

Message #53

I Samuel 21:10-15

Years ago I heard an interview with a paroled prisoner who had served hard time in prison. He was asked how he survived and his answer caught my attention. He said I survived prison by pretending to be crazy. He then said it is crazy on the inside of a prison and the crazier you appear to be, the more they leave you alone. So he said I pretended like I was out of my mind.

That tactic is not a new one. That very tactic was used by David. David had an amazing trust in God, but he also did what he could do to protect himself and defend himself. He used every survival skill he had and every weapon he could get to protect his own life.

When we come to this text, we come to one of the most bizarre stories pertaining to David's life. As Hans Hertzberg said in his commentary, it is one of the strangest stories from the life of David and one of the most humorous (*I & II Samuel*, p. 182).

This story prompted David to write two Psalms - 1) Psalm 34; 2) Psalm 56. When you read those Psalms, it is quite evident that David's trust was in God, even though he did what he humanly could do to cope. Not only that but apparently he also spent time praying to God.

There are commentators who suggest David is just winging it here on his own leaving God out. When you read these two Psalms, it is evident he did not leave God out. He was constantly trusting God and talking to God all the way through this.

There is a tremendous lesson to be learned here and it is this:

WHEN A FAITHFUL BELIEVER FINDS HIMSELF SURROUNDED BY THREATENING ENEMIES, HE CAN TRUST GOD KNOWING GOD WILL DELIVER HIM.

This story in I Samuel shows us three realities about David:

Reality #1 - David had a capacity to be creative in order to survive.

There were times when David had to think and act quickly to outwit and outsmart the enemy. He could not just stand idly by and humanly do nothing. He had to take action. David always did what he humanly could do to protect himself. In today's military, adaptability is still considered to be a hallmark of warriors. Great soldiers learn to adapt to the circumstances.

Reality #2 - David faced real life-threatening situations.

These were not delusional imaginations of some irrational or emotional hypochondriac. This was a very real threat. David could lose his life. Even though David was a very faithful man of God, he still found himself in desperate situations. Just because he was faithful, did not mean he was immune from dangerous trouble.

Reality #3 - David trusted in the sovereign protective hand of God to sustain him.

David did what he could do humanly, but he was well aware that it was God who was protecting him. It was God who would deliver him. He was constantly trusting God and talking to God.

There are five historical parts to this very unique story:

PART #1 – David flees from Nob to Gath, from Saul to Achish. **21:10**

At this point, David is not getting direct revelatory information from God as to where to go. In fact, some have wondered whether or not God wanted David to make this move. David and Jonathan, who were both right with God, concluded David needed to flee the area.

God is not giving David direct messages, so David is coming up with his own plan for survival. There are no voices he is hearing from heaven and no special direct revelations being given to him from a prophet.

There are many times in life when we will face things and decisions and God will not specifically tell us what He wants us to do or where He wants us to go. All David knew is he needed to go somewhere to get away from Saul. **What is so good to know in these situations is that God is sovereign and still watching out for His elect.**

It does seem as though later in I Samuel that David had a good relationship with Achish (I Sam. 29:9), but by David's reaction, at this point in time, that relationship was not the best.

For some reason, David decided to travel some 23-25 miles SW from Nob to Gath. Now Gath was Goliath's hometown (I Sam. 17:4). This city was apparently outside of the jurisdiction of Saul. If we keep in mind that David is traveling with Goliath's sword, one would think this was not one of his brighter moves. But this would be the last place in the world Saul would look for him. He seemed logical.

There have been three suggested reasons among commentators as to why David chose to go here:

Reason #1 - Because it was a safe place to hide, the last place Saul would look. What is odd is that I don't know how David could feel safe in Gath, because of his reputation.

Reason #2 - Because he wanted to offer himself as a mercenary soldier for the Philistines in view of the fact that most of Israel had turned against him. David loved Israel.

Reason #3 - Because he wanted to be an Israeli spy pretending to be a servant of Achish, when in all reality he cared about Israel.

The text does not say. I tend to think he felt it would be a good place to hide. What we do know is that when David went, he was certainly hoping he would not be recognized. **But what David will learn is that God was protecting him even if he were recognized.**

When David went to Gath, he was the ultimate Philistine enemy. He had killed their champion Goliath and he had killed hundreds of Philistines. This would be the equivalent of Adolph Hitler going into Jerusalem or O. J. Simpson going into the Goldman home.

God's people will never find permanent safety or security with the enemies of God. God's people will not find strength hiding out with the people of this world. This was probably not one of David's brighter moves in life, but who are we to criticize David. Sometimes when we are under stress we can make unwise decisions and this was one of those times. But David would learn God would protect him anyway.

We have all made unwise decisions in life. It is so good to know that even when we do that, our God is still sovereign and He will still protect us.

Years ago there was a good Christian family I knew who had a wacked out daughter. They had raised her right and she just walked away from the things of God. Well this father and mother decided they all needed secular counseling so they went to a secular counselor. Well a counselor who has no fear of God or knowledge of God's word is not going to give you great counsel and this counselor started to say things contrary to the word of God. Finally, the husband had enough and he said we need to get out of here. There was no help from a godless counselor in this world. It is the wrong place to look.

PART #2 – David is recognized in Gath. 21:11

If you were a Philistine living in Gath, this would be the last place you would expect to see David. When David got to Gath, some of the servants of Achish spotted him and recognized him. David probably had some disguised look about him, but you can't really change who you actually are.

When a believer goes out into the world into enemy territory, somebody is likely to recognize you; you can count on that.

There was a minister who went to a place he should have never been. He thought no one will recognize him. He was spotted right away and it cost him his ministry. Stay out of places where you don't belong.

Now the servants who spotted David knew truth of God:

- 1) They knew David was the "king" - he would be the next king of Israel.
- 2) They knew David was the "king of the land" - Israel does have a Promised Land.
- 3) They knew David was honored in Israel - they celebrated him and made songs about him.

Even though David was in the world, the people in the world knew and sensed he had a unique relationship with God.

PART #3 – David is afraid in Gath. 21:12

Some of the great servants of God have been afraid at times:

- 1) Abraham was afraid (Gen. 12:12).
- 2) Moses was afraid (Ex. 2:14).
- 3) Samuel was afraid (I Sam. 16:2).
- 4) Peter was afraid (Matt. 26:72).
- 5) All the Apostles were afraid (Matt. 26:56).

David was afraid here. Once David learned that he had been spotted and some were identifying him, he became “greatly afraid.” He greatly feared Achish the king of Gath. David is the future king of Israel. David is the future “king of the land” and he is afraid.

Frankly, David is facing some real negative things here. When he is in the land of Saul, he was facing things that made him afraid and when he is in the land of Achish, he was also facing things that made him afraid.

The irony here is that those who are not right with God are not afraid. Saul is not afraid and neither is Achish. David is the only person in this narrative who is right with God and he is greatly afraid. Saul is living life in his comfortable home and Achish is living in his comfortable home and David is on the run, hiding out, looking like some fugitive.

We need to learn a very important lesson here. Just because we are right with God does not mean we will not fear or we will initially appear to be successful. But these moments when we fear are great moments to trust God. In the end, God will exalt the humble and humble the proud.

PART #4 – David disguises himself. 21:13

David is a quick thinker, which God sovereignly caused. He had the ability of observation, imagination and imitation. He had never been to an acting school. He had been a shepherd, and shepherds are realists and not actors.

He was spotted by the Philistines and they decided to take him to appear before Achish. What irony this is here—David pretends to be insane and Saul actually is insane. David controls his madness and Saul is controlled by madness.

David pretends to be something he wasn't. He did two things that made people think he was some nut:

- 1) He used his hands to scratch and scribble on the doors of the gates.
Those fingers that once beautifully played a harp are now scratching on a door.
It is possible he is writing some form of graffiti that didn't make any sense.

2) He permitted saliva to run out of his mouth into his beard.

That mouth that had set forth the glorious truth of God is now dripping with saliva.

David could have won an academy award for this performance. **He is using a pretend insanity to hide his true sanity.**

I do think there is a principle to glean from this text. There are times when the best thing to do is to play stupid. That is exactly what David is doing here.

I remember reading a story of Charles Spurgeon. There was a cantankerous woman in his church who always railed at something. She made an appointment with Spurgeon and she came in and started in one of her diatribes and Spurgeon said, "Isn't it a nice day." She went on and when she got done, Spurgeon said, "I don't think it is going to rain today." The woman got so frustrated she got up and left the office and told someone there is no point saying anything to him, he is dumber than a box of rocks.

PART #5 – David is released by Achish. **21:14-15**

Achish said do you really think this madman is David? Obviously Achish had seen many insane people in his day. Gath was obviously filled with crazy people. In fact, he says we have plenty of our own insane people so why are you bringing in this guy to me? Do you think I should have this nut working here in my home?

Achish says, get him out of here.

What David was learning and seeing is that God was protecting him. According to the Psalms, he wrote, he had been praying to God for deliverance and God did deliver him. David played like he was insane and God set him free.

PRACTICAL LESSONS:

- 1. When we live in an insane and godless world, our faith in God will appear at times to be insane to those who live in this world.**
- 2. When you are afraid, always remember God is with you, watching you and protecting you.**
- 3. We will never find safe shelter or counsel in the company of God's enemies.**
- 4. When we are in times of stress, we need to pray and draw close to God.**
- 5. All people have been involved in the insanity of sin and there is only one way out of it and that is to trust in Jesus Christ.**