

David – A Man on the Run

The Life of David

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Well, we continue tonight to follow the course of David's life, a man after God's own heart. We find him encountering considerably difficulty, facing immense hostility so that now he is a fugitive, he's a man on the run and that's our title tonight, "Man on the Run," and if you will, to just give, as it were, a flavor of our thoughts, 1 Samuel 23:12 and the way in which David discovers that the people of the city that he and his men at great risk had just delivered from the Philistines are actually going to then deliver him up, David, to Saul. So far from saying thank you very much, they're going to give him over to Saul that Saul might do his worst to David. Of course, Saul achieves that end and that chapter is full of remarkable escapes and things where Saul is suddenly frustrated. He seems to be getting help but, no, the Lord's hand is against him and he doesn't prevail.

But David is now a fugitive well and truly and you see him journeying, don't you, through wildernesses into inhospitable places in order to evade detection. We noted last time, though, and we see it again here in 1 Samuel 23, that Jonathan, the eldest son of Saul who might have and did entertain expectations of being the future king, but now can see that God is with David and that his own father behaving abominably toward David. He's fully persuaded of that and he sides with David and he has to side against his father at great personal cost, and in himself reconcile himself to the fact that David, not he, Jonathan, will be the future king.

Well, Jonathan's friendship is a real tonic to David, proves it to be again here, and sadly this is actually the last meeting on earth between these two good good friends, and we looked at that last time, something of the essence of their friendship. But Jonathan's father, Saul, now is just going from bad to worse, degenerating, degenerating, degenerating, a whole breakdown of his character, his instability, this irrational searching out of David, this monstrous attribution of such bad motives to David that he believes, as it were, now his own lies. He believes now his own reasonings. He really does think that David intends ill and is now absolutely entrenched in that view. He can see nothing good in him in that way, and though from time to time there's a weakening in that resolve, from time to time there's a change but it's not a real change and he reverts, then, back to type and he reverts back even worse than he was before. And we see there the downward spiral of this man, protecting, as people often do, don't they, onto David his own thoughts, what he would have done in that position. If he was David, he might well have

wanted to take the kingship for himself, wanted the throne, wanted the crown. He might well have imagined himself fighting for it in the state that he's now in and he projects onto David that kind of attitude which, well, David is not in that at all. And we'll see in future weeks how in this time of great pressure when he's a man on the run, he's a man of mercy, extraordinary extraordinary mercy. In chapter 23 of 1 Samuel, just as a catalog of ways in which he's being betrayed left, right and center, and yet still we find coming from his soul, we'll see in future weeks, great great mercy, very merciful attitude. Not a sort of temporary fit, just as Saul repentances are like a temporary fit, but then he goes back to normal, but David actually his normal is actually to be merciful. Although on some occasions he has to work a little harder to get to that position, but nevertheless that's what is in his heart to be.

So he's a man now on the run and he has to go through a tortuous journey. We don't have time to go through the entirety of the narrative and as I've said at the beginning of this series, we're kind of just drawing upon certain wider themes, bigger themes rather than following the narrative, as it were, from place to place and studying, as it were, where all these mountains might be and deserts are and so forth. So he's been to see Samuel, he's been also to the priests and the high priest in particular, Ahimelech at Nob. But while there and he receives there the bread which in theory is only for the priests to be able to use but here is an emergency and Ahimelech allows that the bread that is to be replaced on the table there before the Lord in the tabernacle that was in place at that time. But unfortunately Doeg, an Edomite, is there as well and David saw him and this there was instinctive, isn't it, trouble. He saw trouble and rightly saw trouble too as Doeg was quick to report back to Saul David's whereabouts and Saul in his fury ended up killing Ahimelech, the high priest, and all the other priests regarding them as part of this wider plot against David, for at that time priests, the high priest and the priests knew nothing of what was actually happening, didn't realize David was now a man on the run. But they paid for Saul's jealousy, madness, with their own lives.

So this has become a feature now of David having to flee, nowhere safe, he's putting other people's lives in jeopardy. He goes amongst the Philistines, 1 Samuel 21, we'll come to that in a few week's time. He ends up having to feign madness before then returning back to Judah. But not the kind of habited environments, not the towns, but in fact for the most part in wildernesses. The town there that he delivers, well, he doesn't have to stay there too long for it's dangerous and he's out in the cave of Adullam, we find him there in the wilderness of Ziph and down in the southern part of Judah, very barren places, very very infertile places. This is where you go to hide and the vast areas so that you won't be detected but the Ziphites there have got their spies looking for him.

In the meantime, David has found security for his parents in Moab. That's interesting. Moab. Well, it's very interesting because, of course, up the family tree, his great grandmother was Ruth, the Moabitess, and something of a sympathy, something of a togetherness in that makes it, at that point at least, to be a safe environment for him to place his parents in safekeeping because nobody is safe. Anybody with any connection with David is liable to be put to death by Saul on just a whim and a hunch. So it was necessary to find safety for his parents.

Well, I read at the outset there in Revelation 12:13-17. We're going to exegete the entirety of that but seeing from here that the dragon and the serpent that is spoken about is the devil and the woman is the church and to all those who belong to the church, true church, being persecuted, the dragon enraged against her. And there's something of that here. There is something of that devilish persecution of true believers, those who adhere to the testimony of Jesus, as it's put in Revelation 12:17. And notice how it talks about the earth helping God's people, helping the woman, how she's given wings or how the earth there opened up. And, well, pretty graphic, isn't it, the serpent, as it were, spitting out water from its mouth and such things, and yet the earth helps the people of God. Well, you find helps, don't you, and we'll come to those in a moment in this passage and elsewhere. God is with his people protecting, guarding, and just as there in Revelation, we have a new covenant feel to it, a New Testament feel but nevertheless it's the same persecution as David. He had it. The Lord Jesus Christ, of course, had it. And the church has it. It's something that comes with being believers.

First heading though: guarding against bad tactics. And I'll enlarge a bit more upon this in a future sermon, but just to dwell a moment here upon David's sojourn amongst the Philistines, yes, you heard it right, amongst the Philistines, he went to Gath. Gath of all cities associated with Goliath. Goliath, you mean, the giant whom he slew? Yes. He's gone there. Well, we'll reflect a little bit more upon that and why he did that in a future sermon but suffice it to say here that it was not a good idea and that this was a bad move, bad tactics that David here employed.

And we find, actually, perhaps something of his reflection on these things and what he learned about these things from some of the Psalms that correlate with this period of his life, instances being Psalm 34 and Psalm 56. And Psalm 56, perhaps we find there that, yes, he learned, he learned from his mistakes. It's the thing to do, isn't it, there? "Bad move, bad tactics, David, going to the Philistines to look for help there. Why aren't you trusting God?" But that returned to him and, well, won't give too much away but what we're going to be saying in future sermons but basically we shouldn't judge David too too harshly. This is a huge pressure that he's under and that his faith should fail him at this time when he feared for his life and have a good reason to suppose that, that people are dying all around him, priests have been put to death or are about to be and such things.

So Psalm 56 just to read a few verses from that. Where he is we see there when the Philistines captured him in Gath, that they put him a bit under house arrest there. "Be merciful to me," he says in verse 1, "O God, for man would swallow me up; Fighting all day he oppresses me. My enemies would hound me all day, For there are many who fight against me, O Most High." Talking about Saul and his men in view, we've got the Philistines now in view, the whole world set against him. He reflects verses 5 and 6, "All day they twist my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather together, They hide, they mark my steps, When they lie in wait for my life."

But we find him able to reflect at the end of the Psalm upon deliverance. The Lord, and this Lord he's speaking about here, isn't it, that he's had done some strange strange things

and we'll come to it another day, but feigning madness in order to escape the sort of fear that is mounting, that this man David is a bit of a threat to us Philistines. And so he feigns madness as if to say, "You don't need to worry about me." Well, it was not the best moment in David's life there. And here he is in Psalm 56:12 and 13, "Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, That I may walk before God In the light of the living?" Deliverance, found deliverance. Bad move going to the Philistines, we understand David is still a young man, Saul's behavior is unpredictable to say the least and very very threatening. So he has to retrace his steps but he does it reflecting on the Lord's deliverance to him and his feet were kept from falling. It could have ended so disastrously in Gath. It could have ended so so differently but now he's escaped and he's able to walk before God in the light of the living.

We find him other time as well that actually his behavior towards Ahimelech was not good. The high priest on his arrival there, he doesn't explain that actually he's a fugitive and things are dangerous and that, "For you to be seen with me is a dangerous thing." And he is vague with Ahimelech about what he's doing and why and really leads, in a sense, there to the deaths of those priests and Ahimelech the high priest. So again, a need to trust God the more, perhaps he should have been more forthcoming with Ahimelech, warned him of the dangers that lay ahead, allowed Ahimelech really there to make his own risk assessment, if you will, rather than finding out there to his cost later on that actually David was not just on an errand for the king but was actually escaping from him.

Psalm 34:4-7 where we see that this also comes out of his time of reflection after his stay in Gath and he speaks there perhaps to what he had to learn and where he had to look for his help. "I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, And delivers them." That's where he's reached, that he needs to look to the Lord for the Lord can deliver, can deliver his people from all manner of difficulties and hardships.

But when we're under pressure, dear friends, isn't it the case we need to watch the bad decisions that we may be rushed into making and which have consequences not only for ourselves but for other people and bring them into a messy situation where they learn later on that maybe we hadn't told them the whole story, and they then find out to their cost. It's always good to be open, always good to be truthful, always good when confidences have to be kept sometimes and we can't always tell the whole whole story, but to indicate that there is a story and to ensure that people understand that if they're entering into this particular situation or relationship that they need to know there may be a cost to them. David misses that. He doesn't do that and in that way brings a little guilt upon himself there. We have to be careful.

It's easily done and we're going to be dealing with David in a quite sympathetic way when we come to look at him. There he is under great threat, great danger. Suddenly he's gone native, if you like, forgotten the Lord, now making it up as he goes along,

disastrously at times. We have to guard that we don't fall into the same mistake that's so easy to do and to end up then a little bit trapped in our own kind of world of intrigue that we've made and getting caught out and getting other people into difficulty too, guarding them against bad tactics.

And here is the second heading: betrayal is a reality. Betrayal is a reality and this comes through, doesn't it, in that chapter that we read. Betrayal. David, the man on the run. He needs friends, do with friends. Well, he has some friends. They rally to him but many people don't, even people that he has helped don't and end up there being prepared the Lord tells David, being prepared to hand him over to Saul, to give him over to the very man who is seeking his life. So David here, he himself is now at the receiving end of other people's behavior and bad decisions and these are the decisions of fearful people. Well, David himself fearful, made his set of bad decisions. Here are other people, they're fearful and likewise they're making some poor poor decisions.

He saved the people in Keilah, hasn't he and showed great courage, great leadership. The men who were with him were very very uncertain about this and though he sought the Lord, note that, he'd sought the Lord, they still are wondering, "Are we going to be able to win this battle? This is a battle here that looks rather difficult, the Philistines are strong, are we sure we've got the right guidance?" And David seeks the Lord again and they have the right guidance and David shows leadership, spiritual leadership, I suppose military leadership, and the campaign is a great great success. The city is freed from the Philistines and now has liberty again.

So you think they might be grateful, wouldn't you? You would think they might be grateful. Here were these men who at cost to their own lives were risking their own necks to come and set them free from their oppressors, the Philistines. Well, whatever they knew and they knew something, didn't they, about the ins and outs of what was going on and Saul pursuing David, you might have thought that they would be grateful enough to for David and his men and their work to offer them sanctuary. Could have been a walled city, got gates, but therein lay the danger. But now they're there, if the people actually were not sympathetic after all despite what David had done, David and his men are trapped. They're in a city with no escape and that, of course, is what Saul sees in this. He realizes that David is Keilah, in that city. He's trapped. He's making haste to catch him.

But we see that David seeks the Lord and the Lord warns him that that is what the people will do, hence verse 12 in our kind of main theme for the evening, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?" He asked that question and you might say, well, of course they won't. They'll be grateful to you, David, and to all the men. But not, "And the LORD said, 'They will deliver you.'" Well, we don't hear or see there David's reaction, what he thought, rather they move quickly, "So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go." It's not places that had provision for them, a town up in a nice place to settle. But no, that was not to be their resting place, just as our Lord Jesus had no resting place in the true church, in a sense, that we're always, in a way, on the move, there's no kind of calm and peaceful settling down.

Betrayal. And what people will do when they're afraid, never never underestimate what frightened people, fearful people will do, and what loyalties they might break. Here the people of Keilah and other people in the kingdom were afraid of Saul. They knew what he was like. They had heard by reputation that he would get the sword out and kill people that are seen to be sympathetic with David. So we can understand that but it's still really given David's courage and the example of that, well, it asserts that there they lack courage and are unwilling to show their debt of gratitude to David and his men. Friendships, well, Jonathan stands out in that example, standing by his friend come what may, even his father is now minded to kill his own son, but he stands with David but the people of Keilah don't. Betrayal can be a reality.

And it only goes from bad to worse, in a sense, because having then taken refuge amongst the Ziphites in remote places here, now the Ziphites really take, well, the initiative and hot-foot it to Saul. You can see them in verse 19 going to as Saul held court at Gibeah, "Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?" They give the directions there, didn't they? You don't need your SAT now that they've told him absolutely where the location is. Being helpful, well, that's what fear, again, can do. Do they not know that Saul's a tyrant? Do they not know that his behavior left him totally unsuited to being king? Did they not know that God was with David who had slain Goliath and then gone on to slay his tens of thousands? But here fear again dominates and they're willing now to be informants and to help Saul in his efforts to pursue and then catch and kill David.

We notice there that even though for the true church, there can be betrayal, that those who once were loyal suddenly become not and they've gone, they're off following some other creed or behaving in ways that we just cannot quite understand or get our heads around and that is throughout the history of the church the fact that God is with his people. In the midst of betrayal, he is with his people and we could notice in these chapters, we can just do a sort of fleeting glance. Look back into chapter 22 and where David at that point was in the hills and caves of Adullam but now Gad the prophet in verse 5 of 1 Samuel 22 says, "'Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go to the land of Judah.' So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth." Danger. Gad the prophet, God had told him danger, and while it had been a good place to be, he had sanctuary, there was protection. Saul was very thorough and it was on his list of places to come and unbeknownst to Saul, God was giving David help and instruction through the prophet Gad.

Help is given, therefore, and wonderful answers to prayer too. We notice that in chapter 23 and the seeking of the Lord, the only priest who escaped from Nob, the son of Ahimelech managed to get away and tell David, brought the ephod with him which had within it there and we fully don't know what these were, the urim and the thummim, but this which was used to discern the will of God and to determine what was God's mind in a particular situation. They had the help of that. So first of all, that, yes, go up. God would deliver Keilah into your hand and then Saul will come looking for you there and the people of Keilah will now deliver you up. And this, again, is the Lord's help.

And again notice this, the supernaturalism in all of it. This account of places and what's happening, it's very earthbound, isn't it, very much localities, but then notice how when David is at this mountain, verse 26 of chapter 23, and Saul is encircling the mountain. This could be it. This could be curtains, we might be thinking here. Where can David go? He's trapped. But then verse 27, "a messenger came to Saul, saying, 'Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!'" And well, that's a greater emergency that requires Saul's attention and he calls off the siege. David, then, is able to go up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi, we read in verse 29. They called that place the rock of escape and it was the rock of escape and it was God who gave him that deliverance.

News had reached Saul but how come then at that point, at that time? What a providence. God is the architect of providence, supernatural providences, helps that can come to his people just when they need it. When they've been betrayed and hardships come, but that God's guidance is with them, his help is there and he can make events turn out in most remarkable ways. News reaches Saul's ears much as it did Rabshakeh's when he was besieging Jerusalem. Hezekiah was shut in there like a bird in a cage, as Sennacherib said. And then they hear the Ethiopians had come and were creating difficulty and they had to call off the siege at least for a while and this is the Lord's doing.

Well, final heading: the bonds of fellowship. The bonds of fellowship, that out of times of adversity, David, the man on the run, hard hard period of his life, and he finds friends. We knew about Jonathan, we were looking at him last week, but he finds other friends too. These 600 men, didn't they come out to him in chapter 22, and are now fighting alongside him at Keilah, standing with him. Soon he's got families as well who have joined with him too. And that's what adversity can do, it can bring the most solid and lasting friendships. That's the way it happens when you're risking your life together, isn't it? That people in the armed forces, they stay in touch with each other. They fought battles together, saved each other's lives. There's a bond, faced the same difficulties and hardships, endured them together and there is a bond, a lasting friendship that comes because of adversity and this is what happens here. We learn in scripture a brother is born for adversity. That's true of Jonathan. It certainly was, but these other people too that have come to David have been there, not only Jonathan strengthening his hand but these other people have as well.

Psalm 142:7 comes from this period as well, prayer when he was in the cave and we take that to be the cave of Adullam which we've mentioned in chapter 22. At the end of the Psalm he says this, "Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me." The righteous shall surround me, people sympathetic to my cause who are also on that wavelength and wanting to serve God. They've seen through Saul and recognized in David now is the man after God's own heart and they've rallied to him. They've suffered under Saul, quite a few of them have been dispossessed, they're in debt. They realize that Saul is not the king that they need. David is. Now they're with him and David appreciates their solidarity with him at his time of great need in adversities under siege from Saul, his life in his hands at

all times, and here are these people alongside him. They're going to suffer with him if need be, die with him, recognizing David's leadership and staying strong with him.

We mentioned that this is the last time that Jonathan would meet with him. Jonathan again at great risk, he's with his father in the army and he's just sort of sneaked away. He knows where David is and looks him out there and we find him in verses 16 and through to 18 talking to him and forming again, renewing their covenant together. This is something very much which is part of Jonathan's most impressive character, something very very impressive about this man. And it's touching when he says that, "Do not fear." Well, that's saying to David what he needs to hear, isn't it? Well, fear has driven him to all kinds of bad decisions and fear has been the curse there of Ziphites and the men of Keilah. They've been gripped by fear. "Do not fear," he says, "for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you." It's strong, isn't it? That's a word there that comes from the Lord to David and it's true. "You shall be king over Israel." That's true. He's testified to it but we hear with sadness the next, "and I shall be next to you." Not to be. Jonathan is to die in battle quite soon. That is not quite to be fulfilled but we're so touched by his modesty, humility, that he's going to take second place to David. He'll be happy to play second fiddle there, if you will, that David is the appointed man. They make a covenant together.

So we see that Jonathan strengthened his hand in God in verse 16. That's what friends do, isn't it? They strengthen our hands in God. A word in season. Encouragement, "Do not fear." We need to hear that, all of us need to hear that at times, just to have our perspective put right. "God is with you. God can deliver you. Don't be afraid. There aren't any hardships and adversities, that's not going to destroy the church. Be of good courage. Press on." And this is where David is hearing Jonathan, perhaps hearing it too from other people, more spiritual minded people amongst that company.

Man on the run. Fugitive, that's really the church. We're in the wilderness there. We have, as it were, in the world at large not much of a sympathetic ear and much of the time but that's where we are to be to each other, under fellowship, that band of pilgrims on our journey together to glory, God with us, strengthening each other's hands in the things of God. May the Lord encourage us and help us. We haven't got literal deserts to be in. We're not there camped out in the cave of Adullam or on a hill and a literal Saul after us. There are enemies enough there who have got much ill will toward the church but beyond beyond the very God of scripture, the God of Israel our God. Amen.

MAN ON THE RUN: 1 Samuel 23:12.

Reading: 1 Samuel 23: 1-29.

David is now a fugitive. He now knows that Saul intends only harm against him. Jonathan has proved himself to be a loyal friend and has risked his relationship with his father and his own life, to help David. Saul only sees evil in David, wrongly believing that David is bent on overthrowing him and seizing the crown. David has to flee, going firstly to the priest at Nob. But Doeg, an Edomite, sees David here and reports this to Saul, which leads to the deaths of all the priests, except for Abiathar, who manages to escape and bring word to David.

David then is gripped by fear and seeks refuge among the Philistines in Gath, something that we will look at in a future sermon. David feigns madness when he realizes that he is in danger there and then takes up residence in the Cave of Adullam, before having to leave its sanctuary and lead a nomadic existence with his followers. In the meantime, he finds safety for his parents in the land of Moab. All the time he is being pursued by Saul. This is the experience of the true church, persecuted by Satan, and having to find help and refuge in the wilderness (Revelation 12:13-17).

1. Guarding against bad tactics.

David makes some poor decisions at this time. Partly as a result of this, it leads to the deaths of the priests at Nob, including Ahimelech, the High Priest. This we can read of in 1 Samuel 22. We can see from some of the Psalms, like Psalm 34 and 56, that David learnt much from these mistakes. Examples would include what we read in Psalm 56:1-2, 5-6, and 12-13. David has been under great pressure and there is no doubt that David intends to kill him. He is still a young man with much to learn and so we must not be too harsh in our judgment of his behaviour at this time in his life. He was hoping to be able to find relief and safety but took some wrong and costly steps.

He lies to Ahimelech in 1 Samuel 21:2 which was unworthy of him. This left Ahimelech unaware of the danger that he had been exposed to by meeting with David. He also lies to Achish, the king of Gath, by feigning madness (1 Samuel 21:13) which is again unworthy of David. In all of this, he needed to trust the Lord more, something that comes out in Psalm 34: 4-7. We too have to be on our guard when we are feeling under pressure that we are not rushed into making poor decisions that may have unhappy consequences for us and others. Sometimes when we are weary or when we are feeling low, we can rush to seek some remedy, but it actually makes things worse in the long-run.

2. Betrayal is a reality.

At this time of David's life, he is also at the receiving end of some bad treatment by other people. We see David and his followers coming to the aid of the people of Keilah (1 Samuel 23:1-5). In so doing, he shows great courage and leadership. It is also something that is undertaken having sought the counsel of the Lord. Yet then the people are prepared to yield David up to Saul (1 Samuel 23:12). Any loyalty and debt of gratitude they might have owed to David evaporates away because they are afraid of Saul and act against David in the hope of earning Saul's approval. People act like this when they are afraid.

The same thing happens in 1 Samuel 23: 19-20 when the people of Ziph betray the whereabouts of David to Saul, again in the hope of gaining Saul's help and protection. Again, we learn how treacherous people can be in order to save their own skins.

This must have been very difficult for David to have to experience. But the Lord sends him help and encouragement. Gad, a prophet, is there to give counsel and helpful warning (1 Samuel 22:5). There are wonderful answers to prayer (1 Samuel 23:2, 4, 10-12). There are also supernatural interventions (1 Samuel 23:26-28) to protect David and his followers.

There can be times in the history of the church where people seem willing to betray the true cause of Christ and side with the 'Sauls' of this world. They join with the enemies of the truth because they feel safer with them and hope to avoid difficulty. It is a bad policy.

3. The bonds of fellowship.

Times of adversity are the times when we find out who our true friends are. David reflects on this in Psalm 142:7 which is from this difficult period of David's life. But there were those who came over to David and were reliable and good friends in this time of adversity. These were people who had also suffered under Saul (1 Samuel 22:3-4). They recognized David's leadership and had concluded that the Lord was with him. They fight alongside him at Keilah and are willing to risk all to be with him.

We also see again how good a friend Jonathan is to David (1 Samuel 23: 16) We learn that on this, the last time the two friends will meet on earth, Jonathan strengthens David's hand in the Lord. This is what good spiritual friends do for us. They remind us of the Lord's purposes, of His power and of His love toward us. These kinds of friendships and true loyalties are often fashioned in adversity. Persecution often makes the bonds between believers stronger. We pray more for each other and learn to carry each other's burdens. Even if the world does oppose us and might do more so in the future, we know that the Lord will bring us all closer together.