

What Flawed Creatures We Are!

The Life of David

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Well, we've been anticipating the subject matter of tonight's sermons for, or tonight's sermon, I should say, for a few weeks because we're looking this evening at David among the Philistines, curious, well, two episodes actually in David's life. The title therefore is this, "What Flawed Creatures We Are!" Flawed creatures we are, and that was 1 Samuel 27:1 suggests that to us when, "David said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me anymore in any part of Israel.'" Well, that's how it seemed to David then, that seemed the best policy to follow, that's in a sense he was right, Saul actually did stop looking for him and no more does Saul seek him. Saul himself is going to go into an even further downward spiral, consulting the witch of Endor and then dying on Mount Gilboa tragically and with his oldest son Jonathan and two other of his children there.

But here is David and as we've been proceeding and we've been anticipating this, making a few comments and telegraphing really the approach that I intend to take this evening towards him, what flawed creatures we are and we say that really in common identity with David. We say it of ourselves actually, what flawed creatures we are. But it certainly is puzzling and when we look at David and the remarkable help that he's had so far, incredible exploits that he's been able to do unto God, that he then goes to the Philistines. The Philistines, among them, we think, that is rather significant, isn't it? Was he not the man that slew thousands of them and including their great champion Goliath? We come to that as we read 1 Samuel 27, but we can also read it in 1 Samuel 21 because there are two times that he's found in Gath. That's one of the five of the Philistine cities. And actually when we had our reading in Zechariah 9 this morning leading up to the more familiar verses that speak particularly to Palm Sunday and the events then, but it also is talking about woes to the very cities of the Philistines like Ashkelon, Akron, places like this.

And here is Gath which is where Goliath came from, so David goes there, goes to the very city that was the place of the Philistines' champion whom David happened to have killed. A rather curious decision. Later on he goes back to Gath as in 1 Samuel 21, the first occasion, and then he goes at a later time now with 600 men. It's a different Achish, we think. If you looked in 1 Samuel 21, you'd find that there's a King Achish there and

you might marvel that the same King Achish made, if you will, the same mistake again, and so we think perhaps it is another king, same name but a different king, a different person. We've moved on in time and while David doesn't stay in Gath that long, he goes out to the town of Ziklag, that's kind of gifted to him by Achish, and David is able outside of the scrutiny of the king to be busy doing the things that we read in 1 Samuel 27 what he's doing.

But on this second visit, extraordinary, we find him at the end of our reading, don't we there, in a real fix because now he has so won over the confidence of King Achish that the king is now saying, "Well, you're going to be with me, in fact, you're going to be my bodyguard and you're going to go and fight Israel with me because you've made yourself abhorrent to them. In fact, I'm going to make you a chieftain." Extraordinary. And how do we end up with this? Well, you'd have to read on and you find out actually in the end that we refer to it briefly in a moment, but David gets out of this, this cleft stick, this double bind that he's in. Very very difficult situation. He finds himself about to have to go and fight for King Achish against his own people. No way would he want to do that. How is he going to get out of it? Well, we'll see in a moment if you don't already know.

But here we are perplexed, aren't we? This great man of God, king, the king who is patterned along the lines of a greater King to come, the Lord Jesus Christ whose life and David's experience, his trials before ascending to the throne and his coming from Bethlehem, all the ways in which came from obscurity to inherit these great titles is so prefiguring the Lord Jesus Christ and yet we find him here amongst the Philistines. Not there wisely, not behaving particularly wisely. The Lord Jesus went into the districts of Tyre and Sidon. Oh yes, he was amongst the Gentiles alright but he was there to preach the gospel to them and various amongst the people listened, but here his forebear David is not there really doing particularly well and we must assert of this, I think, though others rush to his defense and find reasons to excuse every last bit of his behavior, but I struggle quite to do that and I think I'm in the company of most commentators who look at this and shake their heads at what he's done and the decision making that got him there. But nevertheless, as I will be doing shortly, treat him with a fair measure of sympathy nevertheless despite what he's doing.

But my first heading, I want to draw our attention to these various King Achish's and my heading is this: the gullibility of unbelievers. The gullibility of unbelievers. Often it's believers who can show shocking levels of gullibility but I'll tell you this, that the world that considers itself so much wiser than the people of God can be remarkable in its gullibility and the things that it will believe and the basis on which it will believe them. Why, it will believe quite irrational things and stories that really are threadbare in terms of their credibility, and yet the world will choose to believe them.

Here is Achish, a king, we might therefore expect of him, having come to that position, that there is a fair measure perhaps of wisdom that goes with it, of being a bit canny and yet, no, we find both of these kings, believing them to be two different people, both of these things are remarkably uninquisitive, having in their midst this man, this figure who had slain Goliath and by remarkable happening, who had then fought successfully against

the Philistines, scored remarkable victories against them, had shown them no mercy at all when it came to killing 200 of them there as a way of securing the hand of Michal in marriage, and here he is now in Gath? Can anything good come out of this with the Philistines? And you might have thought them to be highly highly suspicious except the king doesn't seem to be suspicious at all and believes everything that David tells him.

So in 1 Samuel 21, the first time that David finds himself there, we don't see any great degree of probing or of asking of questions. Incidences listed there between verses 10 and 15, "fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him," note that they are a little bit ahead of the king on this, "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?'" Well, Achish hadn't kind of got that far it seems, or if he had thought it, he very quickly allayed any suspicions and it's left there to his servants to tell him really what was the obvious, that having this man in their midst spelled a lot of danger. What was he doing there? They very rightly call it, already the king hasn't quite ascended to the king but they have heard this is the king in the making, what's he doing, spying out for a future attack that he's going to bring to pass against Gath? Are they laying themselves open, a little bit like Hezekiah in a later date did with the Babylonian envoys and show them everything that he had? And so it was told that one day the Babylonians are going to come and seize all that you have there, King Hezekiah, and them maybe saying to Achish that's what David's going to do, he's going to come back one day when he's king with a great army and we were giving him space and time. This is dangerous.

Then King Achish, you wonder that he believes so easily David when he feigns madness. So David begins to think that this wasn't such a wise thing for him to be in Gath when he hears the servants and he hears the rumors. We suspect that he was then put under something of a house arrest, that his movements were restricted, maybe King Achish was now beginning to have second thoughts in hearing his servants. Now he feigns madness. We see in verse 13 he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate and let his saliva fall down on his beard and Achish buys that story and is ready very quickly to believe that, "Well, the man's mad. I don't need to worry about this man." Well, it lacks much compassion for somebody who might be in some degree of mental distress or mental disintegration. He doesn't want him anywhere near him, "Send him away. What have I got to do with this madman here?"

Well, Achish seems to have done what people sometimes can do out in the world, that they're very quick to form alliances with people where they think they have a shared grievance, that they come together and really they don't have a shared grievance and they get destined actually to fall out themselves, you see, as in politics, different alliances and you think, "Why are they in an alliance with these people? They've got so much not in common here." The world somehow thinks that it will all kind of work together. No one has to remark then how very often Islam is humored in a way that Christianity is not and humored by people who would have a lot of quite wicked things actually to say against Christians but will find only pleasant things to say in the main about Muslims. Extraordinary and, well, seeing in the school there in west Yorkshire that shows some of

these cartoons of Mohammad and we're going to find a lot of action at the school gate, so it is at the moment, the discussions about free speech and the rest. But how curious that you find alliances of people for Islam there who can do no wrong in the eyes of many secular people who will defend Islam in a way that they certainly wouldn't come to the defense of Christianity.

So they will have to work that one out for themselves because I think it can only end in tears and here Achish is too quick to think that, "Well, the enemy of my enemy is my friend." He only thinks of David, David is not looking at Saul as a sworn enemy. Saul is looking at David as a sworn enemy but David is not looking at Saul in that way. David is afraid of Saul and worried about what Saul is capable of doing but he is not a sworn enemy. Achish thinks that he is. That's how Achish works, you see. He works along those lines and rather imagines that David must be like that too and so they've got an alliance. Well, that's very gullible of him.

Then later in 1 Samuel 27 where another Achish this time gives to David, really at David's suggestion, David suggests that, "Why should you have to suffer me in your royal city. I'm hindering you in your royal life. I shouldn't really be here. I don't belong amongst your retinue. Find me an obscure place somewhere that I can go and just be there." And he's given the town of Ziklag which then, as we read, comes into the possession of Judah as the result of this. That's remarkable. Achish with again this man with a reputation of having done great great damage to the Philistine cause, there he is. Well, if it's an enemy or possibly an enemy, they say don't you hug them close to you, but he lets him go to Ziklag, out there and if we're beyond the days of social media, there's no drones that you can buzz over there just to see that he's behaving himself.

There he is now outside of Achish's supervision and surveillance, what do to precisely what he does. He goes out on these raids, these attacks and he's not attacking as he makes out to Achish, he tells him a story here that, you know, he sort of vaguely suggests that he's been out basically against the people of Judah, the Kenites and the Jeremialites and other people in this area, you know, barren kind of area, not much news, travels from those parts, and he makes Achish believe that he's been fighting them. But he hasn't, he's been fighting instead the Amalekites and the Gerasites and the Geshurites. I think we would have some sympathy actually with the Philistines, people who were more in alliance with them. We have to quail a little bit and turn pale at David's ethics to that news of who he's actually attacking and doesn't seek back to Gath, to Achish, but he kills everybody, all the men, women and children.

So this is hugely barbaric, the methods that David employs to ensure that his deception does not get discovered. But yet it is still remarkable that the king doesn't inquire too carefully. It's quite evident from the way that David phrases things that there is a deliberate vagueness that he kind of puts over the whole thing and there's the king not showing any great curiosity. Kings are often wise and quite suspicious of the motives of people and inquire more carefully and question more closely what's happening, but here is the gullibility of the king. Just as previously when David's son, his behavior changes and now he's suddenly behaving like a madman, could this really be the same person that

slew his ten thousands, is he really the man that's destined to be king? Is this serious this madness or is he just getting himself out of a tight spot? Gullibility.

Well, one wonders in the moment where talk is of the great reset, a few things. There are Christian magazines and articles and I've read a few things in a few places, this idea that the pandemic is an opportunity crisis that creates an opportunity for those who want to move things in the direction of greater global governance and having more surveillance or control and having this sort of removed from nation states and having it put centered rather more in other kind of super-national institutions and organizations. It's not to be done in a corner. There is this man, Klaus Schwab, he's written a whole book about it telling us exactly what he'd like to do. Well, as Christians we very much balk at what he wants to do and the implications of it but it's remarkable that he thinks that somehow that within this sort of pan-national, this super-national government basically we're going to build utopia here on earth, we're going to have paradise here on earth where we can control future pandemics and climate change or whatever else, we'll be on top of it, I'm going to call in artificial intelligence, the AI is going to come to our aid and like unto that we're going to start sort of fiddling around with our humanity because that gets in the way, doesn't it, of things and we're going to be sort of having implants and we're going to have bits of cybertech kind of fitted in to make sure that we all behave ourselves so it would seem he's aiming at. Remarkable that that should be thought a good thing, that that should be thought a possibility and a nice possibility and we rob ourselves of our humanity, dehumanize ourselves in order to save ourselves, as though that was a good thing. Or making us basically just puppets of some artificial intelligence, some super-computers that can get us to do the right thing, can think ahead for us and drive better than we can do and they can on that score, we won't say anything further. But be able to anticipate and steer our lives in a way that is beyond simply helping us to keep on the right side of the road and will have far more implications for our choices and what is approved of, what's disapproved of, what you can buy, what you can sell, and you can see where all of that travels.

Yet the idea that this is going to solve the problems shows that these people that though they sit in great committees and meet with big people from all around the world haven't a clue about the human heart. Not a clue. Haven't any understanding about what humanity is and human beings are, made in the image of God and sinful at that. So they do not know their own hearts, they don't know there the evil that they're capable of and how projects like this have a bad history, and though they may be filled with good intentions, they happen to be people who steer these things and the good intentions can go very sour and very bad and fall out badly for Christians. The gullibility of unbelievers, even kings and rulers. Never never underestimate the folly that people are capable of, the folly that they can entertain and seriously think will work and will cure the world's problems. They've not read the Bible and what flawed creatures they are.

But more particularly back to David, the second heading: what is David doing? What is David doing? In all this confusion ending up as the king's bodyguard, the king of Gath in Philistine territory, having to feign madness in order to get himself out of difficulty, what is happening here? And there's one word really to sum up what's happening here: fear.

Fear. This is what is generating all of these responses. It's there as we've got as our kind of text, if you will, in chapter 27, verse 1, David said in his heart, this is in him, right? This hasn't actually been spoken but this is what's in him, "Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul." That's his conclusion as the anointed who has had Samuel anoint him, who has already been spared in so many incredible providential ways, and now we find him fearing for his life.

"I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul." Fear. The point is there in chapter 21 as well and we can read as much in verse 10, "Then David arose and fled that day from Saul." Fled that day and now has recently become a fugitive. Sadly it implicated Ahimelech the high priest and the other priests that know in his flight, but here his fear he fled that day from before Saul, the actions of a man who is very very afraid. And fear is never a basis, a good basis for making decisions. Bad decisions follow if we're in the grip of fear and the devil knows how to exploit our weaknesses and our fears and add insult to injury and take us further and further down a set of bad decisions so that then to recover yourself from that and to retrace the steps becomes more and more problematic, more and more difficult and you go in deeper and you end up having to tell more lies to get through the original lie that fear drove you to and David finds himself somewhat there.

And we see the Bible very straightforward about how some of these extraordinary men of God, David here, well, we can think of Elijah in a later time where fear that Jezebel was going to seize him and kill him and he's in full flight. He's off into the wilderness and then eventually reaching Mount Sinai, abandoning his trust in God. Suddenly faith which had been so strong now is gone, as though everything that God had shown him up to that point has now just evaporated away and no longer applies, that somehow the rules are all suspended, God's laws that have been shown so wonderfully, vindication so incredibly, well, now it's gone and it's not coming back and there's only one thing to do, run for your life.

So Elijah has done that and then we read, didn't we, of Peter sitting there in the courtyard of the high priest's house. Fear. Fear of what would happen if he acknowledged that, yes, he is one of his disciples. "Yes, I'm a Galilean. You're right. So I'm a follower of His." But no, no, he assures them, "I don't know that man." That man, that's distancing isn't it? That's not even using his name because if he used his name, it would just be too troubling to Peter so he kind of dehumanizes him and is calling him "that man." Fear. He's afraid. "I'm going to die if I confess that I'm a follower. They'll have me in irons. I'll be before the high priest. I'll be dead next." Fear leads him to act in the way that he does and weep at the end of it. We rather imagine that David sometime later would have wept of the decisions that he took.

But we look at ourselves, don't we, and we say, well, we're actually no better and each and every one of us when that pressure comes upon us and we see David doing it twice, but we can all do this, that the same situations, some configuration of events that occurs again, fear grips us and our decision making collapses. We're no longer spiritual. We're no longer thinking what will please the Lord here. We've gone native and we're in full flight and really anything goes, that we think that we're on our own, it's up to me, I've got

to protect and survive and there's only one way to do it. Hurried thoughts and, well, we doubt all that we knew about God and his calling and his guidance to that date, just suddenly it's all gone out of the window. God can't help. He's not here with me. Somewhere we're saying that and I've got to sort it out myself. Well, that's the sad end of where fear takes us. Decision making becomes, well, quite unethical. In David's case requires of him to play the deceiver's part, try to deceive Achish and the other people in the city of Gath. That's a very sad, very embarrassing, every shameful moment in this great man's life.

So we have to be careful, dear friends, because we're made of that same substance. We are flawed creatures too. Never respond to fear. We should never just jump to it because we are afraid. We know that fear comes in different packages, comes at different moments, somethings about fear, we're just about to be run over, we find the adrenaline to quickly get out of the way of the oncoming car, that's good, but when there are decisions that we need to take that are going to have implications and could interfere with our witness and have impact upon other people, then stop. We need to step back and we need to be in prayer.

We notice there's no prayer here. He is not consulting the ephod, the Urim, the Thummim. He hasn't got the prophet to come and advise. He's gone native. He's suddenly switched off from all of that, "I've just got to do this." And he's doing it and before he's even realized he's doing it, he's done it and there are the implications that follow. Never a good path to take, that we end up then in more and more difficulties and it might have seemed a good idea at the time with those things that we do in haste and we repent at leisure. Fear makes us overthrow or overthrows in us good judgment, overthrows our reason, overthrows our ethics, it overthrows our knowledge that in our better functioning times we have the will of God, suddenly it's gone. What is God's will, that's gone. We're not thinking that. We're panicked and we're acting simply on our own instincts and those can betray us badly.

David, well, it's curious in that part of the world the hospitality culture, the hospitality industry a lot today, don't we, think too much and much of it but here in this Eastern culture that it was expected that people would offer hospitality to those in need, even people that you might sort of step back a little bit and wonder really, "Am I meant to give you hospitality?" But David, in a way, lent on Achish perhaps and presumed on that, and so really he was using something that was there in culture rather than relying on God and thinking, "Well, what are the implications of my decision? What will follow from it? What will people make of this? What will the Lord make of this?"

And David, well, really, like us all, doesn't learn as quickly as he needs to. Having made this mistake once, he again makes the mistake again and he's back in Gath again, and last time he had to feign madness. Did he think this time there would be a better outcome, you know, one that perhaps that people would say, "He wants to be here. He's pretty crazy. Are you better? Are you cured? What's happened to you?" But he just kind of is ready again to have to tell lies, stories and try to extricate himself from the previous deceptions. One deception, you have to then make another deception. You have to

remember what your deception was to make it consistent with the previous one. But oh, what a mess it is to try to sustain that and how dishonoring to God.

But here we find him having to tell more lies and then behave consistent with those lies, at having apparently shown himself so much for the Philistines, now he can't exactly refuse Achish when Achish says, "Well, you're going to fight with me then. I thought you could be my bodyguard. I'm going to make you a chieftain." And David's reply again is somewhat vague and ambiguous in chapter 28, verse 1, hearing what Achish wanted him to do, "You assuredly know," says Achish to him, "you will go out with me to battle, you and your men." So David said to Achish, "Surely you know what your servant can do." And that is what those kind of replies that's not a reply, it's words but what really does David mean? Do you really know what your servant can do?

So David was reserving somewhere the option to suddenly escape from this bind that he's in but he is allowed out of this because the servants or the princes of this Achish again say, "There's no way that we're going to have David going in to fight against Israel because in the middle of the battle he could turn around from in the middle of our ranks and start killing us." Then again, they had more wisdom than the king in spotting that possibility.

Fear. We have to keep a careful monitor on our hearts when we find an old enemy rearing up its ugly head again, fear. I'm watching when it's trying to bully us into doing, what it's impelling us, what stampede it's trying to bring about within our thinking and pushing us into, well, really quite irrational, quite God-dishonoring moves, difficulties that we're then going to have to painfully extricate ourselves from. The third heading though is this: God loves flawed believers. God loves flawed believers. If we have to say of David and say of ourselves what flawed creatures we are and yet God loves even flawed believers.

Well, if he didn't love flawed believers, my dear friends, he wouldn't love any of us because there are so many flaws, so many infirmities, so many ways in which we have the potential to fail, fail and fail again, that we need God to be loving if we are to make any progress at all. And we all of us can say we've had times as Christians, yes, since we were converted, baptized, whatever, times of spiritual failure, times when we look back with embarrassment and shame at what we did, what we said, where we were to be found. Shameful episodes lacking zeal, just not there spiritually, and we have acted, I'm sure each of us we can say somewhere at some time. But here's the wonder of God's working in us, that these things just as with David, however weak he appears here, however in the wrong place doing the wrong thing he appears, it doesn't define who he is, not in the sight of God. He is still the man after God's own heart. And it doesn't define us either, who we are or who we will be in the sight of God, still a child of God, still beloved, still his own special possession and nothing changes that.

We find in David a fact that is testified to in the life of all believers, that we all of us fail, we all of us carry weaknesses, infirmities, and we are capable quite spectacular failure at times. But God still loved David and he still loves us. He guided David and he helped David and even moved the hearts of the Philistine servants and princes to have David

kind of exited out of this difficulty, to have him moved on, providences that God was behind to get his servant out of that hole, to extricate him out of that bad set of decisions that fear had stampeded him into. So there the Philistine lords basically bench him, won't have him come out to fight. That was the Lord's doing and we could even see that as a result of having been there and the decisions that then follow, that David is actually placed in situations where he can help others as after the first visit to the Philistines he's then able to help the people and deliver them.

Totally undeserved, isn't it, all that, totally undeserved. David should have had to live with the consequences. Yes, David, you should have been there going out with the Philistine army wondering what on earth do I do now? Smarting under that. Having to desert, perhaps then having a spear thrown by King Achish into your back as you deserted him. But it doesn't end like that. It's a wonder, isn't it, that even our own times of spiritual lack, unbelief, of failure to live as we should, that God can still guide us through and take us to something better. He can help us and if we're teachable, ready to repent and ready to humble ourselves and in ways start over again, then God can work with us and bring us to better places, show us what he can do in us if we trust in him, give us the contrast between being amongst the Philistines and it all goes wrong and walking with me, trusting me, and things begin to go right.

But he would have us to be this, wouldn't he, first of all, straightforward. Be straightforward and anticipate. There was Peter, could he not anticipate perhaps a little trouble, did he not rehearse in his own mind, "If I am confronted, I need to be ready to speak. Compose yourself, man. Be ready for that." And seemingly he wasn't and he couldn't be straightforward. And here is David as well, digging a hole for himself, giving himself an uneasy conscience and a series of bad memories to look back upon.

So let's be straightforward and speak the truth and act the truth, not play the liar's part. Pray. Here is a great God who can square circles for fearful people, and as we look, I don't know how, there's Saul on your tail and full of murderous intent, what now? Earthly wisdom, well, seems suddenly like a good idea to go to the Philistines. Bad idea and David should have been more prayerful at that time, seeking God's help because God can give escapes from death and he can square the circle, and he can make the impossible suddenly possible if we trust in him. And I'm sure each of us can say, "Yes, He's done that for me too."

Do his revealed will. Telling lies is not his revealed will. Being yoked with unbelievers there not his revealed will. But rather have faith in him. If we obey him and follow what we know to be the right ethical path, that he will bless us in it and he will help us bear the consequences, stand up under the pressures. Trust him with all the circumstances and with all the outcomes because the Lord delights to help flawed weak people who cast their all upon him, who reach the end of their own resources and look to him for help and he's there, gracious God, far beyond anything we deserve, full of mercy, full of willingness, and we can discover that for ourselves. Whatever we may have to face, dear friends, whatever we have faced and already discovered, well, may we make and continue to make wonderful discoveries with the mercy of God towards us even when we

are in states of unbelief, pride or whatever may have gripped us, oh yes, plain fear as it did with David, there is God ever willing to help. Let's trust him.

WHAT FLAWED CREATURES WE ARE!

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: 1 Samuel 27:1 – 12; 1 Samuel 28:1-2.

We find David, on more than one occasion, stopping over with the Philistines. He even stays in Gath, the place associated with Goliath. The first time is narrated in Samuel 21:10-15. The second time he is with 600 men (1 Samuel 27). The king has the same name on both occasions – Achish – but it is thought that he is a different Achish on the second occasion when David goes to Gath. On this second visit he is given residence in Ziklag and ends up, incredibly, being in the king's bodyguard, on the verge of going to fight for the Philistines against Israel. It is through the Lord's mercy that David is discharged by Achish from having to fight alongside him. In all this, Scripture is very open in revealing to us David's flaws, despite being a man after God's own heart.

1. The gullibility of unbelievers.

We are often led to remark that the Lord's people can be so gullible. The fact is that unbelievers can be gullible too. They can be quite irrational and believe incredible things. Both of the kings of Gath show they can be easily fooled. They are un-inquisitive and are ready to hope for the best against the best evidence. Here are some examples.

In 1 Samuel 21, Achish never really investigates why David is there in Gath. He quickly and mistakenly believes that 'an enemy of my enemy is my friend'. He thinks that David is Saul's sworn enemy (which he is not) and that David is now happy to team up with the Philistines (again, which he is not). It takes the king's servants to ask the awkward questions (1 Samuel 21:11) and wonder if David means them harm by being there among them. Achish makes the mistake that many make by forming alliances too quickly and believing there is something in common when there is nothing.

When David feigns madness to deflect attention away from himself and tries to present himself as not being a threat at all to the king, the king believes this a little too quickly. Neither does it show the king up in a good light as it shows him lacking human compassion for someone who might be in mental distress.

The later king Achish does no due diligence on David and does not wonder at his recovery from his earlier 'madness'. Instead, he entrusts to David the town of Ziklag (1 Samuel 27:6) where David will be outside the surveillance of the king. Furthermore, the

king shows no curiosity about the attacks David is carrying out (1 Samuel 27:10). The king also shows bad judgment in making David a chieftain (1 Samuel 28:2). It is left to the king's princes to again ask the awkward questions that he himself had not thought to ask about David's true allegiances (1 Samuel 29:3).

Rulers can be swayed by foolish ideas and notions as we can perhaps see in the fascination by some of the most powerful people in the world with the idea of the 'Great Reset' for the world after the pandemic. This exploits the fears that the pandemic has uncovered and offered the 'solution' of global governance to 'protect' the world from future catastrophe. As Christians we are unhappy with the implications of this. But the world can be fooled by ideas of Utopia which are very lacking in wisdom and understanding. We ask ourselves with astonishment, 'Do people really believe this will answer the world's problems? Do they really think the level of control they want to exercise will be for humanity's good?' They show they have no knowledge of the human heart or really know their own hearts either.

2. What is David doing?

Fear seems to lie behind David's actions on both occasions when he seeks sanctuary among the Philistines (1 Samuel 21:10 and 1 Samuel 27:1). The devil is able to exploit our susceptibility to give way to fear and induce us to make bad decisions. Elijah feared Jezebel and this led him taking flight. Through fear we can abandon faith in God and disobey His law, lapsing instead into unbelief. We might suddenly give way to fear, even after a great victory, and feel we would be unable to do it again. We begin to doubt God and to doubt the calling we have in Him. We feel, wrongly, that we are on our own and that we have to come up with our own decisions. We feel we have to take some rash action in order to survive, that God is not with us, and that we have to do something on our own without reference to Him or, sometimes, in plain defiance of what we know pleases Him.

We should never respond to fear in this state of panic when we will not be capable of making good and wise decisions. We should step back and not allow fear to dictate what we do. We should not overthrow sound judgment, spiritual reasoning, however great the pressures and threats might seem to be.

Here David trusted himself to the 'hospitality culture' of that era where people would be under obligation to give hospitality to someone if they were in need. This was, however, disingenuous of David and he was lying to Achish. David was not relying upon God, something he repeats when he resorts to faking being mad to get out of a tight spot. The fact that he makes the same mistake again by going back to Gath a second time shows that David, like all of us in truth, is slow to learn. It sometimes needs more than one lesson before we really take on board what the Lord is teaching us. Otherwise, we are simply adding deceit to earlier deceit, and then getting ourselves into difficulty when

we are required to behave a particular way (David having to agree to fight against Israel) which brings further agony and dilemmas.

3. God loves flawed believers.

We all, like David, have acted against conscience and against clear light, and brought shame and embarrassment upon ourselves. We have all at times acted the liar's part. But these events do not define who we are or who we always will be. These incidents are proof that Christians do fail, and that indwelling sin continues with all of us. Despite his failure, David is still loved of the Lord. God is there to guide us, even though we may not be looking to Him, but, according to His mercy, He may rescue us from difficulties and problems as He does for David. Through this confused path that David takes, the Lord is even able to make his wanderings help the people in Keilah when they are attacked.

While there is mercy, this should not make us presumptuous but careful in how we live. We need to be straightforward in our dealings, not deceitful as David is in his treatment of Achish. By being deceitful we are exposing ourselves to accusations, future difficulties and painful apologies and admissions that may need to be given. We should strive to have a clear conscience before all people. We should, unlike David in these situations, pray to the Lord for help when we are under pressure and threat from others. The Lord is able to do more than we can imagine, including moving the hearts and minds of unbelievers.

Always we should aim to do what is the revealed will of God and follow what we know to be an ethically justifiable route. We should have faith in God and trust Him, whatever the difficulties we face and the fears that assail us.