

May 1, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: The Life of David
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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BEWARE OF DOEG
1 Samuel 21:1-9; 22:6-23

Here is a not-so-uncommon but hypothetical situation. Some teens are kicking a soccer ball around in the local park. Someone kicks the ball too hard and it flies over a fence into a neighbor's yard. One fellow walks around the edge of the fence to see if there is a way into the yard to retrieve the ball. There he sees a large sign posted in plain sight that reads, "Beware of Dog." Now he is forced to make a decision. Does he forget about the ball and chalk it up to a costly experience? Does he venture up to the door of the house to ring the bell hoping the menacing dog is sleeping out back? Or does he ignore the sign jump the fence and take his chances with Rover?

If he ignores the warning sign, chances are he will bring a certain amount of harm on himself. Or worse, what if he opened a gate in the fence, walked into the yard and retrieved the ball, but then in his haste to get out of the yard, left the fence open? Rover the Pit Bull gets out, goes into the neighborhood and attacks some innocent children. Now how does he feel?

That is how David must have felt. What is a person to do when he is between a rock and a hard place? How do you respond when it appears you are in a lose – lose situation? It is real easy to conclude, "Do what you have to do, and don't worry about the consequences." Right. What if 85 innocent people are killed because of your choice? That was the consequence of David doing what he had to do. What else could he have done in this situation? One principle that comes to mind here is that if it looks like an action or word could cause trouble, if at all possible, back up and wait for a better opportunity. Can we wait and still trust God? If a Doeg is present, we better. Careful planning while trusting God can prevent unexpected dangers.

A Critical Need Experienced (21:1-9).

It appears that David was convinced he needed to lie again (vv.1-2). Let's look at the setting in which he found himself. *Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?" (v.1).* It was another case in which David ran for his life from Saul who was determined to kill him (20:33). The last time David ran from Saul he went to Samuel the prophet (19:18). This time he ran to Ahimelech the priest.

Without warning, David showed up at Nob which had become kind of a sacred city where the priests did the worship work. Even Saul was known to go there to worship. But David's sudden appearance without his squad of soldiers in tow caused the priest consternation. Since David was in charge of the king's body guard, where was the king? No doubt Ahimelech was aware of the conflict and had heard how the prophets had been endangered in Naioth recently, which was just two miles up the road.

In that setting, which was replete with questions, David cooked up quite the story. *And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place (v.2).* In spite of the attempts of commentators over the years to explain this answer as acceptable shrewdness, the fact is that David's answer was a lie. As we follow David's life, we have to conclude that as time goes on, he seems to be struggling more and more with telling the truth. Remember that he and Michal had lied about him being sick (19:11). More recently, he and Jonathan had lied about why he was not at the meal (20:29). Now David told a bold- faced lie to the man of God. His willingness to lie indicated that he held no respect for God's man to whom he lied. It also reveals that he had no real trust in God. No trust in God generally results in no respect for God's servants.

Why did David resort to this spiritual low? Fear causes our faith to fail. When circumstances look out of control, we tend to take matters into our own hands. We deceive in order to protect ourselves instead of committing ourselves to God's disposal. When we lie, we

create a temporary security that results in lasting and painful consequences later. And so David talked about the men he would meet up with. No doubt the members of Saul's bodyguard under David's command were with David, but hiding nearby. They have obviously sided with David at this point.

Apparently, David felt compelled to lie because he faced a very real and serious need. He, and the men with him, needed food (vv.3-6). We might be a little surprised to learn in this story that the priest gave David bread that had been dedicated to God. David asked, "Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here." (4) And the priest answered David, "I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread – if the young men have kept themselves from women." (5) And David answered the priest, "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" (6) So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

David appeared to be pretty bold to demand bread. Actually, it was a common expectation that one would give food to a traveler in need if possible. Knowing this practice, David requested food for himself and for the men he would "meet up with." The priest explained that there was no bread available except for the "show bread" which the priests presented as a sacrifice to God each Sabbath. According to God's law, only members of the priesthood were allowed to eat this bread that had been dedicated to God. Nevertheless, Ahimelech offered that bread to David.

God would not approve of this, would He? The rule in God's law about this bread was plain enough. *Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due (Leviticus 24:8-9).* However, God's law also allowed that if there was an emergency, the high priest had the authority to decide if a "commoner" could eat the bread. In this case, Ahimelech was the

priest in charge and had the authority to make this call. He chose to give the bread to David and his men.

In case we have lingering doubts about the priest's choice, Jesus affirmed God's conclusion on the matter. One day the Pharisees argued with Jesus because His disciples were picking and eating grain on the Sabbath. Jesus explained that the disciples were hungry and then gave this example with which the Pharisees had to be familiar. *He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?" (Matthew 12:3-4).*

Okay, the need was met even if it required a little lie. Everything would turn out fine, right? No. David needed to pay better attention (vv.7-9). Standing off to the side watching and listening to all these proceedings was this Edomite guy. *Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen (v.7).*

That he is identified as an Edomite means that Doeg was a pagan Gentile. Probably he had become Saul's servant when he was taken as a prisoner of war. Why he was detained before the Lord we cannot begin to understand. But there he was. And though he was present, David and Ahimelech carelessly continued their conversation.

David expanded on his lie because one lie almost always leads to a second one. *Then David said to Ahimelech, "Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste" (v.8).* Ahimelech also bought this line and gave David the "dedicated sword." *And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me" (v.9).*

And Doeg the enemy of God's people observed the whole thing. What is worse is that after the consequences come to bear, David will admit that he realized that Doeg would rat him out. Obviously, there are some important lessons for us here. What should David have

done? Obviously, he should have arranged for food and weapons to be ready if Saul proved his intent to kill him. If David was so convinced such was the case, why didn't he prepare to escape? It is real easy for us to fail to prepare by claiming that we are just going to trust God. Trusting God does not excuse us from making wise preparations. Rather, God Himself teaches us the importance of planning ahead and preparing diligently. Solomon told us, *Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest (Proverbs 6:6-8)*. And while we are planning, we need to trust God. *The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps (Proverbs 16:9)*.

A Critical Mistake Exposed (22:6-23).

A short time after he had observed David and Ahimelech, Doeg found himself in a situation where he conceded to manipulation (vv.6-10). Saul caught word of David's escape and demanded respect from people who should be informing him of these things (vv.6-8). *Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him (v.6)*.

The king sitting under the tamarisk tree with spear in hand is a common picture of authority in ancient Middle Eastern art. This pompous king attempted to manipulate his servants by reminding them of what he could do for them. *And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds (v.7)? He tried to manipulate them by falsely accusing them. He falsely accused that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day" (v.8)*.

But the members of the guard did not cave in to Saul's manipulation. They knew that David was a most faithful servant. They also had to realize that Saul was losing it. No doubt they were

more loyal to David than to Saul. They illustrate a very important principle to us. Never cave in to manipulation. Respect is won by good leadership not by threats. The person who tries to gain respect by demanding it and manipulating underlings does not deserve respect.

While the members of Saul's bodyguard refused to rat David out, Doeg was not of their character. He illustrated how evil men help evil men (vv.9-10). *Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, and he inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine" (vv.9-10)*. Who was this Doeg guy? We know that Saul had fought against the Edomites. When he first became king, God gave him success against the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and kings of Zoab (1 Samuel 14:47). It seems likely that Doeg was a prisoner of war who had been made a slave. Even a slave could be the chief of Saul's herdsmen (21:7). If all or any of that is true, Doeg had plenty of reason for revenge.

Given the green light by the evil king, Doeg carried out unimaginable atrocities (vv.11-19). Having learned from Doeg about Ahimelech's help for David, Saul summoned and then falsely accused all the priests (vv.11-15). Like obedient citizens, they responded to the king's request for a meeting with respect. *Then the king sent to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king. And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord" (vv.11-12)*.

Respect and obedience was not appreciated. He and all his family of fellow priests showed up at the king's house only to be slammed with false accusations (vv.13-15). *And 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, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" (v.13)*. What convoluted thinking is in the heart of a man who fights with God. David was not at war with Saul that there should be conspiracy. David wasn't lying in wait for Saul. What is Saul's fear about the priest inquiring of God in behalf of David?

People who are at war with God draw all kinds of conclusions that do not line up with truth. Their conclusions do not line up with the truth of God's Word in general. Or they do not jibe with the truth about the actual circumstances. When put on the spot, the priest exposed the truth to Saul just like Jonathan had tried to do for his father. *Then Ahimelech answered the king, "And who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and captain over your bodyguard, and honored in your house? Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? No! Let not the king impute anything to his servant or to all the house of my father, for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little"* (vv.14-15). He reiterated the truth that David was the most faithful of Saul's servants. And so what if he had inquired of God? Ahimelech had inquired of God for David in the past with no repercussions. While the priest defended David, he also defended himself and the rest of the priests regarding their innocence.

Evil men do not respond well to truth. Saul ordered the execution of God's servants (vv.16-19). Essentially the king's order was for the elimination of the very priesthood that God required in His law. *And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house"* (v.16). This is the command of a man who is in complete and total rebellion against God. He had been in rebellion in his heart all along for forty-plus years. But as the case generally is, the truth of a sinner's rebellion comes to the surface slowly. And how ugly it is when it is viewed in broad daylight.

Apparently, the members of Saul's guard were Israelites who had a lot more respect for God and His servants than Saul did. *And the king said to the guard who stood about him, "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and they knew that he fled and did not disclose it to me."* *But the servants of the king would not put out their hand to strike the priests of the LORD* (v.17). They understood the relationship these men had with God and in God's work. Maybe they also understood God's intended balance of power. According to God's law, the king was not allowed to encroach in the priest's work. Nor was the priest to lead the people like the king did. They held separate offices that maintained a balance of power.

This would have been like a president of the US who bypasses congress. Or like congress ignoring the decisions of the Supreme Court. Or like the Supreme Court being cowed by congress or the president. They are supposed to be maintained as three separate branches of government, each to be a check on the other. Saul planned to wipe out the branch of God's work that deterred his will.

When God's people will not attack God's people, you can always count on Satan's people to do the dirty work. *Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn and strike the priests."* *And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword* (vv.18-19).

Obviously, the news of this grizzly massacre reached David, and he was grieved (vv.20-23). David learned the news through the providential escape of Abiathar. *But one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David* (v.20). The priest escaped because of God's providential grace. What else could we conclude when 85 co-workers were dead. We don't know how he escaped, but we can be sure God providentially protected him.

The priest escaped because God had future plans for him. He became God's representative to David and the people (1 Sam. 23:6). He was especially important as a spy for David during Absalom's rebellion (1 Sam. 15-17). Unfortunately, after David's death, he sided with Adonijah against Solomon, which cost him the priesthood. *And to Abiathar the priest the king said, "Go to Anathoth, to your estate, for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you carried the ark of the Lord GOD before David my father, and because you shared in all my father's affliction"* (1Kings 2:26). For the man of God to finish well is very important for God's glory, and too often not attained.

News of the slaughter was painful news for David (vv.21-22). Abiathar laid the blame where it belonged. *And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD* (v.21). It is true that the pagan, Gentile, Edomite Doeg wielded the sword. And apparently, somehow he alone was able to kill 85 priests. No doubt he had help in destroying the entire city of Nob. But Saul was the real culprit.

Because Saul fought with God, he did not hesitate to raise his hand against God's servants, from David through the priesthood.

As we are prone to do, David expressed 20/20 hindsight about what he should have done. *And David said to Abiathar, "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul" (v.22a)*. As we have concluded, David was between a rock and hard place. What else could he have done? We find ourselves in situations like that. Do we have remorse for those painful things that seem to have been unavoidable? Is it possible that God allows the "unavoidable" tragedies of life to humble us? When we come face to face with the consequences of our actions, it should make us depend on God more.

David accepted the blame. *I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house (v.22b)*. No, it was Saul's fault! No, it was Doeg's fault! No, it was God's fault for not protecting His servants! It is true that God permitted this atrocity and that somehow through it He was glorified. It is definitely true that Saul, Doeg, and even Satan were the real culprits behind the tragedy. But David's actions in a questionable setting opened the door for it to happen. We have to be willing to accept blame when we are responsible for difficult situations. It is part of the process of growing spiritually, growing to depend on God.

In an effort to make up for the tragedy, David offered provision for the priest (v.23). He told Abiathar, *Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping" (v.23)*. On the surface it does appear that David's offer was an attempt to placate the grieving survivor. More likely is the fact that this was an insightful and intentional plan. The priest played a very important part in God's plan for His people. Only the priest was permitted to offer the required sacrifices. The priest was in charge of the ephod and Urim and Thummin by which the leaders made decisions regarding God's will. A wise king would work closely with the priest. Abiathar represented the continuation of the priesthood in Israel.

Would Abiathar accept the offer? Would you if David offered, "You will be safe with me who is responsible for the death of your 85 co-workers"? Abiathar and David teach us a very important lesson about acknowledging our mistakes, taking the rightful blame,

forgiving, and renewing trust in the person forgiven. Quite honestly, if anything remotely close to this would happen in Christian circles, in churches, the result would not be very pretty. The guy like David who made a bad choice would be toast until the day he died. No second chances for people who get caught making bad choices. And Abiathar would quit the ministry altogether because it does not make sense to serve God who lets bad things happen.

To avoid sad endings in life, we need to plan wisely. We need to commit our plans to God in prayer. Be aware of what is going on around you. Conclude that "close enough" is only acceptable in horseshoes and hand grenades. And after all of that, if your plans fail, be willing to accept the blame and ask for forgiveness.