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The Lord of Lords

1 Samuel 29:1–11

The Thirty-First Sermon on First Samuel

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How many of us actually enjoyed history in high school or college? Names, places, dates—I can hear the snores already! The fact that you may have learned a bad version of history doesn't negate the fact that we as Christians need to be into history. Our faith is in historical reality—God made history in the beginning and Jesus was born under the reign of Caesar Augustus and died under the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. History is not merely little independent facts, but it is the story of reality. In fact, history is His-story, the story of the true God. And as we learn about history we learn about the Lordship of God over every area of life. As we learn this story from 1 Samuel 29, this morning, I want you to see that the God of Israel is *The Lord of Lords*.

Remember that back in chapter 27 we began with David's fleeing back into the land of the Philistines and then at the beginning of chapter 28 we read that he was about to go to war alongside the king of Gath—against his own people Israel! What? That's a dramatic detail. We couldn't wait to see how the Lord would get David out of that conundrum. But, then the narrator left us in suspense as he cut away to the strange story of Saul and the Witch at En-dor in the rest of chapter 28. Why did he do this? The Lord who led the narrator to write wanted his people to

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know that while the future king, David, was going down into Philistia, the current king, Saul, was also going down—to his ultimate end, that is. The big question here at the end of 1 Samuel is this: if both the future and current king are descending, how is the Lord going to preserve his people? And the narrator is posing this question as he alternates the story between Saul and David, even taking events out of chronological order to do this. For example, the gathering of the Philistines at Aphek here in 29:1 happened before they arrived at Shunem back in 28:1 and before Saul consulted the medium back in 28:3–25.¹

The way the Lord preserves his people in such a precarious time as this is by the fact of his being *The Lord of Lords*. I want you to see his Lordship over David and Israel in three ways:

1. *In His Secret Presence*
2. *In His Sovereign Purpose*
3. *In His Surprising Patience*

May the Holy Spirit write these words upon the tablets of our hearts!

In His Secret Presence

First of all, we see that the Lord of Israel is the Lord of lords *in his secret presence*. As I read the story, did you hear any, “Thus says the Lord,” any, “And the Lord did so and so?” What we have here seems to us a boring history lecture complete with the names of the Philistines and Israelites, Achish and David;

¹ See Leithart, 157.

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complete with places like Aphek and Jezreel; and complete with some inter-army details about who can go to war after the armies had processed before Achish and his commanders. In fact, the only mention of the Lord, of God in this story does not come in a prayer made by David but comes from the lips of the Philistine king, Achish! You see that in verse 6, **Then Achish called David and said to him, “As the LORD lives,”** and in verse 9, **And Achish answered David and said, “I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God.”**

How is David going to get out of fighting against his own people on the side of the Philistines? And if he does, since there is no mention of God doing anything, would it just be coincidence or luck that he did? Here is one of those examples in Scripture of the hidden or secret yet ever-present presence of God. We know he is omnipresent, everywhere present, and we don't have to hear that he is for him to be! Back in chapter 18 we read that Saul was afraid of David because he knew that the Lord was with him (18:12, 28). So the question is this: is the Lord present with David again to deliver him out of serious trouble and this predicament?

So one of the precious promises of the Lord that we are reassured of in the life of David—and this is not just true in his life, but yours—is that the Lord is as present with us when it's obvious as when it's not obvious; the Lord is as present with us when it's spoken as when it's unspoken; the Lord is as present with us when it's experienced by us with full faith as when it's not felt by us because of our doubts and sins.² Do you believe this? Do you believe his promise, “God is our

² Brueggemann, 198–199.

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refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble?” (Ps. 46:1) Do you believe his promise, “I will never leave you nor forsake you?” (Heb. 13:5) Do you believe his promise, “And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age?” (Matt. 28:20) What’s your predicament, what’s your trouble today? Do not fear, the Lord with you!

In His Sovereign Purpose

Notice something else here about the Lord’s lordship. It is seen *in his sovereign purpose*. As the **Philistines** were **at Aphek** (v. 1) and **as the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands** (v. 2), we read as well that **David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish** (v. 2). This is preparation for battle. All the soldiers were marching in formation so they could get a count of their strength and strategize their attack. And while this is happening **the commanders of the Philistines said, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”** (v. 3) Notice that they only speak of Hebrews in general, and don’t mention David by name. Then Achish speaks in what is the first of several blunders: **“Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day”** (v. 3). “So you’re telling us these are not just Hebrews, our enemies, but their champion who killed Goliath and who has defeated us in battle at every turn?” It’s an understatement in verse 4 to read that they **were angry with Achish**. Why were they so angry? They did not want him to

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become an adversary to us. The Hebrew word translated **adversary** is *satan*.

Notice their reasoning: **For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his**

lord? How could a Hebrew reconcile himself to go to war against his king, Saul?

And again: **Would it not be with the heads of the men here?** Here is a play on

words. David could either reconcile himself by making some deal with the

Philistine heads of the army or by cutting off their heads! That surely would end

any grievance between Saul and David. And these commanders remembered the

son sung about David after he defeated Philistines in battle: **“Is not this David, of**

whom they sing to one another in dances,

**‘Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands?’” (v. 5)**

What are we seeing here? We’re seeing the sovereign hand of God causing Philistine men to recognize Hebrews, causing Achish to reveal David’s identity, and causing remembrance of an old battle song all to get David released from his sinful choice to fight with Achish. The Lord is in total control here! Three times Achish asserts the innocence of David, in verses 3, 6, and 9, which is a great irony as David has been deceiving him all along. Remember how the commanders called him *satan*? In verse 9 Achish calls him **an angel of God!** We read at the end of this short chapter, **So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines** (v. 11).

In that little line we see the sovereign purpose of God in the life of David, which cannot be thwarted by David’s sin, by Saul’s schemes, or by any other king or commander. Just like in 23:27–29 when the Lord used the enemy Philistines to

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become David's savior from Saul, so too here he uses these uncircumcised commanders to save David from further sin, from fighting against Saul and thus losing respect among Israel, and even from dying in battle.

How sovereign is God, brothers and sisters? He used Philistines to save his Messiah. He used King Cyrus of Persia to send his people back to their homeland. He used Caesar Augustus to move Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem so Jesus could be born where the Old Testament said he was to be born. He used Pontius Pilate, who like Achish with David, found no fault in Jesus and even declared Jesus innocent three times (Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22; John 18:38; 19:4, 6). Yet, Pilate relented to the Jewish leaders and delivered up the Son of God for the redemption of the world. As Peter says in Acts 2, this was "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). How sovereign is your God? What does this mean for you? It means that your God has literally moved mountains to save you! He changed kings' hearts, he guided the course of human history, he raised up and cast down armies all for you! Will you believe this? Will you humble yourself and give your life to the God who created you? What a God!

In His Surprising Patience

But there's more here. Bear with me for one last, short point. The Lord shows his Lordship *in his surprising patience*. What do I mean? What is David doing in Philistia anyway? Remember the Lord giving him the upper hand over Saul in the cave? Remember the Lord giving him the upper hand over Saul in his

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own tent? But then what? David doubted the Lord's ability to preserve him against Saul so he fled to the last place a Hebrew would want to flee: Philistia (27:2–28:2). David is running from Saul, but he's also in a sense running from the Lord. And now when these commanders want him gone and when Achish so politely tells him to leave, David is debating, **“But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”** (v. 8)

And how does the God of the Bible deal with such disobedience in his children? Children, how do your parents deal with your disobedience? Never perfectly, that's for sure! Despite David's disobedience, the Lord remains ever-patient. His patience is surprising to us, but not to him. This is who he is, as he said to Moses so long ago, **“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”** (Ex. 34:6).

What a God we have! There is no other like him! Saul, David, Achish, these commanders are all earthly “lords” but there is only one true, eternal, perfect Lord of lords. He is so present with David, his purpose is so perfect for David, and his patience is so enduring in David's life that in the end, the Lord reveals himself to us. And notice how at the end of chapter 28 Saul was left in the darkness of the night—not the place you want to be left in Scripture—while here in verse 10 the story ends with David in the light of the morning.³ Israel's light was about to dawn in David, but he was just a mere reflection of her true Light. Amen!

³ Davis, 307–308.