

May 15, 2016  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: The Life of David  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## WOULD GOD HAVE ME RUN OR STAY? 1 Samuel 21:10-15

Mixed in with the context of David going to Ahimelech the priest at Nob to get food and a weapon, and Saul punishing the priests by ordering Doeg the Edomite to kill all of them, we find David running all over the countryside looking for help. Or at least that is how the story seems to read.

In his attempts to escape with his life, David presents a couple of dilemmas for us to consider. Sometimes, we pious and sincere Christians tend toward the simplistic answers in such troubling circumstances. It is real easy for us to respond to someone who is facing difficulty that they just need to dig in their heels, set their jaw, and stand fast. We tell them to be like Luther at the Diet of Worms who responded to the threats of the church leaders by declaring, “Here I stand. I can do no other.” Or we might even challenge the spiritually weary and worn person to stand to the bitter end like James Bowie and Davy Crockett at the Alamo.

I, too, have in years past encouraged servants of the Lord to just be plain stubborn against any thought of running away. Sometimes that has no doubt been bad advice. All situations and circumstances are not the same. Where it might be wise to stand in one situation, it would be wiser to run in another. For example, if an F-5 tornado is bearing down on your house, I would not recommend that you stand fast and defy the tornado just because you have sovereign rights over your property. Likewise, if Saul is determined to kill you, probably running for your life is not a bad idea.

But what about trusting God? Does the servant of the Lord run from the face of trouble or stand fast when trouble comes, knowing in his heart that he is innocent and on the side of truth? Another

conflict of responses is discovered when we ask, “Does the servant of the Lord depend on other mere people for safety or entrust himself to the Lord for safe keeping?” Didn’t David pray, “*Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings*” (Psalm 17:8)? Then, should he trust God to do just that?

Up to this point in David’s story, in particular in his conflict with King Saul (who God was judging and replacing with David), David has found help and refuge granted by various people. Jonathan protected him. Michal protected him. Samuel protected him. Ahimelech protected him. Now he fled to Achish the king of the Philistines, the hated enemies of Israel, and he will also go to the king of Moab to ask for help for his parents.

There is a time to make up your mind that you will go after Goliath and defeat him in order to defend yourself, your family, your nation, and God’s reputation. But there is a time to run for your life and seek help from those who will offer it. It is possible to trust God in both of those situations. It is also possible for us to put ourselves in questionable circumstances when we do that. That is what we find with David as he ran. Let him teach us more valuable lessons about how to trust God when it seems to make more sense to trust ourselves.

### David Rose and Fled (21:10-15).

It might sound a bit out of line to some sincere Christians, but maybe ungodly people can help (vv.10-11). David must have believed that as he was trying to preserve his life. We read that *David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath (v.10)*. We know that Gath was one of the chief cities of the Philistines. Exactly where it was located is not certain, but we have an idea that it was south of the boundary with Judah.

David fled to that city of pagans because it was obvious that his life was in danger. Jonathan his friend and Michal his wife agreed. This wasn’t a question of conflicting personalities where time and conversation would solve the problem. David would be killed if he did not flee. But we might be tempted to question his fleeing when we know that David was a warrior who had defeated many enemies stronger and more fierce than Saul.

That his enemy in this situation was Saul made the situation most difficult. David's conscience would not allow him to raise his hand against the anointed king. Yes, David firmly believed that God had anointed Saul to the office and, therefore, to attack Saul would have been to attack God. David believed this truth in spite of the fact that Saul was about as evil as a man could be.

We do well to give serious consideration to David's response because God's principle in this matter can make things difficult even for us. God's rule regarding governing officials is clear and unchanging. Paul expressed it as, *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment (Romans 13:1-2)*. Then how should you and I respond if a governing authority persecutes us?

This is a situation where Dietrich Bonhoeffer has caused some debate. He was opposed to Hitler, as any true believer would have to be. However, Bonhoeffer took his opposition to the extreme point of participating in a plan to assassinate Hitler. As a result, he was arrested and ultimately executed. Was he right to raise his hand against Hitler? What were his options? Bonhoeffer could have fled. Many believers did flee Hitler's wrath. Or do we stand, maintain our testimony, accept the consequences, but do not resist the ungodly king because God appointed him or her (in the case of a queen or leader)?

By the way, there is another application of that principle that we are familiar with and which we should consider. Is a pastor ordained by God to lead an assembly of God's people? Yes, and the position should be respected. God's rule for that relationship is: *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17)*.

What is a faithful follower of the Lord supposed to do then when a pastor becomes evil like Saul the king? We should respond like David did who first tried to correct the problem. If our personal addressing of the problem is not effective, we need to enlist the help of someone close to the situation to solve the problem. That is what

David did with Jonathan. As we know that failed. Sometimes even the involvement of other people in the problem with a wayward pastor fails. When the errant pastor will not be corrected, and no one will step up to correct the problem, flee.

David fled and seemed to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. He ran to Saul's enemies, but they recognized David as the man God blessed. *And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" (v.11)*. Because God blessed David, he had a reputation. It is true that every time David went out to battle he was successful. It is probably true that up to this point David had been responsible for the death of hundreds of Philistines (though ten thousand was hyperbole). It is also true that God was the power and glory behind David's success. The history records that *David had success in all his undertakings, for the LORD was with him (1 Samuel 18:14)*. It is doubtful the Philistines understood the source of David's success but they certainly observed the outcome of his success.

How we, the people of God, respond to difficulties is very important because we have a reputation. It is not so important to protect some kind of standing we think we have achieved. Rather, because of our testimony, it should be well known among our peers that we trust God and desire to honor Him in the way we live. No doubt then our peers are watching how we respond to difficulty. If we respond like people who do not claim to love and trust God, what does that say about our God? Moses was greatly concerned about what the pagans might conclude about God if God wiped out the stubborn Israelites. *Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people (Exodus 32:12)*. Our testimony is on the line when we respond to trials.

A possible problem of running to unbelievers for help might be that the ungodly people will cause us to be dishonest (vv.12-15). In that setting, when it looked like he was going to be in trouble, David pretended to be something he was not (vv.12-13). It was clear to David that circumstances in Gath had also turned against him. *And*

*David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath (v.12).*

When the Philistines brought up the fact that David was responsible for the death of many of their friends and family, David was afraid. I find it interesting that he was not afraid of Goliath, but he was afraid of Achish. Maybe he could see the difference between one giant and the whole Philistine army. At any rate, it was very obvious to David that circumstances had just grown out of his control. How do we respond in the company of unbelievers when we are about to be shamed, humiliated, or worse?

In an effort for self-preservation David became a hypocrite. *So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard (v.13).* David chose self-humiliation rather than waiting to see what Israel's enemies would do. This was his way of taking back control of the situation. Granted, he had to pretend to be something he was not, but at least he was back in control of the situation.

In less dangerous and non-life-threatening situations, Christians often respond just like this. In order not to appear odd, they joke and drink along with people at a party who are getting drunk with every intention of going out to drive on the road among innocent people. In an effort to fit in with unbelievers, they laugh at off-colored jokes. They pretend to have watched the same "R" rated movies that their unsaved pagan peers are talking about. In all these examples, as well as many others, people who claim to love Jesus pretend they don't love Him in order not to look different.

In trying situations, immature Christians try to fit in with people who do not know the God of Israel, who do not acknowledge that He is their creator, and, therefore, do not understand the nature of sin and its consequences. The only way we can possibly fit with people like that is to pretend that we are something that we are not. Christians have been chosen by the Creator to be distinct, different from the normal people who belong to Satan's influence. Christians are to pattern their lives after the character of God as He reveals it in His Word. Christians are to be satisfied to be different, to not fit in, so that we can present the wonderful news of the gospel. If we pretend

to be just like the unredeemed people, we have no compelling reason to encourage them to change.

David's plan worked. *Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" (vv.14-15).* The pagan king opened the door for David and his men to leave unmolested and David ran. Achish could have executed David. He chose to let him go. And David breathed a sigh of relief and walked away thinking, "Boy, I sure fooled him."

This brings us to a common wrong conclusion. Because the end justifies the means, the means of deception was approved by God—right? A good result never justifies a sinful plan. Lying is still lying and deceiving is still deceiving even if apparent or temporary good results from it. Again, we see an example of how God patiently, graciously works with faltering humans. We could argue that God should have done some kind of miracle like striking Saul dead on the spot. Then David would not have been put in these difficult situations. But God was using the difficult situations to shape and mold David into what God intended him to be—"A man after God's own heart."

When we fail in the face of trial, rather than giving up because we are such sinful humans, we need to confess our sin and ask God to continue to shape us and make us more like Christ.

### **David Departed and Escaped (22:1-55).**

In times of testing, we generally do not care to gain more responsibility (vv.1-3). But sometimes that is just what happens. Like David, we love to have family visit . . . sometimes. *David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him (v.1).* David escaped from Gath to a cave in Adullam. Adullam was located in the rolling hills of central Judah about 20 miles northeast of Gath and 10 miles southeast of David's home in Bethlehem. That put David and his handful of soldiers about a day's journey from his family.

Because Saul was so intent on killing David, David's family must have also feared for their own lives. Therefore, they all showed up at David's cave. They didn't come for a visit but were looking for protection from the boy who God had blessed. Now here is the kind of dilemma Christians might very well face. We try to walk in fellowship with God. God blesses our efforts and yet life is not without its problems. Just when it seems like life is about as tense as it can get with health issues or job problems or just trying to raise kids, family calls. Why do they call you or why do they want to come and stay with you? Because it is obvious that God is blessing you. Family doesn't always understand that connection. All they know is that your family seems to have it all together, seems to be pretty stable, and, therefore, when they have needs, it only makes sense to resort to you.

Now what do you do when they call or show up? You do all that you can to help. When your advice or offer of help is rejected, you kindly explain that you have done all you can do. But ultimately, because you want to be used of God to help others, you try to help.

Not only did David's family show up and compound his responsibility, but he had to deal with the ages old rule that misery loves company. *And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them. And there were with him about four hundred men (v.2).* Over a short period, about 400 disenfranchised people showed up at David's cave.

These were people who were in some kind of trouble or otherwise lived on the fringe of society. Because of their troubles, they might have felt left out of the mainstream. Notice the word "bitter of soul" is used to describe how they felt left out. No doubt they identified with David who was forced out of his comfortable settings and was now in conflict with the standing government. Maybe they believed that by siding with David they could get a certain amount of revenge against the society who ignored or rejected them when David came to power.

If this picture looks familiar, maybe it should. We are witnessing an historical shift caused by millions of voters who are bitter of soul at the establishment Republican party. They have made their voice heard, and it will be interesting to see if they get their

vengeance on the grand old party who ignored their pleas over the last couple of decades.

But what was David going to do with all these bitter people? We can almost hear them say, "Hey Buddy, we're with you. You can count on us. We are here for you. Do you have anything to eat around here?" Obviously, David needed more help than he was capable of giving.

David needed more help. He would find help from man and God (vv.3-5). An ungodly friend can actually be a good source of help in time of need. To that end, *David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me." And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold (vv.3-4).*

We are not exactly sure of the exact location of Mizpeh in Moab. The name means "watch tower" which might refer to the king's fort. Why did David choose to put his parents in the care of a foreign, pagan, ungodly king? We need to remember that his great-grandmother Ruth was from Moab, so there was some history there. Also, there was an ancient practice of offering sanctuary for the enemies of your enemies as illustrated by the remnant of Judah who went to Egypt who was fighting against Babylon. *Then all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the forces arose and went to Egypt, for they were afraid of the Chaldeans (2 Kings 25:26).*

Notice that David was open and honest about the need. David did not try to be like a Moabite. This time he did not pretend to be something he was not. David was very open, honest, and vulnerable. He obviously asked the king of Moab, "I have a problem. Can you help me?"

This is a good illustration of how we are supposed to interact with an unregenerate world. Becoming isolationists, circling the wagons or gathering inside the fort, cutting ourselves off and forming our own unique society limits any possibility of sharing the gospel or demonstrating God's character. Be open, honest, vulnerable as we ask for help and offer help. Sometimes we can help the people of our subculture, our circle of influence. Sometimes we need their help. Jesus put it like this: *"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell*

*you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings (Luke 16:8b-9).*

And while you are looking for help, trying to solve life's problems, it is good to check to see if God has an opinion. *Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah."* So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth (v.5). As in David's circumstances, there comes a time when it is good to consult the man of God. It is interesting that the prophet seems to have approached David. Obviously, God had sent Gad a message. Maybe Gad was among the people hanging out with David at this point.

Now God stepped in and clearly, pointedly directed David's next step. It was not that God was sitting back and waiting for opportunity. God arranged all of David's moves and choices from the very beginning. Part of the reason he went to Moab is because God had arranged from Great Grandma Ruth to leave there and move to Bethlehem years earlier. Now God made it known that He had some guidelines for David on the run.

At what point would you consult a person who has a very close fellowship with God to ask for advice? An expected response is: "Oh, that only worked in old times. In these modern days we are all equal. Why check with a 'man or woman of God'?" How much time do you spend studying the Word of God? How much time do you spend praying? How many lessons have you learned by talking, helping, counseling others through similar problems? How often have you discovered how the principles of God's Word apply to particular experiences?

It is always good to find someone like Miss Clara from "War Room" who has much experience in fighting and winning spiritual battles. Listen to what such seasoned saints have learned. By the way, a pastor is supposed to be in a position to do this very thing. The pastor is the modern "Gad the Prophet." But folks are always reticent to ask for advice from the pastor because . . . . ?

An important lesson is that it is wise in times of testing and self-preservation to see if God might have already given some answers in His Word. Check with someone who is very familiar with those answers.

There will be times in every believer's life when things get out of control and we don't know what to do or where to turn. A wrong response will always be to pretend we are someone or something we are not; such as, strong enough to handle it on our own, or smart enough to come up with the solution, or spiritual enough to endure. Maybe it will be necessary to run or move away from the circumstances. Maybe it will be better to stay and learn. Sometimes it will be good to lean on the help of unbelievers. Always it is good to allow God's people to help. Above all, find out if God has already addressed your dilemma with principles from His Word.