron, which was south of Bethlehem, which was south of Jerusalem. It was a hilly, wilderness area, not all that different from the geography of our area.

Back in #23 we saw that David and the 600 men with him and some of their families were hanging out in this same area. The people of this town of Ziph told King Saul where David and his people were. King Saul brought a force of 3000 troops to capture David. But just as they were about to trap him, word came that the Philistines were attacking another part of the country. So David was off the hook.

Why was the clan of David hanging out in this area again, when they could not trust the people of nearby Ziph? Because this was familiar territory in David's tribal area, and it had a lot of hiding places.

Why were the Ziphites so willing to turn in a fellow member of the tribe of Judah and one who aspired to be king of Israel? There were at least two possible factors at work. They had heard about how the

town of Nob had been wiped out because the priests there were alleged to have aided David. Then also the Ziphites may have been looking for special favors from the king of the country.

According to v. 2, **“So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.”** The frequent mention of this 3000 man force suggests that it may have been a standing permanent army that was garrisoned in the capital city of Gibeah.

The question is: Why do Saul and his troops keep pursuing David? In his last encounter with David described in #24, David had the opportunity to kill Saul when he went into a cave to relieve himself. David confronted the king, and Saul wept and acknowledged his wrongdoing. He asked David for mercy upon his descendants and confessed that David would be king.

Saul has proved to be unreliable. He has an evil spirit which plagues him. He is still jealous. Perhaps his fellow members of the tribe of Benjamin do not want to give up their privileged position in the royal court. Then also there is the divine purpose in all of this. David has not yet fully learned the faith lesson that the God of Israel has for him.

Verses 3 & 4: **“And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come.”** Notice that the man of God is using spies.

The main thing to observe in these first four verses is that David’s trial continues. His status as a fugitive goes on from weeks to months to years. In #24 Saul gave promises and made assurances that he had been wrong and that David was welcome to return to the palace. But Saul is a liar. He lacks integrity. His jealousy and pursuit continues. David has acquired his own mercenary army. But he is responsible for them. Some of them have family members. David is responsible for feeding them and protecting them. The danger is that he will lose hope and that his faith will be affected. Such is also the challenge for us in the circumstances which we face.

II.

In vv. 5-25 of #26 we learn about DAVID AND THE LESSON OF FAITH SEEMINGLY LEARNED. According to v. 5, **“Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.”** General Abner is Saul’s cousin.

It is night when this encounter happens. Saul is camped out somewhere in the middle of these 3000 men. There is some kind of indication where Saul lies among them. Perhaps there is an extra big campfire beside him. Perhaps his armored chariot is parked beside him.

Verse 6: **“Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab’s brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, ‘Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?’ And Abishai said, ‘I will go down with you.’”** One of these military aides is Abishai. Zeruiah is David’s older sister. Both Abishai and Joab are sons of Zeruiah. Joab is David’s chief general. That makes Abishai and Joab David’s nephews. Because David was the youngest among eight sons, these nephews may not be all that much younger than David. That Abishai is a fighter and that he volunteers for a dangerous mission suggests that he is a bold and aggressive guy.

Verse 7: **“So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him.”** There was apparently something distinctive about the king’s spear. Verses 8 & 9: **“Then Abishai said to David, ‘God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.’ But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless?’”**

David had a similar opportunity to kill Saul in #24, when the king went into a cave to relieve himself. Again he turns down the opportunity. His faith is strong. He is trusting God to protect him. He will not kill the man whom God has appointed, and has still allowed, to be king, and he will not let his nephew do it either.

Look at v. 10: **“And David said, ‘As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish.’”** This was a great opportunity to end this pursuit, to do away with his enemy, but David would not take it. He understood that circumstances are not determinative in doing the will of God. Circumstances must always be taken into consideration. But it is the revealed will

of God and Biblical principles which must always come first. Too often we humans make of circumstances what we want our will to be.

David recognizes most importantly that it is God's job to deal with Saul. Just because Saul has become a bad guy does not mean that it is David's job to kill him. David has been reminded of that in his recent encounter with Nabal. He was a bad guy whom David could have taken out, and almost did take out. But because of the godly advice of Abigail, he waited. It wasn't long before Nabal did die.

David now imagines a number of possible ways in which this could happen with Saul. He could be taken out as the result of some health challenge, as seemingly happened with Nabal. He could have an accident, or he could die in battle.

Continuing in vv. 11 & 12, David says, **“The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go.’ So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.”** The spear is a symbol of Saul's authority. But in temporarily taking this and Saul's water bottle, David is being less intrusive than he was in cutting off Saul's royal robe in the cave. His conscience bothered him about that.

Perhaps in making this approach to the king, the two of them inadvertently made noise, and yet no one stirred. Perhaps they noticed that even sentries were asleep. David and Abishai saw this situation as evidence of divine intervention and approval. Sometimes in the midst of extended trials, we get glimpses and assurances of God's presence with us. We may need that.

In vv. 13-16 we read, **“Then David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, ‘Will you not answer, Abner?’ Then Abner answered, ‘Who are you who calls to the king?’ And David said to Abner, ‘Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is and the jar of water that was at his head.”**

A fundamental concern of leaders throughout history is their personal security. Sometimes those responsible for the security of a king or president or dictator have been killed for failing to protect their charge. Some have speculated that David knew that Abishai would be more aggressive and suspected that this opportunity to do in Saul would present itself and that it would be especially tempting to his nephew. Stopping Abishai would allow David to tell King Saul that he had truly saved his life from one who wanted to kill him.

Look at vv. 17-19: **“Saul recognized David's voice and said, ‘Is this your voice, my son David?’ And David said, ‘It is my voice, my lord, O king.’ And he said, ‘Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, “Go, serve other gods.””** Saul calls the one he has been trying to kill “my son.” David is indeed his son-in-law. In the earlier confrontation David responded to Saul’s contrition by calling him “my father.” He doesn’t do that here. It is just “my lord, the king”

David imagines theoretically that he could have sinned against God and that there is some divine reason why God has stirred up Saul against him. He is being kind. Saul is mostly the problem. It is possible that there are advisors encouraging this enmity. Perhaps some of Saul’s fellow members of the tribe of Benjamin fear losing their power if David becomes king. Perhaps they fear retribution.

If bad advisors are the problem, David says that they are driving him out of the country. If he was to be forced out of the country, it would mean that he could not worship at the tabernacle of God. He could not observe the three annual feasts which the law of God says that all Jewish men are to observe. He could not make the offerings that are required to be given at the tabernacle. His worship would be hindered. It would be as if these bad advisors want David to worship other gods.

Such is the challenge that this corona virus presents to us Christians. We are commanded to meet together. We are told by God’s word that we should participate in joint fellowship and worship. It is tough to do that when the advent of this plague seems to require government to put restrictions upon our movement. Let’s pray that the danger is resolved quickly.

Back to our text in v. 20. David says, **“Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the Lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains.”** It would be a shame to die outside of the land promised to the

descendants of Abraham. Yet if the promise of God to David still stands, he cannot die before he becomes king.

Verse 21: **“Then Saul said, “I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake.”** This sounds good, but we have heard these confessions before. Saul has shown that he cannot be trusted. This may be a confession but it is hardly genuine repentance. For his pursuit will continue.

A more literal translation of the first part of the last clause would read, **“Behold, I have played the fool...”** Do you remember from our last lesson what the Hebrew word is for “fool?” It is Nabal. It is the nickname of the character described in #25. It is perhaps a divinely inspired choice of words. This should cause David to remember how the Lord took care of Nabal a bit earlier. David should see this as a divine assurance that God will likewise deal with Saul.

According to vv. 22-24, **“And David answered and said, ‘Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation.’”** For some reason David does not return the water jug. In the earlier encounter with Saul, David appealed for his life to be esteemed in the king's eyes. This time he gives up that hope and appeals for his own life to be precious in the sight of God.

Verse 25: **“Then Saul said to David, ‘Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things and will succeed in them.’ So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.”** Saul's declaration is indeed a true statement. But David has no plans to return with King Saul. He cannot be trusted. This will be the last encounter that David has with King Saul.

The main thing to notice here is that David has passed this test with an A+. He has no regrets. In the previous encounter in the cave, David felt that he was wrong to cut off a piece of the king's robe. Here he has not given in to the temptation to kill his pursuer. He has taught Abishai a valuable lesson about leaving vengeance with the Lord and not taking personal revenge. David has been prepared for this test by his encounter with Nabal in #25 and by the encouraging words of faith from Abigail, who became his wife.

Likewise this corona virus is a test for all of us. Will we maintain our faith in God and His promises? We have no guarantee that we will not die from this thing. But we have the assurance from God's Word that He will be with us, and that He will accomplish His purposes in us. Our responsibility is to maintain hope and faith and not to give in to fear.

III.

In #27 we are going to deal with DAVID AND THE LESSON OF FAITH SEEMINGLY FORGOTTEN. According to 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. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand.'"**

What happened? Will David one day perish by the hand of Saul? Not if the promise of God is true. Why this change and sudden lack of faith? Some time has perhaps gone by. Saul has perhaps renewed his pursuit. The trial is getting long. David is responsible for 600 men plus family members. Protecting them and providing food for them is a constant stress. He is getting worn down. That may become a challenge for us, too. This week we may be OK. But how about next week and the week after that and the week after that?

The initial error that David makes is telling himself a wrong message. Is he listening to Abigail, who has been a woman of encouraging faith in the past? Why has he not gone to the priest? What about turning to the Urim and Thummim, the sacred dice which the priest can use to get direction from the Lord? What about dwelling on the promise of God that he will be king, and what about remembering how God has delivered him in the past? There is, in fact, no reference to God in this chapter.

What we need to do in times of challenge is listen to spiritual encouragers. We have to meditate on God's word. We need to remember God's promises. We need to remember how God has intervened for us in the past.

Verses 2 & 3: **"So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow."** David should have learned his lesson in #21 about not going over to Achish, king of

Gath. This may be the same person, or the son of the previous king. The scholars are not certain if “Achish” is a name or a dynastic title.

Gath was one of five Philistine city-states. It was located just west of the territory of Judah. It was the hometown of Goliath. It may have been the dominant city in the Philistine confederation.

Whereas David went to Achish before by himself, now he has a significant mercenary force with him. This offers propaganda opportunities for Achish as well as an additional military ally. Achish could encourage people from the tribe of Judah to join with him and with David in fighting against Saul and his forces.

Verse 4 adds this additional note: **“And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.”** David is immediately relieved from the stress of dealing with the pursuit from King Saul. But the immediate relief for the stress of trials is not necessarily the right course of action, especially when it goes counter to God’s revealed will.

Verses 5-7: **“Then David said to Achish, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?’ So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.”** The exact location of Ziklag is uncertain. It was apparently to the south of Gath along the border with Judah.

There were nomadic groups like the Amalekites who lived in these southern desert regions. They were occasionally making raids against both the Philistines and the Hebrews. So this allocation of Ziklag to David and his clan seemed to be a win-win for Achish. He had more protection on his southern border. He didn’t have David and his Hebrews living right in Gath, putting a stress upon his resources and causing complaints among his people about foreigners and aliens living among them. David, in turn, had a certain security and protection from Saul, and he had a certain freedom to operate by not being at a distance from Gath and not too much under the authority of Achish.

Look at vv. 8 & 9: **“Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but**

would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish.”

Some of these people were classified as Canaanites. God had earlier told Joshua to wipe out all of the Canaanites. Earlier Saul got in trouble for not totally wiping out an entire clan of Amalekites. He allowed the king and the best of the cattle to survive. Here David also keeps the cattle. Thus David is not exactly following God’s prescription for holy war. He is being more pragmatic in killing enemies of Israel, some of whom may also be enemies of Philistia. He is leaving no one to tell the tale. Whether the Lord approves of all of this is in doubt.

Verse 10: **“When Achish asked, ‘Where have you made a raid today?’ David would say, ‘Against the Negeb of Judah,’ or, ‘Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites,’ or, ‘Against the Negeb of the Kenites.’”** So David is lying to Achish. He is claiming that he is making raids against Judah and its allies when he is not. Achish thinks that David is sealing his alliance with the Philistines and ensuring the enmity of his fellow Jews in Judah. There are no survivors of David’s raids to deny the story. Probably David also gives Achish some of his captured booty.

The chapter concludes in vv. 11 & 12: **“And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, ‘lest they should tell about us and say, “So David has done.”’ Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines. And Achish trusted David, thinking, ‘He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant.’”**

Under the stress of an extended trial, David has chosen expedience over faith and righteous action. Initially it appears that he has achieved what he wants--- relief from the stress of an extended trial. But we will find out next week that there are always complications when we depart from the revealed will of God.

The history of God’s deliverance of David should have kept him from heading out on his own. So should God’s record of dealing with us keep us from departing from His revealed will. But we all have a new trial facing us. Will we maintain our hope and trust in God if this corona virus epidemic and our government shutdown becomes extended? Normally we Christians find comfort and support from meeting together. But now even that is somewhat restricted. Fortunately we do have social media, and we have the phone, and sometimes we may need to check in on each other in person. Most importantly, we have God’s word and its promises.

C. S. Lewis wrote an essay back in 1948 addressing the crisis of his time. The title was "On Living in the Atomic Age." Listen to his encouragement and think "corona virus" when he speaks of the danger of the atomic bomb. He wrote, **"In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb [or corona virus]. 'How are we to live in an atomic age [or corona virus age]?' I am tempted to reply: 'Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.'**

"In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb [corona virus] was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors--- anesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

"This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb [or corona virus], let that bomb [or virus] when it comes find us doing sensible and human things--- praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts--- not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs [or viruses]. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds."

So may it be with us.