

Let the Afflicted Hear and Rejoice!

David the Fugitive Pt.1
1 Samuel 21 3-8-2009

Summary: The point of 1 Samuel is: "God is still the king." The contrast between David and Saul is not to show the greatness of David, but to show that the one who bows the knee to the real king is blessed. David goes first to the house of God to seek guidance and get help. He lies to Ahimelech to protect him (the place is bugged by Doeg). God shows His favor by giving David the food right off His own table and the greatest sword in the land. But then God sends him to the lion's den (Gath), where despite his prayers for help he is captured. He has to humiliate himself, but God delivers him and David is full of joy.

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Psalms 34:1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. 2 My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. 3 Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. 4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. 5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. 6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. 8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. 9 Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. 10 The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. 11 Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 12 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. 15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; 16 the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. 17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. 18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; 20 he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. 21 Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. 22 The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

Introduction

Imagine that you were a US soldier fighting in Afghanistan, and you were falsely accused of treason. You were set to be executed, but before that happens you escape and the only place for you to hide is a village deep inside Taliban-controlled territory. You are hiding, praying that you won't be captured, but soon you are discovered and dragged in to the local Taliban warlord who is known for his merciless torture and brutality. No one from home is going to save you and now you are at the mercy of a monster who considers you his greatest enemy in the world. What do you do? That's almost exactly the situation in which David finds himself in 1 Samuel 21.

Why the life of David?

We return this morning to our study of the life of David after a long break. In fact it has been so long I should probably remind you why we are doing this study. If you have been in my hermeneutics class you know that I am not a big fan of character studies. The reason we have stories in the Bible is not so we can study the people; it is so we can study God. God is the main character of all the Bible stories, and it is a mistake, in most cases, to focus on the human beings in the story.

David, however, is an exception. David is an individual that God does want us to focus our attention on and to learn from his example. David's name is mentioned more times in the Bible than anyone except the Lord Himself - 1089 times! That is 400 more than Adam, Isaiah, Noah, Elijah, Paul and Abraham all put together. David is mentioned twice by name before he is even born. God devoted 68 chapters of Scripture to the life of David. Second place is Joseph, with 13.

I think there are at least three reasons for that. One is that knowing about the life of David is important for understanding the Psalms. Secondly, understanding David is crucial for understanding Jesus. Almost all messianic prophecy in is based on David and God's promises to him.¹ And the third reason why God wants us to know about the life of David is because Scripture says that David's life is to be an example for us. All the kings that followed David are measured in Scripture according to how well they compare to David. He is the Old Testament standard for godliness, not only for kings, but also for the people themselves. The reason the kingdom was divided in the first place was because God punished them for not following the example of David's faithfulness (1 Ki.11:33). Very few people, if any, (except for Jesus Himself), have ever loved God like David loved God. God gave us 68 chapters on David because He wanted us to have a crystal clear idea of what a man after God's own heart looks like.

Now, of course we have an infinitely greater example of how to live a godly life in the life of Jesus, who never sinned and that is why we preach Christ far more than we preach about David. However, one thing you cannot learn from Jesus' example is how your own sin fits into the equation of walking with the Lord. We do not learn from Jesus' example how to repent of sin and recover from failure.

Review

If you boil the book of Samuel down to its most basic message, it is probably this: God is still the King. When Samuel started getting old the people rejected God as their king and demanded a human king so they could be like everyone else. So God punished their disobedience by giving them what they asked for - Saul. Saul did not start out bad, but he became bad for two reasons:

Fear of man

He cared more about what people thought than about what God thought.

¹ The Messiah is the great Son of David, and David's character and reign was a picture of the character and reign of his greater Son, the Messiah. The reign of David was designed by God to teach us how to have joyful hope in the future reign of Christ. The accounts of David fill our minds with imagery of a great king who is good and powerful and wise and beautiful and a delight to the people he leads. Everything in us that is drawn to stories of bravery and adventure and valor and good vs. evil is all satisfied by the accounts of David. That is by design, because David is a picture of the ultimate King, the great Son of David – the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have not gone through those four sermons I would strongly urge everyone to do that. Saul was governed by fear of man rather than fear of God, and that led to his decline.

Both David and Saul sinned. But Saul responded to his sin by trying to restore himself without really letting go of his sin. He would obey God as far as he agreed with God. But when God's will was different than Saul's, Saul would not give up calling the shots in his own life.

So God rejects Saul - twice – first in chapter 13 and then again in chapter 15. Then when David's name appears for the first time in chapter 16 the mood of the book shifts. God tells Samuel to stop grieving over Saul. It is time for the joy of hope to eclipse the pain of grief because God's is about to select a man after His own heart to be king.

God is still King

From the time David first appears all the way to the end of the book the writer contrasts David and Saul and the contrast couldn't be more stark. David has the Holy Spirit, but not the throne. Saul has the throne, but not the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit leaves Saul He is replaced by a demon, and Saul is tormented for the rest of his life, is rejected by God and dies in disgrace. But David clearly has the blessing and approval of God. He has a hard life, but a good life because he is blessed by God. It is a lot better to have the Spirit without the throne than the throne without the Spirit.

And the point of all that is not to show that David is so much better than Saul. It is that David bows the knee to the real King and Saul doesn't.

1 Samuel 12:12 "when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'--even though the LORD your God was your king. 13 Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. 14 If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God--good! 15 But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

24 But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart ... 25 Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away."

Basically God was saying, "You want a man with a crown and a throne? Fine. But I'm still your King. You want a human king because you're worried about your wellbeing, but you need to realize that that human king has nothing to do with your wellbeing. Your wellbeing is 100% dependent upon whether you obey Me. Obey Me and I'll take care of you and your little king. Disobey Me and both you and your little guy with his little crown will be swept away like so much dust."

You might hear that and say, "That makes it sound like the human king of Israel is really just a figurehead, and the real king is God." That is exactly right. And that is the message of 1 Samuel. David is great, and David is successful – not because of his techniques or skill or intelligence or strength, but because he bows the knee to the real King.

David Runs to God

So in chapter 16 David is secretly anointed by Samuel. After that, David gets a high rank in the army, and he is blessed with so much success that Saul becomes jealous and starts trying to kill David. But God keeps protecting him and blesses everything David does and frustrates everything Saul does. And it is so obvious in these early chapters that it is God and not David. David's words and actions are hardly ever mentioned – just report after report of God granting him success.

God even uses Saul's own children to protect David – first his daughter Michal, then his son Jonathan. We left off at the end of chapter 20 when Jonathan finally realizes that his father is trying to kill David, he rebukes his father, and Saul in turn tries to kill Jonathan. So David and Jonathan say their goodbyes, and now David is on the run.

So we pick up the story where we left off last time with David in a field.

1 Samuel 20:42 Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

So there David stands in that field, watching his best friend walking down the path toward home. And as Jonathan disappears over the hill, a chill running through David's body as the reality of this situation sinks in. Where is he going to go now? He certainly cannot go back home or to a friend's house – Saul's soldiers will be there for sure.

We get a little bit of an idea of how David thinks from the last time he escaped – when he climbed out the window of his house. When that happened he fled to Ramah. To give you an idea where all these places are – if you think of Gibeah (Saul's headquarters) as being right down the street at 104th and I-25, David lived in Bethlehem, which is down by the downtown Denver exit at 34th – about eight miles south. Ramah is just a couple miles north of Gibeah – right around 120th. So David escapes from the 34th Street exit, travels right by 104th where Saul was, so he could get to 120th. Why go that direction? If you are running away from Saul, why travel right past his palace?

It was dangerous, but David did it anyway because he really wanted to get to Ramah, because that was where Samuel lived and there was a group of prophets up there. When David was in trouble he would run to God. And if there was a man or group of men who spoke for God, David wanted to be near them – even if it means passing by Saul's very house.

But hiding out in Ramah did not work out very well. Word got to Saul in no time, and David had to escape again. So now here stands David in this field – no food, no sword, nowhere to go. And so he starts making his way south toward Nob – right around Thornton Parkway.²

So there he goes, stumbling and fighting his way through the rough terrain – staying off the road, out of sight, silently making his way down to Nob. Why Nob? Same reason he went to Ramah in chapter 19. At this time the Tabernacle was located in Nob. David didn't know where to go, so he went to where the Sanctuary was so he could ask a priest to inquire of the Lord for him so he could seek guidance from God. (We see that in 22:9-15.)

God endorses David

So let's see what happens when David gets to Nob. The question in the reader's mind at this point is – "Who is going to have God's favor – Saul or David?" That is really the question any time there is a conflict among God's people – which side, if any, has God's approval? We are about to find out, because David is going to the very house of God.

1 David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him

The priest took David very, very seriously. At this point David was not a man that *anyone* took lightly. You already know at this point in the book that God's purposes are bound up in David, and so we are really not all that surprised to see a priest of God tremble in David's presence.

Another factor may have been the fact that David didn't have his normal entourage with him.

² Jerusalem is just a couple miles south – at about 88th St.

1 Ahimelech trembled when he met him and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" 2 David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place.

So in essence David's answer is – "I'm sorry, that's classified." David makes up a story that he is on this top secret mission, and he feeds Ahimelech a big cloak and dagger line to explain why he is alone. Why? Why not just tell him the truth? I believe it was because he was trying to protect Ahimelech, because David knew that the place was bugged, as it were. (We'll see how in a minute.) But David knows this conversation is going to get back to Saul, so if Ahimelech knowingly helps David that would put him in jeopardy. So David lies to protect Ahimelech.

Request for help

At this point David asks Ahimelech to inquire of the Lord for him so he can get guidance from God. And once that is done, David asks for help.

3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." 4 But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here--provided the men have kept themselves from women."

The word translated "regular" means "profane" – it is the opposite of the word "holy." Profane bread is common, regular, everyday bread. So Ahimelech says, "We don't have any regular bread. This isn't a bakery. However we do have some holy bread."

Now, at that statement every ancient Jewish eyebrow rises. In Exodus 25, when God was giving instructions for the Holy Place, He told them to make a gold table to hold 12 very large loaves of bread (each one was baked with 3.5 lb of flour – and there were 12, so 42 pounds of flour for the batch). And those loaves were replaced with fresh baked loaves every Sabbath day. No one but the priests ever came near this bread – it always remained in the Holy Place and when they replaced it, the priests would eat the old bread. Only priests could eat it, and they could only eat it in a holy place.

Everything in the Holy Place was extremely sacred, and this bread was no exception. Not only was it forbidden for anyone but a priest to eat it, but it had to be prepared in a very specific way, and arranged on the table in a certain way, and the table it was on had to be gold, and the table itself was so holy that it was to be carried with poles just like the ark.

And Ahimelech offers to let David have it to feed to his men on the condition that they are ceremonially clean. This is the only time ever that we know of that anyone who was not a priest ever ate the bread of the presence.

Now, what do you know from past history about what happens when someone does something out of the ordinary with regard to something in the Holy Place? Remember Uzzah? He transported the ark once on a cart instead of the prescribed way, and when the oxen and Uzzah reached out to keep the ark from falling off the cart, God instantly struck him dead. When Nadab and Abihu switched up the way the offering was presented, God burned them alive on the spot. Experimentation within the Sanctuary is hazardous to one's health.

So what is going to happen? Does fire come down from heaven and consume Ahimelech and David?

5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 6 So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread

of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

Nobody drops dead. No lightning, no earthquake – nothing. This passage does not present Ahimelech in a negative light at all – just the opposite. As you read through the next chapter you see that he is presented in a very positive light. He is the priest in charge of the Holy Place. He is representing God here. I believe what is happening here shows that in this conflict with Saul, David has God on his side. David has God's favor. And also to show that God makes a dramatic exception to His law to take special care of David.

Divine exception

If you are a student of Scripture you may remember that Jesus mentioned this event in Matthew 12:1-8.

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

Jesus' answer is something totally different from what you expect. You would think He would say something like, "We didn't break God's law – just your silly rules." But that is not what Jesus says. He wants to make a much more important and profound point.

3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread--which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests."

The standard interpretation of this is that Jesus was simply saying, "Look, God's ceremonial rules can be bent a little bit in an emergency. Human need is more important than ritual." But the situation with the Disciples eating some grain as they walked along was hardly a life and death emergency. And with regard to human need, I am sure there were always plenty of poor people around every single Sabbath when the bread of the presence was replaced. And yet never, ever, in the entire history of Israel is there any record that anyone besides a priest ever ate that bread (except David).

If you want to understand Jesus' point, just look at His conclusion in verse 8.

8 Therefore the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

If all Jesus is saying is that the account about David shows us that you can bend the rules in an emergency or when there is human need, how do you conclude from that that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath?

I am convinced that Jesus' point is not that it is OK to bend the ceremonial rules. The history of the Old Testament teaches us exactly the opposite. What Jesus is saying is, "If *God* says David can do something, then he can do it." No man is allowed to bend God's rules. Those who tried often found themselves burnt to a crisp. However, God Himself can make exceptions to His own rules if He so pleases, and that is what He did with David.

And that fits the other example Jesus gave.

5 Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?

God said no work on the Sabbath and yet the priests work like crazy on that day. And that was by God's command. So again, the priests were allowed to break the no work rule on the Sabbath because God is the one who makes the rules so He is free to make exceptions.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying, "God is free to make any exception He pleases to any rule He pleases, and I'm God, so if I tell these guys they can eat some grain, they can eat it." That is why He concludes by saying...

6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.

8 Therefore the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

I am in charge of both the Temple and the Sabbath and I can give anyone permission to do anything I please.

Both the context of 1 Samuel 21 itself as well as Jesus' reference to it in Matthew 12 confirm that the special favor David finds in the eyes of the priest is a sign of God's favor.³

Doeg

But then in verse 7 an ominous cloud arises.

7 Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd.

The writer does not tell you why he is significant until chapter 22. For now he just tells you that he is there. That fact that he is an Edomite means he is a potentially sinister character. And the fact that he is Saul's man makes it pretty much certain that he is trouble. So this is like when you are watching a movie and the camera turns for a moment and shows you some new, shady looking character who is watching what is going on. You don't know who he is yet, but you think, "hmmm, I bet he's a bad guy."

He was **detained before the Lord** at the Tabernacle. Evidently he was fulfilling some vow to God or some such thing.

This is what I meant when I said the place was bugged. And we are going to find out in chapter 22 that David knew Doeg was there and that this whole thing would be reported to Saul. So David made sure that Ahimelech didn't know he was helping a fugitive so he wouldn't get in trouble.

The sword

Before he leaves David asks one more favor.

8 David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent.

David is good at a lot of things, but lying is not one of them. This story is getting more and more flimsy. If his companions had time to purify themselves prior to leaving on the mission, how could David

³ That is a fairly common principle in Scripture, and it is a good one for us to keep in mind. When God grants you favor in the eyes of men – especially in the eyes of godly people that is a blessing from God. Receive that as a gift of love from the Lord, and a sign of His favor on you. When you tell people something and they believe you, when people trust you, when people do favors for you and show you kindness that is a blessing from God. And when people don't – when they do not believe you or trust you or treat you well, when people do not seem to like you or favor you; if it is because you are doing something wrong, then stop doing that. But if it is happening even though you are not doing anything wrong, then instead of seeking favor from them, seek favor from God, and leave it up to God to grant you favor in the eyes of men.

not even have enough time to grab a sword? But God is granting David favor in the eyes of Ahimelech, and so it does not occur to Ahimelech to pick apart David's story.

9 The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one." David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

So David needs some food and a weapon, and God provides him with the very food literally right off God's own table, and for a weapon God gives him the greatest sword in existence. Without question David has the approval and favor of God. The writer wants us to understand that because of what happens next, because the expression of God's favor and approval does not always come in the form we expect.

God Sends David to Gath

What David does next is amazing. Keep in mind the greatest enemy of the Israelites are the Philistines. That has been the case since long before David was born. David had killed many, many Philistines (including Goliath), and he also knew what it was like for Israel to be dominated by the Philistines – like back in chapter 13.

But at this point David is desperate. He knows that wherever he goes in Israel Saul will find him. And even if he escapes, whoever helps David will then be in danger from Saul. So the only thing David can think to do is leave the country and go somewhere where Saul would never follow him. So in verse 10 David does the unthinkable.

10 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath.

Not only is that right in the heart of Philistine territory, but this town Gath was the hometown of... *Goliath!*

And I think it is safe to presume that he went there because God led him there. Remember, his purpose in going to Ahimelech was to seek guidance from the Lord, as well as to get food and a weapon. There is no reason to assume God gave him the food and the weapon and not the guidance. So it seems that God is sending David to Gath. But He sends him there not by any direct statement from a prophet that he should go there, but simply by removing every other option. David has absolutely nowhere else to go.

When your best hope is Gath...

You know you are in a rough spot when your best hope is going to Gath. Some of you are facing a situation kind of like that right now – where it seems like there are no good options. You lay out all the options and the best one is horrible. And you might be tempted to cry out to God and say, "God, every option is terrible. Every direction is blocked. Which way am I supposed to go?" And the answer is, "Take the option that is best. Even though it looks terrible to you, it's the path I've chosen for you." That does not mean God has abandoned you. It just means He and you are going to walk together through the valley of the shadow of darkness for a while.

Scary

This had to be a terrifying journey for David. The journey itself would be a dangerous one, because Saul is after him and David knows that Saul has intelligence from Doeg on his whereabouts. So you know he is going to show up soon. And it is a long trip on foot. On our scale map, Saul is at 104th and Nob is just south of that at Thornton Parkway, Gath falls right at Blackhawk. So you set out from here on foot with an APB out on you, you are at the top of the 10 most wanted list, and you have to make it to Blackhawk. And in Blackhawk are the people you have spent your whole adult life killing. It is the

hometown of the champion whose sword you are now carrying. So David has to make it past all the wolves along the way just so he can walk right into the lion's den.

Evidently David cuts his companions loose at this point. The events in Gath sound like David is alone. David does not want them to face the danger in Gath, and so he says goodbye to them, and sets out on the long road to Gath all by himself.

Fast forward a day or two. David makes it. He sneaks in to town – probably at night, and just tries to blend in and go unnoticed. If he can just lay low here for a while maybe he can figure his next move.

Besides the fear involved in such a dangerous move, can you imagine the loneliness? Totally cut off from his wife and family, no friends, he certainly cannot afford to get to know anyone here. He is in the most dangerous situation imaginable and he is totally alone. And if he gets discovered he is outnumbered thousands to one – he wouldn't have a chance.

But God has shown that He favors David. He has blessed him up to this point. Surely God will protect him. Surely God will give him a little break. God is his shelter and refuge – certainly God will provide him a place where he can lay low and go unnoticed. I don't know if David thought any of that, but if he did he was mistaken. This is a bad situation, and it is about to get a lot worse because in verse 11 the unthinkable happens.

Captured

11 But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: "'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?"

This is unbelievable. The great David – the man after God's own heart, God's anointed – about to be captured by the Philistines? This just cannot be happening!

But it is happening. David's attempt to lay low doesn't work. Not only is he recognized, but of all people – it is the officials of the king of Gath who recognize him. And they report him immediately.

And they don't just report him. They make an argument to the king for why he should take this seriously. This is the guy who is famous for killing thousands of our people and constantly defeating us in battle! So if David thought he was going to slip under the radar, they do their best to make sure that doesn't happen.

This is just like in the movies when the hero gets captured and finds himself in an absolutely impossible situation. What is David going to do now?

12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath.

Unlike the hero in the movies, David is scared to death. It is hard to imagine any good outcome here, and the Philistines were really not very nice to captured Israelite generals. They would not only kill you, but there would be a whole lot of torture and humiliation as well. And then they would use your head or your dead body to demoralize the Israelites (just like David did with Goliath's head).

David knows he is caught. There is no point in running. There is no escape at this point. What do you do now? What do you do when you are just about to be captured, arrested, and taken off to the most unthinkable torture and death? Well, if you are David, you write a psalm. If you are wondering what David was thinking and feeling at this moment, all you have to do is read Psalm 56.

Psalm 56:1 For the director of music. To the tune of "A Dove on Distant Oaks." Of David. A miktam. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.

So this was written just before he was arrested. The only thing the Samuel text tells us is that David was **very much afraid**. David is scared to death. And this is what came out of his heart:

Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. 2 My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride. 3 When I am afraid, (which is right now) I will trust in you. 4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid.

That is fascinating when you boil down that sentence to its essence. “When I am afraid...I will not be afraid.” Why?

What can mortal man do to me? 5 All day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to harm me. 6 They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life.

It sounds like Saul is just as much on his mind as Achish at this point. When someone hurts you that does not go away just because someone else starts hurting you.

7 On no account let them escape; in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.

Why is David praying for that? Revenge? Is it that he is just mad at them and wants them to suffer? No, that is not it. Here’s the reason:

9 ...By this I will know that God is for me.

That was the issue. That is all David cared about. “God, please show that You approve of me.”

10 In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise-- 11 in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

That is the second time he said that – “What can man do to me?”

David was afraid of what man was about to do to him. But once he started praying and turned his focus upon God and saw God’s faithfulness and power and kindness and favor and refuge, he said, “Wait a minute – what do I have to be afraid of?” Maybe they can torture and kill me, but what harm does that do me as long as God makes it clear that He approves of me and is on my side? If God is for you man cannot do anything to of that is of any consequence.

12 I am under vows to you, O God; I will present my thank offerings to you. 13 For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

David’s escape (God’s Deliverance)

So David is afraid, he goes to God with his fear, and writes out his prayer, and by the time he is done writing he is not afraid anymore, because he realizes that if God is for him King Achish cannot do anything that will separate him from the love of God. So now he has courage.

But he is still in quite a predicament. How is he going to get out of this one? He comes up with a plan in verse 13.

13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

Imagine if you had been there with David. “*That’s your plan? Graffiti and drooling? You’ve got to be kidding! You’re going to deface some public property and then drool all over yourself – that’s how you’re going to get away? Do you have any backup plan?*” This does not strike me as a plan that has a great chance of success. But it does succeed.

14 Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? 15 Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"

Achish reprimands his officials. You can almost picture him smacking these guys in the head. “I already have enough of morons around me without you bringing in another one! Get him out of here!” These poor officials – everything they said was exactly right. But God does not grant them favor in the eyes of Achish. Instead they get humiliated and dressed down, and David gets to go free. He does not even get in trouble for the graffiti! And the first thing David does when he is set free is ... guess what ... write another prayer.

How does that crazy plan end up working? And how does his flimsy story to Ahimelech end up working? The answer is in Psalm 34.

Psalm 34:1 Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left.

That is talking about Achish - Abimelech was evidently a dynastic name – like Caesar.

This is such a great chapter to study after last week studying Psalm 121. That psalm was about how God protects us in times of trouble. And we talked about how to enjoy the promise of protection even though you know God will still allow all kinds of painful things to happen to you. David is a great teacher for us in how to do that.

Praise!

He has been through some horrible things. Unjustly condemned by Saul. Driven from his wife and family and friends. Driven into the middle of Philistine territory, where despite his prayers for protection he is promptly captured. So he is reduced to drooling on his beard. The beard was a sign of manhood, and any mistreatment of the beard was a big deal. David would later go to war over the mistreatment of some of his men’s beards (2 Sam.10).

Many people would write a prayer at this time and say, “This is what you call protection? Why are You letting all this happen to me?” But remember last week we found that when you realize your own helplessness and you trust in the goodness of God, you are delighted to be protected by Him on whatever terms He might have? David could not be happier about how things have turned out.

1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. 2 My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. 3 Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. 4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. 5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

David is ecstatic. God did not do it the way he wanted, but God did ultimately deliver him, and David couldn't be happier. And so he says **Those who look to God are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.** Never covered with shame? David is writing that even while he is wiping the spit off his face. His face was covered with unbelievable shame *temporarily*. But David is not talking about that – he is talking about final outcomes. And the final outcome is that if you look to God you will not end up with egg on your face when it is all said and done.

6 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

It was like David could feel an angel of God right there with him in the court of Achish.

8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

All the commentaries ask the question, “Why does David go to Gath?” Most of them conclude it was because he was disobedient or traitorous or backslidden or just foolish. I believe he went there because God led him there. And why did God lead him there? Probably a number of reasons, but surely one of them was to get Psalms 56 and 34 written. David was to become the worship leader for all God's people throughout the ages. He needed to be a man who was full of joy in God and who took great delight in God's refuge and salvation. That does not happen when God saves you from little things. So God brought the world's great worship leader to the point of abject terror and hopelessness, so that when God delivered him he could have a vivid understanding of what it means when God says, “I am your refuge.”

Why is all this pain happening in your life? Maybe because a psalm needs to be written. Maybe God needs to bring you to a point of writing a Psalm 56. “Be merciful to me, I'm in trouble! When I am afraid, I will trust in you. I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” And only then will He deliver you so you can write a Psalm 34.

Psalms 34:1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. 2 My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice!

Benediction: Joshua 1:7-9 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Devotionals

Day 1

When God delivered David from Achish, even though it was not in the way David had wanted or in the timing he had asked for, and even though it involved great humiliation, David was still ecstatic over God's deliverance, and wrote a psalm of praise in response (Ps.34). That psalm is not only an expression of joy and praise, but it is also a wonderful handbook on how to draw near to God. It shows us at least nine ways to approach the presence of God.

1. Prayer

Psalm 34:4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me

⁶ This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles

¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

You draw near to God through prayer. Saying little sentence prayers all through the day is a good thing to do, but that is not what Scripture means by seeking God with all your heart. We need to follow Jesus' example and have times of extended, intensive prayer in a solitary place away from distractions – and David's example of crafting well-thought-out prayers in written form (the psalms).

2. Praise

Psalm 34:1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

³ Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

Praise is what happens when you are so delighted by God that the joy comes out of your mouth verbally. A big help in this area is music (the psalms were also songs). Music touches the emotions, and so listening to really good praise music will help you take delight in God. Listening to secular music won't. It might make you feel happy, but not in God. Use worship music to assist your daily praise.

3. Behold His glory

Psalm 34:5 Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

God is invisible – you cannot see Him with your physical eyes. So when the psalmists talk about looking at God they are talking about the gaze of the soul. To look at the radiance of God means to fix your attention on the attributes of God. An attribute is something wonderful about God revealed in the Bible. The only way to experience God is to experience one of His attributes.

When you first read about an attribute in the Bible, most of the time you know in your mind that it is a wonderful truth. But it does not do anything in your emotions. It does not cause joy, or peace or hope or zeal or delight. So you pray, and meditate, and focus, and study, and seek hard after God until He opens the eyes of your heart to be able to be delighted by that attribute. And when that happens you are seeing the glory of God.

I begin every day with an extended time of prayer and study over some attribute of God from the Psalms. And I stay until I can see. I do not stop until my heart is moved by what is so wonderful about

that attribute. Then I set the countdown alarm on my watch for 30 minutes, so every 30 minutes I am reminded to spend the next 30 minutes enjoying God – especially that particular ray of His glory that my eyes were opened to that morning. Nothing has generated love for God in my heart more than doing that.

Day 2

When God delivered David from Achish, even though it was not in the way David had wanted or in the timing he had asked for, and even though it involved great humiliation, David was still ecstatic over God's deliverance, and wrote a psalm of praise in response (Ps.34). That psalm is not only an expression of joy and praise, but it is also a wonderful handbook on how to draw near to God. It shows us at least nine ways to approach the presence of God.

4. Taste God's goodness

Psalm 34:8 Taste and see that the LORD is good

To taste something means to experience it. You draw near to God when you experience His goodness. One way is by seeing and enjoying His attributes. So, for example, if the attribute for today is God's protective care, then all through the day you are aware of all ways in which you are experiencing His protective care, and you enjoy that as something that is the direct result of the presence of God.

And that part is so crucial. If I find a gift sitting on my desk all wrapped up with a bow, and I think that gift just appeared by chance, I may thoroughly enjoy the gift, but it is not going to help me love my wife more. If I assume it came from Santa Claus, I may love that gift, but it does nothing for my relationship with Tracy. But if she hands me the gift, and it is clearly an expression of her love to me, then my enjoyment of the gift can be an expression of my enjoyment of and delight in her.

That is not automatic. It is still possible for me to thank her for the gift, but then to delight in the gift without really delighting in her love. But the more I see that gift as an emblem of her love so that my gladness terminates not on the gift but on her, that will increase my delight in my wife.

It works exactly the same way with God's gifts. All the pleasures of life are like mailmen carrying a message of love from God. If you enjoy your family and friends and food and possessions and recreation and nature and all the other joys of life, if you enjoy those things in and of themselves – if your enjoyment comes from those things themselves and is dependent upon those things, you are like a woman who gets excited when the mailman comes to her house because she is in love with the mailman, not because he is carrying a letter from her husband who is overseas.

But if you see all of the little pleasures of life as mailmen carrying a message of love from God, so that your enjoyment of those things is a real act of conscious fellowship with God and enjoyment of His love, then you are like a wife who is excited to see the mailman because she is excited about the letter from her husband. So your enjoyment of food or sex or any other pleasure in life can be fellowship with God and worship or it can be love for the world itself which is adultery against God. We draw near to God when we taste of His goodness by being aware of and enjoying God's gestures of love every few minutes in your life.

5. Boast in God

Psalm 34:2 My soul will boast in the LORD...

When we think of and speak about God as our only confidence, when we regard God as the only foundation of truth and reality and we delight in that, when we regard God as our only badge of honor and our knowing Him as ultimately the only thing that is good about our lives, that is an act of drawing near to God. When we regard something else as a badge of honor; we are moving away from God.

Day 3

When God delivered David from Achish, even though it was not in the way David had wanted or in the timing he had asked for, and even though it involved great humiliation, David was still ecstatic over God's deliverance, and wrote a psalm of praise in response (Ps.34). That psalm is not only an expression of joy and praise, but it is also a wonderful handbook on how to draw near to God. It shows us at least nine ways to approach the presence of God.

6. Take Refuge in God

Psalm 34:7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. 8 ...blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Encamping around you is something God does; taking refuge in that is something you do. We all take refuge somewhere. Life is full of dangers and threats...

- things that threaten to kill us,
- things that threaten to hurt us,
- things that threaten to take away our comfort,
- things that threaten to take away our joy,
- things that threaten to make us bored;

and all of us, without exception, look to some refuge to protect us from those threats.

It might be your spouse or your job or your home or your hobby or your TV or your mind or your library. It might be people or things or your own mind, or it might be God. If it is God – if you have learned how to flee from those threats and actually find real refuge and safety (not just theoretical, but real) refuge in God, that is a very important part of drawing near to God.

7. Fear God

Psalm 34:7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,

⁹ Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

The prospect of God's displeasure, the thought of Him being grieved over me or...

- being angry with me or
- chastising me or
- turning His face from me or
- withdrawing His presence from me,

those things should terrify me. That is not to say I should live in a state of constant anxiety, as though those things characterized God's disposition toward me. Those things do not characterize God's overall disposition toward any Christian. God is mostly pleased by Christians (and that goes for every Christian), however Scripture is clear that there are times of Him being displeased with us. And the more we love Him the more seriously we will take that. If the threat of losing close intimacy with Him is no big deal to me, then I have not drawn near to Him. If you are near to God in intimate fellowship, it is so wonderful and so satisfying that the threat of forfeiting that – even for an hour – is a horrible, scary thought. So fearing Him is a function of drawing near to Him.

And just as it is unfaithfulness to God when I offer my affections to the world instead of to Him, when I love the world instead of loving Him, it is also unfaithfulness if I fear anyone or anything else besides Him.

Isaiah 8:12 do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.⁴

Jeremiah 10:5 Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."

By fearing someone you are pointing to that person as the one who is in charge of harm or good which means you are putting that person in the place of God.

Isaiah 51:12 I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men

God says, "Who do you think you are? You have no right to fear men, because I am the one and only source of comfort. Your comfort or non comfort depends on Me, not them. How dare you fear men?"

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

When you fear someone you are exalting that person to the position of being the one who is ultimately in charge of harm or non harm.

When you are afraid of disease, or sickness, or injury, or what your boss might do to you, or what might happen to your loved ones - all of that is unfaithfulness to God. Our attitude should be, "If God is about to use my boss to discipline me in His anger – that terrifies me. But if God is pleased with me and my boss's actions are not being used by God as a rod of His discipline, then I'm not one bit afraid, because as long as I have God's favor I have everything I want."

When we have that attitude we find ourselves not as people pleasers, trying to do whatever it takes to avoid human anger, but God pleasers, desperately seeking to be close to God and pleasing to Him so that there is nothing to fear. And that is a critically important way to draw near to God.

If you flee the displeasure of an angry earthly father, you might run out of the house to get away from him. But that does not work with God, because He is out there too. He is wherever you run. There is only one place to run to flee from God's anger, and that is into God's arms of love - to be reconciled to Him and draw near to Him in intimacy. The only refuge from God's anger is God's favor. The only place in the entire Universe where you can hide to be safe from God's displeasure, and that is in God's arms of love. So fear of His displeasure is key component of drawing near to Him.

⁴ Peter quotes that verse in his discussion of persecution in 1Peter 3:14.

Day 4

When God delivered David from Achish, even though it was not in the way David had wanted or in the timing he had asked for, and even though it involved great humiliation, David was still ecstatic over God's deliverance, and wrote a psalm of praise in response (Ps.34). That psalm is not only an expression of joy and praise, but it is also a wonderful handbook on how to draw near to God. It shows us at least nine ways to approach the presence of God.

8. *Seek God*

Another key component is seeking Him.

Psalm 34:10 The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.⁵

When your soul follows hard after God and clings to Him, that is drawing near to God. That is not accomplished by little sentence prayers throughout the day. Nor is it accomplished when your prayer life is a mere act of self-discipline apart from the affections, so that you pray because you make yourself pray and not out of a strong desire to be in God's presence and to enjoy fellowship with Him.

Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

So ask yourself, "Is my seeking after God so intense that it uses up my strength?" "Is there any conceivable way I can look at what I'm doing in my life right now and call that 'seeking with all my heart'?"

9. *Learn of God*

Psalm 34:11 Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

The fear of the Lord is something that must be learned. We draw near to God when we read His Word not for the purpose of gaining a Bible education, or winning our next debate, or being able to impress people, or taking pride in our great Bible knowledge; but when we study earnestly specifically with an eye to what will lead us to greater intimacy and fellowship with Jesus Christ. Some of you need to make a commitment to study the Bible more. But for others of you, that is not what you need. You already study the Bible – what you need is a commitment to change the way you study - to stop using the Bible as an encyclopedia or as a status symbol or a book of magic or a textbook or a mere reference book; and to use it as a means to intimacy. Remember the three "I's". We are to use the Bible for Information that leads to Insight that leads to Intimacy. Some people stop at the first "I". They are content to use the Bible for information. Their minds are filled with Bible facts, but they have not insight into the principles of how to live. Other people stop at the second "I". They use Bible information to arrive at insight, but then they are content just to know the principles. We have not used the Bible as we should until we gain information for the purpose of insight that leads to intimacy and fellowship – personal interaction with God.

You cannot have that intimacy without the insight. And you cannot have the insight without the information. So you do have to do the hard work of reading and studying and applying sound

⁵ You have a certain amount of strength, and you can spend that little bit of strength in one of two ways. You can be like a lion, using your strength to gather what you need and want, or you can use your strength to seek hard after God (which means you then have to trust Him to give you what you need and want.) Lions are very strong, but a lot of them starve to death.

hermeneutics, and figuring out what the Greek words mean and reading the commentaries and all the rest. But all that is worthless if it is done as an end in itself. You cannot bypass that work and go straight to intimacy, but nor should you be content with knowledge alone.

Day 5

When God delivered David from Achish, even though it was not in the way David had wanted or in the timing he had asked for, and even though it involved great humiliation, David was still ecstatic over God's deliverance, and wrote a psalm of praise in response (Ps.34). That psalm is not only an expression of joy and praise, but it is also a wonderful handbook on how to draw near to God. It shows us at least nine ways to approach the presence of God.

10. Seek reward from God

Psalm 34:12 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; ¹⁶ the face of the LORD is against those who do evil

We draw near to God when we are motivated by the rewards He offers. When God offers something He says is wonderful as an incentive, and that has no pull on our hearts, that is a lack of faith. We either don't believe His rewards are all that great (which is to doubt His goodness), or we don't believe He will deliver (which is to doubt His faithfulness).

But when we see the life and good days that God promises as far better than any life and good days we might obtain any other way, that greatly glorifies God and He will reward us for that by granting us nearness to His presence. (His face will be toward us instead of away from us.) Jesus commanded you to live your life for reward from God.

Matthew 6:20 store up for yourselves treasures in heaven

Don't just live a righteous life. Live a righteous life with the motive of seeking reward from God. That is an important part of drawing near to Him.

11. Repent and be humbled before God

Psalm 34:18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Do you want to draw near to God? Do you want God to be close to you? He is close to the brokenhearted and crushed. We draw near to God (and He draws near to us) when we allow trials and suffering to humble and crush us in repentance.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite

That is where God dwells – near the crushed, broken, contrite heart.

James 4:8-10 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people! ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord

We draw near to God through repentance and contrition and that is more than just being crushed and broken and sad. It also involves a turning from sin and a seeking of cleansing and righteousness from God.