

Faith and Fear

1 Samuel 21

Life was like a run-away roller coaster for David. Unable to stop or steer, he had been pushed and propelled into a world of pressures and perils.

He had no dreams or desires to be anointed as Israel's next king. He was simply called in from the sheep fold. And Samuel did not ask David's permission. He simply poured oil over his head.

Then Saul summoned him to serve as his court minstrel. Once again, David was not asked if he wanted to serve the king. He was commanded to stay at Gibeah to entertain Saul.

When David walked down into the Valley of Elah to face Goliath, he was not choosing to spend his life as a soldier. He was simply doing what he always did: trying to serve the Lord he loved.

With sheep, Saul, and other soldiers, David had given his whole heart and tried to honor and exalt his God. But his faithfulness had not produced any positive results.

His faithful service to Saul had not produced appreciation, only anger in the king. Instead of honoring Jesse's son, Saul had seethed with hatred. And that hatred soon soured into a murderous rage.

Now, David was on the run. The most powerful man in the whole country was determined to kill him. But that was not really David's problem. In the same way, that which threatens us is not really our problem. The real danger David faced was the same peril we face. Fear!

In a headlong, panic-stricken flight from Saul, David gave in to his fears. And that caused him to do things he would forever regret.

We examine this godly man's dark hours reluctantly. But examine them, we must. And the reason is both practical and personal.

When we are afraid, we face the same temptations David did.

God's Purity

David first tried to find safety and security by fleeing to Samuel. But the old prophet could only provide a temporary refuge.

Then David ran to Jonathan. But his dear friend could not offer him a safe sanctuary, either. So with three or four faithful servants, he fled, unfed and unarmed.

Desperately hungry, he left his friends waiting nearby and stopped at Nob, a city of priests.

Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling to meet David and said to him, "Why are you alone and no one with you?" Verse 1

The Arc of the Covenant gathered dust in the shadows in a back room of a farmhouse in Kiriath-jearim. So there was no real temple worship. And the priests were poverty stricken.

They were weak and helpless, too. So Ahimelech, the high priest, was filled with fear when David appeared all alone one day. Everyone knew how erratic and unpredictable King Saul was. It was more than merely dangerous to displease him; it was disastrous.

So the priest asked David why he was alone. And in that moment, David faced a terrible choice. He could tell the plain truth. But then the priest might not give him the food he so desperately needed. And David was not willing to risk that.

David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commissioned me with a matter and has said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you

and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.' Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found." Verses 2-3

There was not even a fragment or a fragrance of truth in the story David told Ahimilech. It was a bald-faced lie, born of fear.

Peter faced the same temptation one terrible night in Jerusalem. While Jesus was being abused and accused by the high priest in an upper room above, Peter warmed his hands in the crackling, orange glow of a fire someone had lit in the courtyard below.

A slave girl kept staring at the big fisherman. She was sure she recognized him as one of Jesus' disciples. Then others around the fire voiced the same suspicion.

An icicle of fear chilled Peter. And he was faced with the same dilemma David faced. He could cling to God's purity and tell the truth. Or he could give in to his fear, abandon the Lord's standard of righteousness, and lie.

Peter did what David did. He lied, lacing his denials that he was a friend and follower of Christ with ugly, old fisherman's oaths.

In the end, it really does not matter much what we are afraid of. It makes no difference if we fear poverty or pain, defeat or disgrace. The temptation is the same.

David succumbed to Saul's seminal sin. We might call it situational morality. It is the belief that pressure-packed circumstances or desperate and dangerous situations allow us to abandon the purity and perfection to which Jesus said our God has called us.

...you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48

At the end of David's ordeal, he wrote one of the most shining psalms in all the Bible. That song of thanksgiving contains the conclusions David's failures taught him.

Who is the man who desires life and loves length of days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. Psalm 34:12-14

We must settle it in our minds and emotions. And we must do so in the silence and serenity before the next storm of fear starts swirling around us.

We must determine to do as our God has commanded us, to keep His commandments and reflect His righteousness, regardless of how desperate or dangerous our days might be.

The three young Jews who stood before Nebuchadnezzar made that choice long before they stood before Babylon's king. They decided that whatever the cost, they would honor and obey God.

So when Nebuchadnezzar commanded them to bow down before his statue, their decision was already determined. And it did not make any difference that clinging to God's purity might cost them their lives.

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Daniel 3:16-18

If faith is to triumph over fear, we must do as those young men did. We must be willing pay any price rather than disobey our God.

If we stop short of that, defeat is only a matter of time.

God's Power

Ahimilech had no bread of his own. But the Law allowed him and the other priests to eat the consecrated bread in the holy place when it was replaced each week. David could have that if he wanted it, the priest said.

Jesus Himself gave the best commentary on Ahimilech's decision. And God's Son said that, although only priests were allowed to eat that consecrated temple bread, the danger David faced made it permissible for him to eat it too.

But bread was not all David needed. He was utterly defenseless. If Saul's soldiers overtook him and his men, he would need a sword.

David said to Ahimelech, "Now is there not a spear or a sword on hand? For I brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's matter was urgent."

Then the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take it. For there is no other except it here." Verses 8-9

David was no longer the skinny shepherd boy who defeated Goliath. He had spent years as a captain in the king's army. But he still remembered the day he defeated Philistia's champion.

After that battle, Goliath's sword was enshrined at the tabernacle. It was kept there, carefully wrapped in a cloth, as a reminder of God's faithfulness to His people.

The priests had no other weapons. But if David wanted it, he could fetch Goliath's sword from where it hung behind the ephod: the shoulder garment the high priest wore.

A light sparked in David's eye. That was a wonderful idea. He would arm himself with the same weapon with which he beheaded Goliath.

And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me." Verse 9

David smoothed his hands on the blade of the dusty, old sword and smiled. It reminded him of the day he walked alone down the hill into Elah to face the Philistine giant.

But somehow, David forgot one important detail. Yes, Goliath's gleaming sword was a powerful weapon. But it had not done the giant any good when he stood before a teenaged shepherd boy who was armed with nothing but a river rock and a leather sling.

It was not that shepherd's sling that killed the Philistine that day, either. In his desperate desire for a weapon, David forgot the first and foremost lesson God had taught Him. He said it himself when he stood before Goliath.

You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, 1 Samuel 17:45-46

David did not need a new weapon. And neither do we. When we are empowered by the living God and trusting only in Him, any weapon will do. The bleached jaw bone of a donkey was all Samson needed to fight God's battles. And an odd assortment of trumpets, clay jars and torches was enough for Gideon.

The lesson is simple. We must never allow fear to force us to abandon a complete commitment to depending upon God's power. Adopting the ways and wiles of this world might seem sound and sensible. But depending upon God and standing upon the promises of His Holy Word are all we ever need to be victorious.

When fears chill us, we are tempted to duplicate David's mistake. But we must never be deceived. Better methods will not deliver us from that which threatens us. Neither will better equipment and more effective techniques insure our success.

God is the only one who can keep us safe. And we can only triumph through His power. Later, David realized that.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! O fear the Lord, you His saints; for to those who fear Him there is no want. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing. Psalm 34:7-9

Then and now, there simply is no substitute for simply trusting in God with all our hearts.

God's Plan

Armed with Goliath's sword, David continued his headlong flight from Saul. But as he rode away, the seeds of disaster were sprouting.

Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds. Verse 7

Doeg was a convert to faith in God. Maybe that was why he was there at the tabernacle. Hidden behind a flap in the tent, he listened as David spoke.

Later, when Saul's soldiers came seeking David, Doeg was quick to turn what he learned into profit. He told Saul how Jesse's son had been there and how Ahimilech had helped him.

As a result, all of the priests were slaughtered. And so were their wives and children.

Then and now, whenever the Lord's servants succumb to fear, someone suffers. Even when we are struggle with powerful pressures and face desperate days, we cannot give in to sin and suppose no one will be hurt. Sin always brings pain.

David did not know it yet. But as he rode out of Nob, the dark decisions he had made in fear and desperation were about to bring him down to the dust.

Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. Verse 10

It is hard to divine what David was thinking. Armed with the huge, gleaming sword he himself had taken from Goliath, he rode into the giant's home town.

He hoped to find refuge among Israel's ancient enemies. But he was recognized at once.

But the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" Verse 11

David had spent his life honoring and exalting, worshiping and serving the God of His fathers. But now fear goaded him into seeking safety with pagans who scorned his God and hated his people.

Somehow, the former shepherd forgot that he had been anointed king over Israel. Indeed, even the Philistines seemed to know God had chosen David to sit on the throne of Israel.

True, Saul, the discredited and disgraced king of Israel, sought his life. But that does not mean God's will for David had changed. He was still the anointed king of God's people. And even if his life was at stake, he could not abandon God's plan for him.

Like David, we cannot find safety and success by forsaking our faith in Christ, His service and His will. We cannot embrace the ungodly and find freedom from all our fears, either. David did not.

David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. Verses 12-13

Fleeing out of fear, David first forsook God's purity. Then he forgot God's power. Finally, he gave up on God's plan.

But that did not bring the safety and security he sought. Far from it. All it did was put him in a desperately dangerous place and fill him with panic and terror.

In the end, David was reduced to groveling in the dust and pretending to be insane. He drooled and dribbled saliva out of his mouth into his beard. He scribbled on walls, babbling and muttering like a madman. All out of unrestrained, uncontrolled fear.

The Philistines sneered and looked on David with scorn. Then they let him wander out of the city gate. But it was not David's clever imitation of madness that delivered him. He knew that.

This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. Psalm 34:6

That was what David learned at Gath. Yes, he was afraid. But it is neither a shame nor a sin to be afraid. What really matters is how we handle our fears.

David learned that, no matter how terrible his situation might be, he could call out to the God who loved him. It did not make any difference if the problems and perils he faced were the result of his own foolishness and frailty, either.

David's life hung by a spider's strand at Gath. All because he responded to fear by abandoning the life of faith in God he had lived so well for so long.

Nevertheless, God delivered His servant. He forgave David for the sins he committed out of fear. Then the Lord gave David the safety and security he sought.

We can be sure that our Savior will do the same for us. He will faithfully deliver us, even from the problems and pains our own willful and wayward decisions cause.

As David rode away from Gath, that was the lesson which was etched in his mind.

The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Psalm 34:17-19

In dark and desperate hours, we need to remember what it took danger and degradation to teach David. We never need to become frantic with fear and retreat from faith in our loving Lord.

God is our refuge. And we can rest in His faithfulness.

