

“The Danger of Despair”
1 Samuel 27:1
(Preached at Trinity, March 18, 2018)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. David was a man described as mightily filled with the Holy Spirit.
1 Samuel 16:13 NAU - "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward."
 - A. David was a man of faith. As he wrote many of the Psalms his great trust in God was continually expressed.
 - B. But David was also a human being like us all. He had the same struggles with sin that we all do. And like all of us, David’s life was often like a rollercoaster of ups and downs. In **Chapter 21** he is in despair and acts foolishly before Ahimelech the priest and Achish the Philistine king. Then his faith is revived in the Cave of Adullam and he once again demonstrated great courage and strength.
2. But now, as we arrive at **Chapter 27**, we find David, once again, at a low point. It catches us off guard, for in the previous chapters it appeared that David’s trust in God would keep him valiantly standing firm. William Blaikie expresses it well: “We are not prepared for the sad decline in the spirit of trust which is recorded in the beginning of the twenty-seventh chapter. The victory gained by David over the carnal spirit of revenge, shown so signally in his sparing the life of Saul a second time, would have led us to expect that he would never again fall under the influence of carnal fear. But there are strange ebbs and flows in the spiritual life, and sometimes a victory brings its dangers, as well as its glory.”¹
3. As we read **Verse 1** we find David at the point of despair. He has resigned himself to the inevitable - "I will perish one day by the hand of Saul."
4. On one hand, perhaps we should grant David some grace.
 - A. Our hypercritical, censorious heart is a vile remnant of our fallen nature. It is so much a part of our sinful condition. How easy it is for us to look down upon the decisions of others without actually considering what they are experiencing. How easy it is for us gossip and condemn their behavior without considering how vile our gossip is or how vile our condemning heart is—it is to our own condemnation.
 - B. David was in a terrible dilemma. He had no confidence that Saul’s words of sorrow and repentance were sincere. He had every right to expect that Saul would not end his pursuit until he was dead. In addition, David was not fleeing by himself or with a band of hardened soldiers. There would have most likely been wives and children with them. David, himself, had recently taken another wife. He would have felt a tremendous responsibility for their protection. Many estimate there could have been as many as 2000 people under David’s care.

¹ Blaikie, William Garden. *Expository Lectures on the Book of 1 Samuel*. Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005, Pages 391.

- C. Richard Philips writes: “One answer David would surely give to his critics is that prudence is not opposed to faith. The same God who promised him salvation also entrusted him with the care of a great many lives. Trusting God did not require David to trust in Saul and place himself at the king’s nonexistent mercy. Neither did trusting God’s promise relieve David of the duty of finding a suitable base for his band.”²
5. While being careful to be gracious towards David as we examine his decision to flee, there are some elements in his decision that cannot be excused. David’s actions were motivated not by the prudence of a faithful believer but of unbelief. We can understand David’s doubt in Saul’s sincerity. We cannot overlook his doubt in God’s ability to sustain him. David had gone from faith to unbelief.
- a. Faith believes the words of Jonathan in **Chapter 23**:
1 Samuel 23:17 NAU - "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel"
 - b. Unbelief doubts God’s sovereign purpose:
1 Samuel 27:1 NAU - "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul."
6. David’s actions in this chapter are not of a man who has carefully considered his options, while seeking the face of God. Instead, they were the impulsive decision of one given over to hopeless despair. His words express a hopeless surrender without any regard for the promises of God. David says within his heart, “There is nothing better in this life. I will go make my home with the enemy.”
7. What can explain David’s hopelessness and loss of faith? How can we explain this utter despair? With David, we are not told specifically. But we know the symptoms that should rise up as warnings.
- I. The danger of self-confidence
- A. This was often David’s besetting sin
 1. David experienced amazing victories. Goliath was a formative foe, but David took his head. Sneaking into Saul’s camp unnoticed and taking his spear was an adventure worthy of telling for generations. Such victories can either bolster our faith or blind us with self-confidence.
 2. We can see this contrast in **Chapters 24-25**.
 - a. In **Chapter 24** David humbly bowed before Saul. His heart was fixed upon what was right in the eyes of God.
1 Samuel 24:6 NAU - "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed."
His conscience smote him when he cut off the hem of Saul’s robe.
1 Samuel 24:5 NAU - "David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe."

² Philips, Richard. *1 Samuel, Reformed Expository Commentary*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2012, Page 463.

- b. In **Chapter 25**, however, we find no sign that God was on his mind. He was consumed with his own honor and determined to destroy Nabal. There was no seeking God. No careful consideration. We only read, "Each of you gird on his sword."
- B. How dependent we are upon the continued graces of God
1. We are too easily given over to self-confidence; too impulsive. We must be continually reminded of just how weak and helpless we are.
 2. Paul understood this as he was plagued by his "thorn in the flesh." With the surpassing experiences he had received of Christ he was tempted to boasting. God protected him from this sinful self-confidence.
2 Corinthians 12:7-9 NAU - "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me-- to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."
 3. May God protect us from becoming so full of ourselves we lose sight of our infinite need to be full of Christ.
- II. The weight of repeated trials
- A. David was overwhelmed by the continued pursuit of Saul
1. It seemed in **Chapter 24** Saul had repented of his wicked intentions to kill David. But in **Chapter 26** we find Saul's repentance to be counterfeit and he was continuing to pursue David. David witnessed this over and over again. At the end of **Chapter 26** we presume that Saul's pursuit of David was over. But, again, David had no confidence in this.
 2. David knew from experience that Saul could not be trusted. Over and over he knew death could be at his very next step.
1 Samuel 20:3 NAU - "But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death."
 3. The endless pursuit of Saul had crushed David
Dale Ralph Davis writes: "Hunted, tracked, and attacked by Saul; treacherously exposed; making thrilling escapes and executing daring escapades—nine chapters full of high-blood-pressure narrative. It's the stuff that makes great movies but takes its toll on real people. ³
 3. David had given up hope that he would ever escape.
"Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul."
- B. Repeated trials can overwhelm us. They can cause us to lose hope
1. Elijah was weary from the pursuit of Jezebel
1 Kings 19:4 NAU - "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."
 2. It could be financial woes, health problems, family issues, job pressures
 3. It demands much grace for us to keep our eyes upon God.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, Focus on the Bible Commentary, (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 279.

III. The negative influence of self-talk

- A. Our worst enemy is often within our own bosom
1. David's problem was an affliction of the heart. It burned in his bosom with an ever-increasing fire. Such attacks must be dealt with quickly and decisively. This is the nature of sin's temptation. And of course, the tempter tries to establish a stronghold.
 2. David began to talk to himself—words of doom, words of discouragement, words void of God.
1 Samuel 27:1 NAU - "Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul."
 3. Apparently, David was often given over to this self-talk. And it had the same result of creating despair.
Psalms 42:5 KJV - "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me?"
- B. We often brood over our situation
1. We brood over things we've done, or things others have done. "Why did she say that?" "What are they thinking?" "What if this happens?" "Will I lose my job?" "Is this cancer?"
 2. We can feel sorry for ourselves as if we are the only ones suffering affliction. "Poor pitiful me."
 3. We can begin to over-estimate the severity of our situation. David had no indication that Saul was still pursuing him.
 4. We can become consumed with our condition. We imagine every possible doom and magnify our situation. We can talk ourselves into despair.

IV. The irrational conclusion that it will never get better

"Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me"

- A. David resigned himself to doom – "I will perish"
1. This was a faithless doom. It was a conclusion that there is no God governing the events of time and eternity. It is the belief that we are on a course with no direction and no plan. David's faithless conclusion was there was nothing better for him.
 2. There are sadly thousands of people who feel this way—that there is no light at the end. There is no hope for a brighter tomorrow.
 3. This conclusion leads to many suicides—hopeless despair.
 4. Such thinking is not rational. David's conclusion to flee into the hands of the Philistines was precisely the opposite of what he should have done. His irrational despair led him to believe it was all hopeless.
- B. It was all irrational thinking
1. Had not God promised him the kingdom? Had he not been anointed? This was common knowledge. Even Abigail had known of God's promise to David:
1 Samuel 25:30 NAU - "when the LORD does for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and appoints you ruler over Israel"

2. Had not God already delivered David numerous times.
 - In **Chapter 23** it was God who caused a sudden assault of the Philistines that forced Saul to abandon his pursuit of Saul.
 - Wasn't it God who delivered Saul into David's hand in the cave
1 Samuel 24:9-10 NAU - "David said to Saul, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'? ¹⁰ "Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave"
 - Wasn't it God who caused the deep sleep to come over Saul's 3000 man army?
1 Samuel 26:12 NAU - "they were all asleep, because a sound sleep from the LORD had fallen on them."
 3. Was God now unable to continue to protect His anointed? David's actions were completely irrational. This is the danger of despair.
- C. No man knows what tomorrow will bring
Proverbs 27:1 NAU - "Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth."
1. But there is always hope--and for God's people, our hope is a certainty. We must rest upon the reality that nothing happens without Divine design.
 2. The sad reality of this passage was David's prayerlessness. There is no sign that he was seeking what God would have him to do. There was no call to bring forth the ephod.
- V. Our only hope is a resting upon the certainty of God's provision
- A. God is our only source of comfort during times of adversity
1. He will never forsake His own
 2. The Apostle Paul described this well
2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NAU - "*we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;"
Hardship is characteristic of the Christian life. It can seem relentless. Paul said sometimes the servant of Christ is afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down – but we are never defeated.
 - Although we are afflicted on every side, we are not crushed
 - Although we are perplexed, we are never in despair
 - Although we are persecuted, we are never forsaken
 - Although we are struck down, we are never destroyed
 3. David was speaking to himself with words of doubt. He was speaking words that were not true. The solution to such talk is to speak the truth about God. This is why God's Word must be our daily bread. David's false talk of doubt determined his action. We must speak the truth and meditate upon the truth and allow God's Word to direct us.
Psalms 119:104-105 NAU - "From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. Nun. ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."

- B. As we look to God our despair turns to hope
1. In **Psalm 42** David turns his negative self-talk into positive
Psalm 42:5 NAU - "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And *why* have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him *For* the help of His presence."
 2. God is our hope in every trial
2 Samuel 22:1-4 NAU - "And David spoke the words of this song to the LORD in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. ² He said, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; ³ My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence. ⁴ "I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies."
- C. Looking to God is a continual exercise
1. David did well as he looked to God as his fortress. But when he looked away he lost all hope.
 2. We must look to God continually. It demands great patience and steadfastness. As we go through the adversities of life, those who wait upon God will be sustained.
Isaiah 40:28-31 NAU - "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary, And to *him who* lacks might He increases power. ³⁰ Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, ³¹ Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary."

Conclusion:

1. Despair is a terrible thing. It directs the entire universe upon our current situation. It reflects a life forsaken and hopeless. But for the Christian, such a life does not exist.
2. David's later conclusion reflects the reality.
Psalm 42:5 NAU - "Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him *For* the help of His presence."
Psalm 62:5-6 NAU - "My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him. ⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken."