

The Gap Widens: David Flees to Gath

Call to Worship: Psalm 145:14-21

1st Scripture: Numbers 20:14-21

2nd Scripture: 1 Samuel 27:1-4

Hymn #27- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Hymn #487- *Faith of Our Fathers*

Hymn Inset #145C- *The Eyes of All are Turned to You*

Introduction:

Once again, Saul has come looking for David, with three thousand men, and once again, David, though given the opportunity to kill Saul, has refused to harm the "Lord's anointed." And what do you do, when you have an unreasonable enemy, who happens to be the king, and who happens to be set on destroying you for unrighteous, envious purposes, when the whole time, your conscience will not allow you to retaliate in defense of your life and the lives of all who are with you? You have tried reasoning with this man. You have proven to him, over and over again, that you have no intention of ever harming him. You are further responsible for the welfare of six hundred men and their families, who have entrusted their lives to you, and who are constantly under the same threat. You have hung in there all along, living in mountains and caves, trying to maintain some form of a presence, in the land of your inheritance, and in the land, over which, God has ordained and anointed you to be king. You have been faithfully waiting upon God to fulfill His promise, but you are also coming to the realization that you will no longer ever be safe in these present circumstances. What do you do?

In our text for this morning, David is left wrestling with that very difficult question. And his final decision, brings him to the place where, although he will be out of Saul's reach, he may also (from the standpoint of humanity) take the great risk of deepening the gap, that presently exists between him and the throne of Israel. David flees to Gath, in the land of the Philistines!

I. Wise Reasoning, Accompanied by Great Faith

[Read verse 1]. Too many close calls with an unreasonable madman, lead David to make a wise and difficult decision. "If I stay here any longer, Saul will eventually succeed in destroying me. The best option, at this point, is to quickly escape, outside of Israel, and into the land of the Philistines, where Saul will be unable to find me. And when he can no longer find me in any part of Israel, he will grow tired of looking, and he will stop pursuing me."

Now, this is both a wise and a dangerous decision for David to make. It is wise, because it will indeed keep Saul from pursuing him. This could very well relieve the great pressure of having to constantly hide and watch your back, because the king is pursuing you. But it is also dangerous, because, first of all, it is the heathen land of the *Philistines*. Not only are they a barbaric, ungodly, heathen people, but furthermore, as we have seen in the past, David has probably killed more Philistines than anyone else (and who could ever forget David's crushing defeat of the great giant, Goliath!). David was not unknown to the Philistines. He tried to run there once before, hoping they didn't recognize him, but when they did, he feigned madness, and barely escaped with his life. Now, he is running back to the same people. This could very well be a "jumping out of the frying pan, and into the fire" scenario for David!

And then, secondly, it is dangerous, because it could potentially drive a deeper wedge between David and the throne of Israel. Not only will David be dwelling outside of the land of Israel, but furthermore, he will be living among the Philistines, Israel's most hated enemies. This could easily be seen as treasonous, from the standpoint of the Israelites. Can you imagine how you would be viewed by your fellow Jews today, if you left Israel, only to live among the people of Iran for a time? They probably would not be too anxious to have you return as king, any time in the near future! And so, this decision is both wise (at least in the short term) and dangerous/risky (in the long term). But of course, we know that David has his eyes and hope fixed beyond the boundaries of finite, human control, and into the realm of the infinite, and all sovereign God, who is able to do, "exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we can ask or even think!"

And so, David and his men (with their families), pack up and head to Gath of the Philistines. [Read verses 2-3]. David and his men find favor with the king of Gath, Achish, and they are able to find refuge right there, with Achish, in the royal city. We are not given a transcript of the dialog that had taken place between Achish and David, but we can assume that David had explained a bit of the conflict that he had with Saul, and Achish believed him, also seeking to take advantage of a situation, where he could inherit David and his army, for his own military profit and use (this will be confirmed later on).

And then, finally, we find that David's plan has indeed worked, at least for the short term. Saul gives up pursuing him. [Read verse 4].

II. Conclusive Thoughts and Applications

Now brethren, I want to stop right here for this morning, and spend the remainder of our time, considering some practical thoughts and applications, which can be taken from this critical move, on David's part. Early on in David's life, we recall that he was anointed by Samuel, and declared by God to be the one, who was to replace the wicked and rebellious Saul, as ruler over Israel. And shortly after that, God had providentially brought David into Saul's presence, as one who could help soothe Saul's torment, as a distressing spirit was sent upon Saul. The little known shepherd boy, David, was brought right into the throne room, as it were, to play soothing music before the king, which God indeed used, to alleviate Saul of the distressing spirit. And from there, David took off, and it seemed as if the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy, was right around the corner. David advanced militarily, and he gained great favor with Saul and all of Israel, and the highlight of this was found when David slew the great and fearless giant, Goliath.

But then, providence swung David around in a most abrupt and shocking way, indeed, to the point that one might begin to question God's faithfulness. And David has seemed to have traveled in that opposite direction, ever since. Saul grew jealous of David, and the hunt for David's life has been on, ever since. He has been a fugitive, hiding out in the caves, having to move his family over to the other side of the Jordan, in the mean time. Has Saul thwarted the great plan of God, concerning David? Well, we know that he has tried, and while he has kept David on the run, we have found God still present and active, if nothing else, at least keeping David alive all throughout his fleeing. But one might begin to ask, "How long, O Lord?" When will this end? When will You fulfill Your Word and Your promise? Perhaps David gains a step or two in the perceived right direction, but then another sharp turn ensues, doesn't it? And the whole time, David is certainly learning that he must minimize his anticipation of how the path will look up ahead, which is meant to lead him to the throne. He knows the beginning, he knows the end, but the in-between is just way too unpredictable. It is a labyrinth, full of human impossibility and sorrow, ups and downs, and all manner of sanctifying struggles, which cause the soul to cast its confidence wholly upon the omniscience and omnipotence of All-Mighty God! Indeed, the simplest way, from the standpoint of human logic and the naked eye, seems to be blatantly obvious, but providence has set a road block right there.

The Israelites are wandering in the wilderness and they are looking to head north, to make their way around the Dead Sea, and into the Promised Land. And look, there is the clear

way right in front of them, The King's Highway. They can just follow that right up to the top; it is a smooth run to their final destination. All they have to do is humbly bring a request before the Edomites, their brothers in Esau, who own the land, upon which the highway sits. They will not bother them. If they need food or water, they will pay whatever costs are necessary...so, off they go. They bring forth the request, but Edom refuses to give them passage through their land. They ask again, with humble plea, but Edom still refuses, and further sets up a large army, ready to attack, should the Israelites set foot on their land. And the Israelites cannot receive the challenge and attack Edom, for, God has commanded them not to attack their brothers in Esau. And so, they are forced to go backwards; uncomfortably, inconveniently, back into the wilderness, only to travel all the way around the land of Edom, and up the rear...when the King's Highway would make life, so, so, much easier for them. What should have been a 100 mile journey, on a smooth, developed road, has just become a 260 mile journey, beginning with 80 or so miles in the wrong direction. Now granted, their sin, in large part, helped bring about this great burden, but if your sights are set on this life, that kind of news will sink the soul down, will it not?

But in David's case, there was no sin involved, was there? David was righteous in the matter, and he continues to exercise an unnatural confidence and trust in the invisible and living God. And now, David is forced to widen the gap further, at least, so it seems from any logical standpoint, as he flees into the land of the Philistines, to live amongst the heathen enemies of the people of God! The throne seems more out of sight now, than ever! It doesn't seem like David could step much further away from the throne, than this! And yet, brethren, we know the rest of the story, don't we? And as we read the chapters ahead, we actually find that every step backward for David, was really a step forward to the throne...in accordance with God's plan, because every step outside of the realm of David's natural ability and understanding, was a step inside the realm of increasing his faith and confidence in his Sovereign God! David was being thoroughly stripped of all self-confidence; David was being forced into the zone of God-dependence, not knowing what a day may bring, not knowing how he would reach his final destination, but forced to trust that, somehow, at some point, God would bring him there. And that is exactly where God wanted him. And that is exactly where God wanted the Israelites (not "living by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"). And brethren, that is exactly where God wants us! And He will take us to all manner of

uncomfortable and even painful places; He will move us forward a little, back a little more, to the right, to the left, up, down, and all over the place, until our heads spin off of their axis, leading us to say, "Ok God, I will stick to obeying, You lead the way. I am through seeking to be my own GPS; I will seek to move in a direction (indeed toward the goal), but my hope will be set upon your faithfulness, to bring me to the ultimate destination. You promised! I am over here among the Philistines; that path looks really nice and smooth over there, but it is presently blocked by Saul, so I will be faithful here, and trust you to bring me there...somehow! The way around Edom, though much longer, seems best to you...and so, I am heading south now, Lord." "I am the Apostle Paul, Lord, and it would seem so beneficial to the church, for me to be free to travel and preach, but here I am in prison for who knows how long. And so, I will write a couple of letters, hoping to encourage and build up the brethren that way. Somehow, you will find good use for these letters, I am sure...Let's see, where do we begin?" "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Philip. 1:1-2).

Brethren, where are you in your walk with the Lord, right now? What unpredictable circumstances are you facing, have you faced, or will you face in the times ahead? Remember Pilgrim's journey, in *Pilgrims's Progress*, how there were times when he came to the top of a mountain, and was able to glory in the sight of the Celestial City? But then, shortly thereafter, he would have to trek further ahead, which brought him down the mountain and into another lowland area of trial, where the Celestial City was no longer in view, was it? All he could do was rely on the Word of God and the Interpreter as his compass, trusting that every step of faithfulness was, by the grace of God, a step in the right direction, even when the road seemed to wind all over the place, and the heavenly city was nowhere in sight. Such is our path, brethren, and if our eyes are fixed anywhere else, than on Christ ("the Author and Finisher of our faith"), and on the reality of our ultimate destination, then we will find ourselves, often lying unproductively in despair. If we are going to have to live among the Philistines, then let us do so, in a way that would bring glory to our great God! And let us trust God to direct our steps home! "Trust in The Lord with all of your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

There were no short cuts for David. Obedience to God, would take him down the road of self-sacrifice and necessary sanctification, because God was more concerned about David's

character, and about molding Christ-like virtues in him, than He was with giving David ease of life. The Lord Jesus Christ, who was a Man of sorrows, and whom David foreshadowed, knew the winding path of suffering all too well, did He not? Satan took him to the pinnacle of an exceedingly high mountain, where He could gaze upon the kingdoms of the world, and he offered Him a path to the throne, which would not take Him to the agony of the cross. "Just bow down to me, and I will give you all of these kingdoms; I will release them to Your power." But of course, our Lord resisted the deceptive temptation, and embraced the cruel and shameful cross, for the joy that was set before Him!"

Where does your winding journey take you? Have your life dreams been dashed? Are you moving in a direction that carries you away from your intended plan?

1- Does obedience to God take you down the road of a forfeited job promotion or job opportunity, where you know you would have to sin against God by working that job? Yes, it could relieve a lot of your present burdens, it comes with all kinds of "bells and whistles" of benefits, but it requires that you unjustifiably work on the Lord's Day, or it necessitates some form of dishonesty, or in some way, it brings your conscience into conflict with God's revealed will. Do you touch the Lord's anointed or honor God and embrace life among the Philistines for some unknown portion of time?

2- Does obedience to God take you down the road of having to deny yourself the opportunity of pursuing a mate, because you know that, while such and such a person is so wonderful, friendly, beautiful...etc, they are not in subjection to the same Christ, with whom you are in union? You cannot form an unequal yoke, and though your heart yearns to find a spouse, you must wait upon God, back in Gath.

3- Does obedience to God require you to give up some seemingly great opportunity, simply because it is a rushed opportunity, that will not be around long enough to let you pray and seek the wisdom of God and the godly counsel of others, before making the commitment?

4- Does obedience to God add an extra year of schooling to your college load, simply because cramming it all in a shorter time frame will not allow you to fulfill your basic responsibilities to your soul, your family, your church...etc?

5- Does obedience to God compel you to embrace a difficult marriage, though no peaceful end seems to be in view, and your life clock is quickly ticking away?

6- Does obedience to God move you to sacrifice popularity and coveted friendships, when doing so, will keep you from walking the path of the wicked?

7- Does obedience to God move you to abandon your life dreams when the call of glorifying Christ requires it?

8- Might obedience to God call some even here to leave the comforts and privileges of our free country, in order to seek the lost on foreign soil?

9- Does obedience to God require you to glorify Him in some besetting illness that tends to leave you ailing or writhing in pain, while everyone else seems to be "living it up," during all of the passing holidays?

You see, brethren, David's path to the throne was not a coveted one, and in many ways, his reign, and his life, from the standpoint of this life, were not to be coveted either. Man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upward, and David's life confirmed this as well, as we will continue to see in the times ahead. The glory of life in Christ is not found in this world. This is the preparation, the moving tabernacle in the wilderness, the war zone, the rest stop, which spills over into the real glory! We never know what a day may bring, brethren. We may get our hopes up, that just maybe this time, Saul will see the error of his ways and back off, only to find ourselves exiled further off track, into the land of the Philistines. Whatever the case may be, we must lay our confidence in God, and in His revealed promises! He will make a way through the Red Sea. He will bring Isaac, even out of a dead womb! He will bring David to the throne! He will keep us safe in Christ, for the salvation ready to be revealed at the last Day! The last grain of sand will reach the bottom half of the hour glass, and we will find ourselves feasting with Christ, and all of our brethren, in glory! Though the gap widens from our standpoint, we are always that much closer to reaching glory! For God's ways are not our ways! Time and space and distance are all measurements, which do not contain or concern God! He is above and outside of them all, and it is from there, that God brings our salvation to its final destination...right according to plan, and not a moment too soon or late!

The Gospel: Saul's path was shaped by his own sinful desires. David's path, though imperfect, was shaped by the will of God. Which path are you on? "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof, is the way of destruction!"

AMEN!!!

Benediction: 1 Peter 1:3-9