

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 21. And we're going to look at two chapters tonight - 21 and 22. We have to put them together because they are opposite ends of the same lesson, if you will, the same application.

We have studied and started studying the life of King David. In the waning years of Saul, when God set him aside, Saul would stay fixed on the throne seven-and-a-half years after the LORD said He was done with him. You might question why the LORD didn't just take him out. Well, God has His plans, and certainly he becomes an irritant in David's life but also a pusher and an enemy that would bring David to really begin to trust the LORD in all that he was facing. David came to his calling quietly. The old prophet Samuel showed up at his house and prayed for him, anointed him to be the king. He was slow on the scene. God began to use David to come and play his harp in front of Saul, who no longer had the Holy Spirit with him but now an evil spirit that was torturing him. And the music, the worship, drove this spirit away. So, for a while David would come and go back to his father's sheep.

In chapter 17, when Goliath was out barking at the children of Israel and David happened to show up on the sixth week of this guy, twice a day, mocking the God of Israel, David heard about it, was angry, wondered why no one had done a thing about it, and volunteered to do it himself; this young, teenage kid with a slingshot. But his argument with everybody else - with the army guys and the tough guys and the marines - was that he had learned to trust the LORD in his work and seen God deliver him from the impossible. So he figured this uncircumcised Philistine who was mocking his God needed to go.

With that victory, and if you were here we went over it together, David rose to prominence immediately. I mean, everyone knew about him. The girls liked him - a young kid, good-lookin' kid. They all sang about his exploits and all. So Saul noticed as well. Though he had been set aside, he wasn't going quietly. He was hanging on to power that really was no longer his. And it wasn't long before his response to David was to get angry, to want to remove him. He threw a spear at him a couple of times while he was trying to play music to calm his spirit, if you will. And David just saw the writing that was on the wall, there in chapter 18, filled with little

quiet ploys of Saul to try to get rid of David - not publicly but kind of on the sly. He wanted to get rid of him but didn't want any blood on his hands, so to speak.

In chapters 19 and 20, Saul's determination to kill David went public. It came out in the open. He talked about it to his son. He tried a couple of other things that were more overt but no less severe - trying to send him into battle, dangling a wife before his eyes, and giving him what seemed to be impossible chores to move ahead. And David, it says, was wise in all that he did. He showed himself to be a man who just would trust the LORD. He wasn't so ambitious that he wanted something for himself; he figured God would bring it when God was ready. And so that seemed to make it worse with Saul who continued to try to eliminate David even though he knew - he knew - that God had replaced him and this was his replacement. In fact, he would say to Jonathan, in his anger (at the end of chapter 20), "As long as David is alive, you'll never get the throne, and that's gonna be it for you." But Jonathan was okay with that. He was a godly man. He recognized the hand of God upon David, and so he would become David's lifelong friend.

Over the seven-and-a-half years that cover much of the rest of this book - in fact all of the rest of 1 Samuel - David learns that God will protect him; that he is right where God wants him to be, but it's hard, it's threatening, it's costly; that God won't allow anything in his life unless it has been approved by Him. David will be on the run for seven-and-a-half years. He's a young kid. David will be in hiding, escape near death, suffer the betrayal of his own countrymen, receive unfair treatment at everyone's hands. This was all undeserved. You could make a case David could have easily written a book that said, "My Life Just Stinks!" But it didn't. Because, through all this, David learned that God could be trusted.

We ended last time with David meeting with Jonathan, who prepared him for fleeing the capital. Jonathan was not so willing to believe his dad was actually going to kill David, but over a couple of days and a dinner, he realized that's exactly what he wanted to do. In fact, he even threw a spear at his own son. So he and David met out in the woods. He told him, "Just get out of here. Get out of Dodge. You're right. My father's lost his mind."

And so we start up with David tonight in two chapters that are very much different from one another. On the one hand, David has to run for his life. Now it is clear that his suspicions are true. David has nothing and no one; Saul has the full faith and financial support of an entire government and an army. Talk about

outnumbered. There's no way in the world he could see a way out of this. And David's life will be spent, for the most part, in the southern area of Judah near Ein Gedi, around the Dead Sea area. (You think it was hot in Hawaii, it is blistering hot in the Dead Sea. If you go down to Eilat - we were in Eilat a few years ago in Israel. It was 45 degrees Centigrade, so that's 127. It was hot!) And poor David, just runnin' for his life. Where do you go?! But this was going to be his plight for the next many, many years. So this picture repeats itself over and over through the end of this book, in these last few chapters. In the process, David learns - as a young man - to trust God. It isn't easy to learn to trust God when things go well. I think most of our faith does not grow...but we grow in faith when we are at our wits' end, when you don't know where to turn or who to look to or where to turn next. There are times when David will say, "There's no time for faith, I gotta run or I'm gonna die," and he responds not in faith but in kind of the flesh (like we would understand it). It is easy to have faith in God when everything's going your way. It's terrible to have to trust the LORD when your neck is on the line. We had a friend....well, we had a granddaughter as well starting college this week. But she's in town, so we can kind of keep an eye on her. But we have a friend whose two daughters are both going to college this year - the twins - in Texas. And I talked to him this weekend online, and you could see his eyes were fixed in place. These were his kids, his daughters. They're going away, moving away. And I said, "You know, you raised your daughters really well. They're sweet, godly girls. They're gonna be just fine. We'll just pray for them." "Well it's easy for you to say! They're not your daughters." (Laughing) All of a sudden, right? There's a difference between faith and then having to have faith. And now what matters most to him and his wife - they have to have faith for their daughters. So, David's lessons are going to be under pressure. I don't know how you do under pressure.

Tonight David, he's terrible in chapter 21; he couldn't be better in chapter 22. He hits rock bottom in the first chapter; ends up on top in the second. Maybe that's us in a nutshell. But faith in God has to be developed under pressure. And, as a believer, the good thing about David is (and maybe you'll take notice of it) that David never goes very long without being sick and tired of being himself. When he's out of God's will, he's not happy with himself at all. He lasts a little over a year with the Bathsheba hiding-it-in-the-closet thing, and it about killed him. Read some of the psalms he wrote about his vitality turning into the drought of summer and he just felt like he was dying. But usually it doesn't even take that long. David usually wakes up in a day or an hour or a week, and he goes, "Oh, I'm an idiot." And I think that makes him a man after God's own heart...and you as well. Or a woman

after God's own heart. Because you're willing to admit your faults. It isn't that David's perfect. Boy, he's far from it. But he's a man that relies upon the LORD really quickly and finds God's grace time and again.

So chapters 21 and 22, like I said, there's a marked distinction between the two. In chapter 21, David tries to survive on his own. He lies, he deceives. Devastating consequences, by the way, to not David only but to the nation. In chapter 22, he goes back to faith, and you begin to see the blessings of God on a life that is trusting in Him. Nothing has changed, by the way, of the pressure between the two chapters. The pressure stays the same. The enemy is the same. His plots are the same. The danger is the same. Nothing has changed except David's handling of the difficulty - either handing it to the LORD or trying to handle it on our own. So, to learn that the battle belongs to the LORD is a hard lesson to learn. It can be hard to walk with the LORD in the sunlight, but, man, it's even harder when there's a downpour. So, learning to cast your care on the LORD and really trust Him when things are down - that's growing up, isn't it? That's spiritual growth. And the LORD thought David needed this before he was going to ascend to the throne seven-and-a-half years down the road. So chapter 21 - the rough road of self-dependence; chapter 22 - the highway of real faith.

But we get to travel with David, and the nice thing is if you pay attention, you don't have to make these mistakes. You can go, "Ho, ho, David. Glad you did that, you knucklehead. I'm not doin' that." And you can learn from his life lessons. You can vicariously grow up in the LORD by running with a fugitive. And I always call David - he's a fugitive by the will of God. I mean, he's on the run because he's done the right thing. But how he runs sometimes is not so right.

Chapter 21:1 (you knew we'd get there eventually, all these long introductions, I can't help it, that's just who I....), "Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, 'Why are you alone, and no one is with you?' So David said to Ahimelech the priest, 'The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, "Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you." And I have directed my young men to such and such a place. Now therefore what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found.' And the priest answered David and said, 'There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women.' Then David answered the priest, and said to him, 'Truly, women have been kept

from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day.' So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away." So David, after he hears the news from his buddy Jonathan about Saul's intentions, does not go home to pack. David hits the road. This is a reaction of fear. He's ill-equipped for the desert. He has no weapon, he has no food, he's got just a couple of guys with him, and he heads to a place called Nob. You might remember, if you've been with us, that, for the longest time, the tabernacle of God stood in a place called Shiloh. But it had been moved here to Nob by a city of the priests. It is only a mile or so north of Jerusalem; if you go to Israel today, and you go to Mount Scopus University, that's where that city stood. And so from the hill of Mount Scopus, you can look right into the city of Jerusalem. So put yourself with David, a teenager with adrenaline running through his body and fear churning. He's done everything right, and yet now he has to make plans to get out of the country. And so he goes to the priest; that's all that he knows. He's a godly guy in many ways. And he heads there looking for provision. Having run off in fear, he now has to try to make some plans. Ahimelech, who is the high priest, if you will, in charge of the tabernacle, finds it very odd that David, the son-in-law to the king, would show up without a royal accompaniment, an entourage, some soldiers to protect him. (Just a few men, according to verse 4.) And he asked David about it, and David, he's afraid, and he's unsure of whether he can trust this man or any man. So he lies. "I'm on a secret mission for the king. Can't say another word about it or we're gonna have to kill ya." One of those kinds of things. Hush, hush, and mum's the word. And so here's David on the run for his life, coming to the place of worship to look for help from a priest, and he starts off by lying to him because that's how fear and unbelief work. David will later write, as a prayer in Psalm 119:29, "Remove from me the way of lying, so that I might find Your grace in Your law." "Can I just listen and follow?" But that's down the road; this is present-tense. David is on the move. He's not immune. You're not immune from stumbling. David is pretty nervous right now. He's not praying. He's not seeking the LORD. David's just running with David. This is all David knows. "I gotta get out of here. Saul'd like to kill me." And, like I said, the balance of power is so one-sided you could imagine how he must feel.

The showbread in the tabernacle were those twelve loaves that represented the twelve tribes of Israel. They were kept on a table in the holy place in front of the

Holy of Holies where the LORD's presence was. They were changed every week so that Israel would be seen as being before the LORD. And the priests who would eat that bread were really intimately, then, involved with the care for the nation. They were the representatives of the people before the LORD. They ate of that bread. It was sanctified which meant it was holy. "*Hagios*" is a word that means to be set apart. It was only supposed to be used for those purposes once they had been devoted to the LORD. So David goes, "We're hungry," and Ahimelech says, "We don't have any *Weber's* bread here. We've just got the bread that we've given and set before the LORD that we have to change out." And it was an odd situation, and Ahimelech decides to give him the bread. He sees no problem because there's human need involved. And so he puts them out and asks just about the men's moral status for the last little while, and David assures him that they've been on the run, or at least on this mission.

If you go to Matthew 12, the first eight verses or so, there's a discussion that Jesus has with the Pharisees. His disciples are walking through the fields. It happens to be a Sabbath. And because they're hungry, they're reaching up, plucking the wheat off the plants, and eating it for strength. Right away the Pharisees jump all over Jesus, and they say, "Look at Your disciples. They're breaking the rules of the Sabbath. You're not supposed to work. That's work. What're you doin'?" And Jesus said, "I guess you all have never read 1 Samuel 21." No. That's not exactly how He said it. (Laughing) But He refers to this incident. "Haven't you read about David how, when he was hungry, he went to the priest and was given the showbread?" And the Lord went on to say, "When it comes to human need, the ceremonial law" (which are types of something much deeper) "can be set aside." As important as they are, when it comes to meeting a need, that's most important. What it represents, at that point, is far less important. So they're hungry, we feed them. David was hungry, he was fed. Even though that bread was normally devoted to the priests, it had a type, it was a reason, there was a spiritual lesson in there. But, hey, if your spiritual lessons now become a substitute for a guy dying because of hunger, now you're out of balance. I shared this a couple of years ago with a Jehovah Witness friend whose daughter was in the hospital, and he was fighting with this whole blood transfusion thing. I shared those verses with him out of Matthew 12. I said, "You know, the Lord would never put your daughter's life at risk for some ceremony or some misinterpretation of Scripture. Look what He did with David, with these." The guy ended up getting his daughter help, but I don't think he believed the Bible. I think, at that point, his love for his daughter and his misplaced faith just had a big conflict. If you go Pennsylvania,

for years the Amish were unwilling to place reflective triangles on the back of their buggies which, if you've driven through there, are dark and black, and if it's night, man, you can't see 'em until it's way too late. But they said that they wouldn't do it because that was placing trust in something other than the Lord. All right. We get your faith stuff, but people are gettin' run over! So, here, read Matthew 12. So the Lord refers to this incident, if you will, with David. And Ahimelech did the right thing. The king's son-in-law, he's hungry. He has respect for David. David was well known by many at the time. And so he offers him the food.

Verse 7, "Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD. And his name was Doeg," (I'm just gonna pronounce him "Dog" because that's what he becomes) "an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul. And David said to Ahimelech, 'Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.'" (Still lying.) "So the priest said, 'The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here.' And David said, 'There is none like it; give it to me.' Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, 'Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" ' Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath." Now, as David was here getting food, we get some information that we'll need next chapter. Because one of the fellows that was there - interesting wording - his name, we're calling him "Dog." He was an Edomite. Back in chapter 14, the Edomites had been overthrown by Saul, and this fellow "Dog," I think in order to save his neck (you will find him mentioned there), switched sides and volunteered to come to work for the enemy, if you will, and eventually became the chief herdsman over the king's herds. He was a traitor, he was an evil man, he was a heartless guy. And there's nothing in the Bible that would tell you and me that he should have been at a tabernacle being held up by the LORD for anything. He was not a godly man. He might have been like Saul, though, putting on airs, pretending he was something he wasn't (because that whole administration of Saul seemed to be willing to do that). Where we read he was detained at the place of worship, we have no idea or even guess as to why except that he might very well have just been going through the motions. Now, he's capable of such atrocities that when Saul finally gives the order to slaughter these priests and their families, Saul's regular army won't touch it. They're

humane enough and sensitive enough to go, "No way." But old "Dog" the Edomite goes, "I'll go," and he took his guys, and they did this horrible thing. It seems to me, from what I read here, that he was just at the temple (tabernacle) pretending to care about God, but that's all we would see; there's no support for that, whatsoever. But keep him in mind for the next chapter.

In verse 8 and in verse 9 David, having eaten, now asks about weapons availability. You might remember, if you were here with us for a while, that for years Israel only had two swords - one in Saul's hands, one in Jonathan's. Now we don't know, over those years that followed, if they were able to make a deal with the Philistines and buy others (because they kind of controlled the iron trade). But David had nothing to fight with. I don't know if David knew that the sword that he had taken from Goliath was here. Probably, I would suspect, if he did know, he would have just asked for it. But he's not telling the truth here very much either, so I don't know.

So, I like the picture though because David gets the sword of Goliath, a sword that he had gotten when he was walking by faith, when he was fighting the impossible battle. Right? Now he's running from Saul who is quite a bit smaller than Goliath. He might look just as tough, but Goliath couldn't have looked any tougher. Goliath scared the entire Israeli army out of their socks! But David didn't see it because he was walking by faith. Now he's got the sword - reminder of days gone by - and he's just terrified. So it interests me that all he needed when the LORD was in view was a slingshot and confidence in the LORD. Now that the LORD is not in view - and maybe that's the lesson - when all you see is your flesh, he's just happy to have a sword. Somehow the sword is more comfortable for him than his relationship with God. "I'll take that. There's none like it. This is the one I can trust in and have."

We read, in verses 10 and 11 and 12, that David then, with his guys, goes on the move. He goes southwest of the city, thirty miles or so to Gath. Gath was a city in Philistia, the Philistine territory. It was Goliath's hometown. Now think about this crazy kid entering Goliath's hometown, wearing Goliath's sword. "There is none like it." It was one of a kind. It made the "Guns & Ammo" magazine for years. "You've seen Goliath's sword." And now David's comin' to town. Is that a good idea? No! It's not a good idea. If he thinks he's goin' unnoticed, this is not the way to go. But when you're running from God, your thinking isn't always that clear. It's kind of like a backslider trying to fit back into the world. David's trying to fit back into

the world, but he's whistling in the streets. He's not incognito. It's not gonna last for very long. And so he tries it, though. But notice, in verse 11, he's immediately recognized. Verse 12 tells us that David "took these words to heart" as he heard that the people knew about him. He was "very much afraid," and apparently they arrested him. Even the heathen, in verse 11, acknowledging this is going to be their king, this is the guy that is being raised up. David's in the wrong place, with the wrong weapon, trusting in the wrong person. Now what?

So we read, in verse 13, "So he changed his behavior before them," (his arresters) "pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard." (Translation - he's spittin' on himself.) When Achish arrived (the king) to look at David, "Achish said to his servants, 'Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?' " And he just dismisses him. It does seem rather disgraceful for a king (that God has called to be king) to pretend that he's insane. He's spittin' on himself. He's acting out in his mind in hopes of saving his life. He's running into the gate and scratching at it like a dog might. And he's doing everything that might project to someone else, "This guy's lost his mind." "The fear of man brings a snare," we read in Proverbs 29:25, and it certainly brought one to David. Here's the problem: it worked. His plot worked. He's released by a disgusted king who seems to be less bent on revenge than he is upset by the inconvenience. "Don't bother me with this idiot! Just get rid of him! I don't really need to balance the books. The giant-killer's done. His life is over as we know it." Yet, just because it worked doesn't mean God was in it. Remind yourself of that. Just because it worked doesn't mean it's the LORD who did it. David saw himself this way as well. He realized, and he would, how quickly he had gone from trusting the LORD and doing things wisely (as we read from those chapters) - behaving himself in a godly way - to now, all of a sudden, falling right off the edge and determining to do things his way. And it has led to this. Oh, he saved his neck, but what a stupid move goin' there! Lying to the priest, carrying Goliath's sword, and then what a picture this is! How terrible!

So David decides (in between these chapters, and there's not much time between them) he's going to go back home. "Whatever I've got to do to get rid of Saul, I cannot do it this way." And he determines to go home, determines to start by heading for Judah again, with the thought, "God can handle my life. What was I thinkin'? I haven't gotten this far on my own. I didn't call myself." And whatever

was going through David's mind....and we can give you the psalms that he wrote during that time because they have labels at the top of them so that you knew when they were written; and we mentioned them to you, I think, when we went through the Psalms. But David wrote two psalms immediately after this event that kind of share with us his outlook. He wrote Psalm 34 and Psalm 56. So you can go to look, maybe write those in your margins and look at them later. When he returns to Judah, he begins almost immediately to experience God's encouragement, His blessing. And the two psalms kind of portray both sides. Psalm 34 speaks about the hope that he has in the LORD and Psalm 56 of the fear of man and the confidence that he should have had in the LORD. In the introduction to Psalm 34 is the name Abimelech. Not Ahimelech like we see in verse 1 of this chapter, but Abimelech. Abimelech is not a name; it is a title. It is, no doubt, the reference to the king of Gath at the time, Achish. Abimelech is just the guy in charge, like Pharaoh; not really a name, more of a title.

So David, in chapter 21, gets away from the enemy. Saul's still out to kill him, but David's now concerned with David. And, hitting rock bottom, he goes home with repentance, wants to grow. But growth has to come, sometimes, at a price. So after the shameful depending on yourself, he returns home. So, look, you've gotta turn around anyway. If you're goin' after the world, you're gonna have to come back because you're not gonna find anything out there. That's pretty much why you came to the LORD. I got saved because I tried everything in the world, and it wasn't good. And so when I got saved, the temptation to go back to the world is kind of like I've been there. Got pictures of those things. And scars. And dreams. And headaches. And who knows what else I brought with me? But God brought me out. So learn from David. Then you won't have to go through chapter 21. You can just leave chapter 21 completely out of your life. Just jump right....in fact, say that of yourself, "I'm just going to chapter 22." That's all you really want to do.

Well here's what we read in chapter 22:1, "David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him." Adullam is about halfway between Gath and Bethlehem, where David was living. The area was on the border between Judah and the Philistines, almost like a no-man's land. But enough away to know that you're out of the enemy's grasp but not really all the way yet in Judah. David stops here in the hills and in the caves. There're certainly plenty of them there today. This place that David stopped was a place that David committed himself to trying to work this out in his head before the LORD. He had some guys with him.

Notice that when his family found that he was there, for the first time in the Bible, David's family is nice to him. Right? Maybe they're under pressure now, too, and I suspect, from what we read in the next few verses, that was the case. But they came to support him. In this cave (if you're taking notes), David wrote two more psalms. We know that, again, by the headings that are on those psalms. He wrote Psalm 57 and wrote Psalm 142 in this cave, returning from Gath. Both of them speak about how God will care for His own if His own will just trust Him with their lives. David had fallen hard, and now he was at God's feet, and he wanted God's nearness, and he was sorry. And I love the picture of David falling because if David can return to the LORD and be instantly received by Him and forgiven, so can we, so can you. I don't know. Sometimes you stay away for a long time. "I don't know if the LORD'll forgive me." Oh, I'll argue from David's perspective. He took David back in a hurry. He was hiding in a cave, but he was still hiding, now, by faith in the LORD. We read, in Hebrews 11:38 about those "of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." That's where we find David. But he was making his peace with God. Nothing had changed outwardly, but David was changing inwardly. The circumstances were still the same - Saul was still on the throne, still a bounty on David's head. But David had returned to the LORD. Here's what David said in Psalm 142, "I cry out to the LORD with my voice; with my voice to the LORD I make my supplication. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk they have secretly set a snare for me. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul. I cried out to You, O LORD; I said, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me.' " In the cave, our hero, David, going through and searching his own heart. You do find, in the Bible, God's people ending up in the weirdest of places: Joseph ends up in prison, Daniel ends up in the lion's den, Jonah ends up in the belly of a great fish, Paul ends up in the ocean more than once, David is hidden in a cave. It's fun to walk with God. You don't know where He's takin' you. (Laughing) It's an adventure.

Meanwhile David's family, like I said, for the first time shows him any kindness at all; they come to support him. It could be, like I said, their lives were in danger. Remember when the prophet came to anoint David, nobody acknowledged that he

was even outside. "Have any others sons?" They went, "Yeah...that guy. He's a punk. We don't bring the punks into the house. He stinks like the sheep." They just..... "Bring him in here. That's the guy." But now they come to his aid, come to help. It's an interesting picture.

Verse 2 tells us, "And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him." As David begins to be restored, God begins to gather to him men that were in distress. Three, really, "D" words - distress, debt, and discontented. If you want, they were the four hundred men that would, in a couple of chapters (in chapter 25, there're going to be six hundred in all), they, like David, were also on the run from Saul. Some of them maybe deserved to be caught. All of them needed to repent. They were all the guys who were running from the law, so to speak. They were the lawless. They might have had good arguments, but they weren't your stand-up guys who you'd like to have over for dinner and introduce your daughter to. They were the cast outs and the unaccepted and the castaways. They were the greatest candidates of all, though, for the church, or, if you will, for the work of God. Isn't that kind of what we have in here most of the time? There're not many holy. We're all just basically hangin' on by the skin of our teeth, aren't we? God's mercy keeps us. This wasn't the cream of the crop to build an army. But here's what David began to do - because of his commitment now to the LORD, "I'm gonna do it Your way," God gave him these souls to begin to teach. And over the next seven years, they would become his army, his loyal guys; they would risk their lives for David. David said, "I'm thirsty," they'd go, "I'll go into the enemy territory, and I'll get you a drink of water." And David would go, "I can't drink this. I gotta pour this out. You risk your neck for me, I give this to the LORD." But that's how loyal these guys would become. They would learn one by one, from David, what it meant to love the LORD, to walk with God. It was David's first leadership responsibility. It was his first little flock. They would become David's "mighty men" of valor. If you're taking notes, you might write that in the margin. 1 Chronicles 11 and 12, 2 Samuel 23 are three chapters which discuss, in great detail, the exploits of David's mighty men and what they had learned and what they would go about. We will read there that they wouldn't break rank. They would just stand with David. They were loyal to him to the end.

But it's this great parallel because Jesus comes to be our King while Satan is out to destroy us. So while Jesus is building His kingdom - which is comprised of the

distressed and the weak and the discontented and the debtor - the enemy is trying to destroy. We take a position today in our world to stand with Jesus. That's not popular. For them to stand with David was not popular. It was dangerous. There's no outward benefit. It sure didn't show in terms of gain for them in the short term. But one day David will come to the throne, and they will see that they made the right choice. They stood with God's man. One day when the Lord comes for us, the world's gonna see we've made the right choice. We've stood with Jesus. We stood with Jesus when no one wanted to, when few people would. But we would. We were glad to do so.

So, back to our story. Once David's resolved in his heart to walk with God, he was in a position to finally help somebody else. In his repentance (later on with Bathsheba in Psalm 51), he said to the LORD in his prayer (verses 12-13), "Restore to me the joy of my salvation. Uphold me with Your generous Spirit. And then I can teach transgressors Your ways, and then sinners can be converted to You." "Get to me first, and then through me, You can get to others." People have asked me about teaching and pastoring and is it easy or is it hard? I must just tell you - usually it's pretty easy. People make it hard. But the LORD is never hard. I'll tell you what the hardest thing - if you're teaching a lot - is you live for a week with your lesson, and then people only have to live with it for an hour. And if they want, they can get up and walk out a couple of times and back in; they don't even have to hear the whole thing. So you have to live and die with the lesson that I'm telling you I've had to think about this for a week. And it's not always so nice. You get to just, "Ah, maybe I like that, maybe I don't. I don't know." (Laughing) You get to taste and see, I guess. I have to live with the message from Sunday to Wednesday for a week. Anyway, David has been touched by the LORD. Now David's life is about to touch others.

Verse 3 says, "Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, 'Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me.' So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold," (while David was on the run). So David does very kind things. He lovingly provides for his elderly parents. Even though they had relegated him to kind of a second-class citizen, he showed them great respect. He took them to Moab which, by the way, was where the relatives of his great grandmother Ruth would have lived. So these were family members that he took them to. Saul's nuts. He (David) knows that God has taken care of him, but he has to take care of his parents, and the best thing he can do

while he's on the run is get them a safe place. And so David, unsure what the LORD wanted to do - Saul being the wild card - he takes his parents and entrusts them to this relative, if you will, across the border.

"Now," verse 5, "the prophet Gad said to David, 'Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go to the land of Judah.' " ("Get off the border," if you will.) "So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth." The prophet Gad - you can mark him a little bit if you're with us every week - will be on the scene with us until Solomon builds the Temple. So this guy's gonna be around for the next thirty-five years. His advice to David at this point, speaking for the LORD, "Get out of the caves, and get movin', man. There's work to be done." So he takes him to the forest of Hereth. The word in Hebrew means "thicket." So it must have been a pretty dense place. We don't know where it is. There's no mention of this place anywhere in the Bible, anywhere in history. So it could just mean into the thicket, and he knew what it was, and we don't need to know.

Well, meanwhile, verse 6, "When Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered - now Saul was staying in Gibeah under a tamarisk tree in Ramah, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing about him - then Saul said to his servants who stood about him, 'Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds? All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and there is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day.' " Back in camp, Saul is doing what Saul does best - sitting under a tree, doing nothing, giving orders to his troops. In fact, he chides them - the Benjamites (that's his own tribe) - that David would never treat them like he did. He comes from a long line of favoritism to his family and friends. He wasn't an honest guy at all. He even accuses them of ingratitude and unfaithfulness and not telling him more about Jonathan's relationship with David.

Under this tirade and insult from this guy lying under a tree with a spear in his hand, verse 9, this guy "Doeg," (or "Dog," our buddy) "the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, said, "I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.' " If he inquired of the LORD for him, we don't know that that's true. It does seem, because everything else is a lie and

kind of a twist, that David wasn't there, really, to pray; he was there to run. So I'm not saying that this guy's tellin' the truth because he's a liar, and he shows himself to be so.

Verse 11, "So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were in Nob. And they all came to the king." (I can just imagine the fear in their hearts.) "And Saul said, 'Hear now, son of Ahitub!' He answered, 'Here I am, my lord.' Then Saul said to him, 'Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword, and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day?' So Ahimelech" (honestly) "answered the king and said, 'And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much.' And the king said, 'You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house!' " So "Dog" stands up, accuses the priest of complicity, never mentioning the fact that Ahimelech had questioned David, had no clue to where he was going, gave him the sword because he was asked for it, fed him because David demanded it. David is the son-in-law, after all, to the king. He doesn't represent him well at all. He just says, "He's the most faithful guy I know. You should be proud of him let alone worry about him lying in wait for you." So he, with a clean conscience, answers the king in his integrity. "He's innocent!" Saul, though, not to be one to have the facts straighten his life out, threatens to kill him.

"Then the king said to the guards" (verse 17) "who stood about him, 'Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled and did not tell it to me.' But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD. And the king said to Doeg, 'You turn and kill the priests!' So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep - with the edge of the sword. Now one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the LORD's priests." So Saul's wickedness knows no bounds. He orders the destruction of eighty-five priests. Can you imagine?! Then has somebody go to their hometown and kill everything that moved in the town. Just to say what? "Don't hide from me,

and don't take David's side. It could cost your life." Well it isn't costing your life tonight to take Jesus' side. Not yet. But what if it ever happened? I never thought we'd get where we are today, and here we are. I can't believe the Lord's not here yet. I'm prayin' He's comin' soon, I'm telling you that. What Saul had refused to do a couple of years earlier to the Amalekites - when the LORD said, "Their day of judgment is here, just wipe them all out" - he was more than willing to do through "Dog" the Edomite to God's priests. He was more than willing to wipe out his enemies, but he wouldn't take God's opinion about the Amalekites. So he wipes out the true priests of the LORD. By the way, the last Edomite in the Bible is Herod. So, isn't it interesting? Herod is the one who ordered all of the male babies two years and under, in Bethlehem, killed in hopes of stopping the King of the Jews that he heard had been born. So, the destruction - just as an overview, you might not see it just reading it tonight - of these priests was a step in the fulfillment of God's Word to Eli that his family would no longer rule from the throne because of his unwillingness to raise his sons in the ways of the LORD. So he would be taken out of office. When Abiathar, this boy who survives, dies in the days of Solomon, that would be the end of Eli's household. So, again, lots of people suffering for the sins of others. In this case, imagine how David would feel when he heard this, that his little venture in the flesh to go get some help - out of fear - had caused the death of an entire town and every priest, except this one young man standing before him. So David gets the horrible news. Abiathar would become his lifelong friend, a very great supporter of David. David will take him under his wings and, I think, for no other reason than he feels personally responsible for his condition.

Well we read, in verse 22, "So David said to Abiathar, 'I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house. Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you shall be safe.' " So, two chapters. Because of the first chapter, David gets the worst news of all. Lying and scheming and acting the part, and now the death of all these innocent people. David, by the way, had repented of this foolishness in chapter 22 before this ever happened. But here's the thing - when you backslide or you go away from the LORD, you leave consequences. Right? Sin is forgiven immediately. "LORD, I didn't mean to sleep with my boyfriend. Now I'm pregnant." You're forgiven, and you're about to become a mom. You can't separate, sometimes, the consequence from the behavior. Though the forgiveness is immediate, the consequences stay with us. It takes time to build consequences. Even in the right order, people, when they repent, they go,

"I don't feel any different." Well just give it some time. Go with the right thing. Because if you're gonna plant, you're gonna reap. It just takes time. So, we can get away from the LORD for a time, but you should probably realize, always, that getting away from the LORD doesn't just hurt you; it's gonna hurt other people as well. It's gonna mess up a lot of lives. There's just no way to isolate sin. It just destroys exponentially.

So in chapter 22 we go with David to the cave. He comes back to his senses. He returns to the LORD completely. You couldn't have wished for any better. But the consequences follow. So David now has to live with that for the rest of his life. I've always thought that if I could have gotten saved at 16 rather than 19, 80% of my life of sin was accomplished in three years, I believe. I would have loved to avoid that. I love when you see young kids like Aaron - leading us in worship today - loving the LORD for so many years. It's so good, isn't it? Get saved early. That's what I say. If you're here, and you're young, get saved early. You'll save yourself a lot of grief. You won't have the end of chapter 22 to deal with.

But Jesus promises us forgiveness. So you might want to read those four psalms - 34, 56, 57, 142 - in light of what we read this week, lest you think God doesn't care, because He does. Here's one of the things you might want to consider: when your circumstances clash with God's promises, stick with Him. Stick with Him. Let David and his experiences teach you to hang in tight. Faith requires testing. But we also learn that true spiritual growth occurs when the heat is turned up. You'll read - there's a great verse in 2 Chronicles 32:31 where you read about King Hezekiah receiving a visit from the princes of Babylon. And the LORD says, "When I sent them to inquire about the wonders in the land," it says that "God withdrew Himself from Hezekiah to test him so that he might know what was in his heart." Not that God didn't know but that Hezekiah might learn. Sometimes the LORD just puts you in there so that you can see how your progress is. You know? It's easy to go, "I'd just trust the LORD if I was in that situation." "Okay, let Me put you in that situation." Well, look at you. All different. So we need to know. We need to learn. And not that David was going to die here. David was chosen. He was going to make it. God would protect him. That wasn't the issue, and God had promised him all of those things. But getting from here to there, man, that's the growth time.

So we will continue with David next week - chapter 23, maybe 24 as well. They'll go together as well. And we'll call it "The King Who is Ruling From Exile" as God

begins to use him as king though he can't really sit on a throne anywhere, and he's got no palace to reign from. Just like you and me. We're in this world; we're not of it.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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