



Sermon Series: David: Following God's Heart
1 Samuel 25 "When Crisis Meets Faith the Lord Will Provide"
Pastor Dillon Barber: March 20th, 2016
Big Idea: In the face of adversity, find strength in the Lord.

It is always a pleasure to be here with you in Live services as we look together at God's word. This morning we are continuing the Life of David series in which we have seen this humble shepherd boy be anointed King of Israel and place his trust in the Lord over and over again. Our story today brings us to the mid point of David's life and a fundamental turning point in his journey. Once again David is facing some very real challenges in his life and chooses to put his trust in the Lord.

As you turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 27 let me explain to you how I got myself into the trouble that we are in. Originally Brian in his gracious wisdom assigned me to preach just Chapter 27 and that was probably a really good idea. However, as I was studying the passage I learned that chapter 27 is part of a five chapter literary unit. These chapters from 27 through 31 highlight once again, the differences between David, the future king, and Saul the rejected king. The author of the story switches back and forth telling different sides of the story to add to the dramatic nature of these events and to communicate the epic conclusion to this book. This would make for some really great television as we are often left in suspense waiting for the next episode to find out what is going to happen.

So these chapters are interwoven together and do not strictly follow chronologically. The breakdown is like this. Chapter 27- gives us background about David and his men. 28- talks about Saul and the witch of Endor. 29-30 back to David and his men- 31. The Death of Saul and the conclusion of the book.

The events in these 5 chapters take place around one of the great battles between the armies of Israel and the Philistines their enemy. The timeline is not the focus, the focus is comparing David and Saul and how they handle difficult situations and that is what we are going to focus on today.

Since the story begins with David we are going to begin with David.

Following after God does not mean being perfect:

Chapter 27 follows on the heels of yet another opportunity where David could have killed Saul but he chose not to do so. Saul goes home and

David went on his way. This time David has had enough. Look at 27, verse 1, *“David thought to himself, one of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel and I will slip out of his hand.”* Are there any alarm bells going off here? Does this sound like a good idea to any of you? After killing thousands of Philistines under Saul, David thinks he can just move into the neighborhood and things will be fine? Aren't these the sworn enemies of Israel? The uncircumcised dogs, as David put it? This goes to show us once again that just because David is a man after God's heart, he is not immune to making poor choices. He is still human. And this is one of the times that we question his judgment.

So David moves with his 600 men and their wives and kids to Philistine territory to Achish son of Maach King of Gath and they settled there. I don't know how that worked out. Apparently the story that Saul was hunting David all across the country was enough to get him in the Gath, and after a while David is given the village of Ziklag to settle in. Then for the next year or so, David and his men run around the countryside attacking villages and killing everyone and taking their stuff. Now keep in mind that he was attacking the Geshurites, Girzites and Amalakites, traditional enemies of Israel. And he only killed everyone because he would take his loot back to Achish and tell the king that he had attacked a village belonging to Judah or Israel. It was a massive game of deception. He needed to make sure that no one ratted him out.

Again, not David's finest moment. He is running around killing off villages, taking the stuff and lying about it. Eventually it will catch up with him but for the time being it worked. The deception works so well that Achish loves David and takes him to war with him as the king's bodyguard. So in the beginning of chapter 28, we find that David is marching with his men to fight alongside the Philistines against Israel. The alarm bells should be going off again. This is a serious problem. The anointed king of Israel is marching to war against his own people alongside the sworn enemy. What a mess.

God still loves us and protects us when we make mistakes:

Now skip ahead to 29 and I am going to summarize the chapter in 3 sentences. David was marching to battle alongside Achish and the Philistines. Fortunately, the other Philistine commanders do not trust David and tell Achish to send him back. Achish defends David but ultimately the generals prevail and send David and his men home. They leave the next morning. That's all of chapter 29.

Now, some of you are thinking, what in the world, David was making some really knuckleheaded choices and yet God protected him. He was deceiving people and had to march off to war on the wrong side of the battle and God just pulled him out of the hot mess. Where is justice? Why didn't David get what he deserved?

Here is what I think. David was doing his best to pursue after God. He had made it his lifestyle, his objective to serve and obey the Lord. Did he always get it right? No. Were there consequences when he screwed up? Of course. And the consequences are coming. But we see God's grace, his favor and protection over David in this situation. Throughout the scriptures we see the Lord loves and cares for those who put their trust in Him. Aren't you thankful for that? I know I am. This is an example of God's favor resting on David all the time, even when he doesn't make the best choices.

In times of crisis, find strength in the Lord.

Now lets see what happens when David and his men get home to Ziklag. Look at 30:1. *David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way. When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. David's two wives had been captured-Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.*

So, they walked back into town and discovered that all their wives and kids and loved ones were gone, all their livestock was stolen and their

homes have been burned down. It's overwhelming to think about. I can't imagine how overwhelming that would be. Some of our refugees down in Sacramento know exactly what this is like, but it is hard for me to understand. David and his men were overcome with grief and not only that but some of the men were talking of stoning David. This is a genuine moment of crisis for David.

But notice what David does. David found strength in the Lord His God. David lost everything close to him and was threatened with stoning, his life was on the line, yet he found strength in the Lord. Some of you have lost loved ones. Husbands, wives, children have passed away. Some of you have lost your homes, or your jobs. Some have been diagnosed with cancer or other debilitating diseases and it felt like your whole world was crashing down around you. I hope you can relate to David in the midst of crisis and put your trust and faith in the Lord, finding strength in him. David had spent so much of his life trusting God, and time and time again God had cared for him and provided for him in big ways and little ways. I think David remembered those events in his life and found strength in the Lord because the Lord had always been with him. That is how he could write Psalms like Psalm 27:

1-3 The Lord is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

The story does not end there. David is a man of action, he called Abiathar the priest to bring him the Ephod, a special robe or apron that the High Priest would wear when inquiring of the Lord. Abiathar brought David the Ephod and David inquired of the Lord and the Lord answered. This is a big deal. David was in a way functioning as a priest before the Lord. Something that he was not technically supposed to be doing. Abiathar may have been wearing the Ephod, we don't know, but the Lord is answering David's questions. The text says that God answered, "Pursue them... You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."

David and his men pursued the Amalakitites and rescued all of the people and all of the livestock and took all of the other things that the Amalakitites had stolen from other villages. The Lord delivered David and restored everything that was Lost because David trusted in him.

Make no mistake; this mess David went through with the Amalakites happened because of his own poor decisions. But in the face of crisis, David had faith, he sought the Lord's direction and he obeyed God's instruction. The only way he could do this was by being rooted and connected with God. This wasn't a one time super human act of faith, this was the result of a life of pursuing after God.

Rejection leads to rejection

Since it was important to the Author to tell the story of Saul we are going to look at his side of the story. Flip back to Chapter 28. Beginning in verse 3. *Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.*

4 The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. 6 He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.

Notice what is happening. Saul saw the Philistine armies and he freaked out. He was overcome with fear and terror filled his heart. Does that sound like someone who is finding strength in the Lord? No. It was a natural human reaction in someone who had only ever trusted in himself. The text says that Saul inquired of the Lord but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or urim or prophets. These were traditional ways that God communicated with his people. Saul was going through the motions but his heart wasn't in it. This goes to show when we continually reject God, when we continually disobey or deny Him through our actions and choices, we have a hard time hearing his voice. Sometimes we cruise through life on auto pilot, and go through all the motions but our hearts aren't in it, and then we wonder why we feel so distant from God, or why we aren't growing spiritually. Maybe we finally hit a crisis and come running back to God but we aren't connected to Jesus and we have no firm foundation to stand on. We all do this kind of thing. If we want to hear God speak, if we want to be closely connected to him in the midst of hardship and crisis, we have to start now. Waiting until you "need God" is waiting too long. We have to spend our lives walking and talking with him so we can recognize his voice when he speaks to us.

Searching for life amongst the dead never works.

So what does Saul do when the Lord did not answer? He finds himself a witch, a necromancer and goes to her for answers. Lets read verses 7-20

This is one of the strangest stories in the Bible. There are a lot of head scratching things going on. First, here is what we know from the text. 1 Everything happened at night under the cloak of darkness and disguise. That is a clue that bad things are going to happen. 2 The woman is surprised and terrified when she sees Samuel. This suggests that she didn't expect it to work. 3. It was actually Samuel. The text makes no suggestion that it was a demon that was sent to deceive. 4 Samuel interacted with Saul's questions directly. It was a real conversation, not just a vision or dream. 5. Samuel pronounced God's judgment on Saul, repeating past judgment from Chapter 15 with new details. 6. Everything Samuel said came true, demonstrating that it was God at work and not a deceiving spirit.

There are a lot of things we don't know. How this happened, if Samuel spoke audibly with Saul or through the medium. Why the Lord caused or allowed this to happen. This is a crazy event and there is no other like it in the Bible. I will be praying for you small group leaders as you discuss this passage later this week.

When Saul was desperate, filled with fear, he sought the Lord and the Lord did not answer. Then he went to the next best thing he could find to get answers. He found a witch, a medium, a psychic. And he asked for the only authority figure he had ever respected... Samuel. Friends, do not try this at home. This is not prescriptive and it is not a good idea. But people do this all the time. Our culture is not saturated with witchcraft as others but we are headed that way. People are much more open to new age spiritualism than they were a few decades ago and it is dangerous. But even if you don't go chasing fortunetellers there are a lot of things that we normal people do when we face a life crisis in order to get answers or to feel better. Sometimes we self medicate with alcohol or drugs. We try to satisfy our "needs" through unhealthy relationships or pornography, or by spending money. We look to alternative medicine and self help books. There are lots of "normal" things that people go chasing in order to make it through a life crisis. The problem is none of them provide anything more than temporary relief and all of them bring more trouble than they are worth in the end.

When Saul wanted to know what to do he went to the dead looking for answers and instead he was reminded of God's judgment for his actions. One commentator explains it like this. "Saul only learns that his rejection has come to a head (*tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me* in v. 19). Thus, the story "depicts the futility of conjuring the dead, since this results in an announcement of death; to speak with the dead is to join the dead." So, this story does not support a view that God sometimes uses even the pagan religious practice for his own purpose. Rather, something very unusual even from the perspective of the female necromancer occurred through God's power. The situation, rather than the practice of necromancy, was used for God's purpose to declare his judgment on Saul.¹

The warning is clear. To speak with the dead is to join with the dead. To meddle in spiritualism, to meddle in new age or occult will only lead to trouble. To look for answers anywhere but God, is to invite destruction into your lives.

Notice how Saul responds. He collapsed on the floor, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. Wouldn't you? Yet even here, staring at death's door so to speak, Saul still didn't repent. He didn't throw himself on the mercy of God and ask for forgiveness. His heart was hard toward the Lord and so the Lord had turned away from him.

In Chapter 31 we learn that everything Saul was promised came true. The armies of Israel were defeated, Saul's sons were killed and Saul was mortally wounded by an arrow before he fell on his own sword. There is no celebration in the text over Saul's death. No one was happy about it. It was a sad ending to a sad and desperate life.

Conclusion

Saul rejected the Lord over and over and over again throughout his life and finally the Lord rejected him. It is a sad reality and I think even here in this story of judgment, God was giving Saul one last chance to repent. If you

¹ David Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 608–649.

had such a profound experience and were told that you are going to die tomorrow, wouldn't you want to make peace with God? Yet Saul refused.

Some lessons we can learn from this story.

If you are waiting for a life crisis to get connected to God you are waiting too long. David found strength in the Lord because he was rooted and grounded in faith. He was trusting God all along the way.

If you are in direct rebellion against God, if you are ignoring him every step of your life, I invite you today to check your heart and consider God's invitation to put your trust in him. God is merciful and compassionate and forgiving and he has made a way for your forgiveness through the blood of his son Jesus Christ.

When we do face our next life crisis, I hope that each one of us can take notes from David.

1. Find strength in the Lord.
2. Seek the Lord and listen to what he says.
3. Faithfully follow his direction.
4. Trust that even when we make mistakes, God loves us and he can use those mistakes to point us in the right direction.