

David and the Philistines

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[0 : 00] Yeah, so we come this evening to not really quite the easiest of passages. Graham this morning talked about how the passage he had was an ocean, that there was so much, so much depth and riches in it.

And today we come to a passage that at first glance doesn't seem to much we can learn from it. But some of our studies in 1 Samuel have been relatively straightforward.

Some have been a bit challenging to work out what's going on. I particularly don't envy the speaker that's got the next passage in chapter 28 with all the strange supernatural goings on there.

But this chapter at first seems to have not much happening in it. And then at a second look you realise, wait, what's going on here?

This is strange. And then once you work that out it's, okay, what's really going on here? In many of our studies recently we've been thinking of David as a type or a picture of Christ.

[1 : 18] And legitimately so. Later prophets and the New Testament writers frequently make much of the links between David and great David's greater son.

But David is just a man. A fallen man like the rest of us. And in this passage we see him not so much as a picture of Christ, but as a picture of us in all our weakness and folly.

I hope I'm not being too harsh on David. But while some of his actions in this chapter may be debatable, his motives certainly seem to be compromised.

So if we start at the beginning in the first four verses of chapter 28, we find David in a low place. Fear has overwhelmed him. He's sure that it's only a matter of time until Saul kills him. Saul promised in the last chapter that he would not try to harm him again, but David knows that Saul can't be trusted.

[2 : 36] But fear is nothing new to David. Saul's been chasing him on and off for the last nine chapters, probably about as many years.

In fact, if anything, we could say that David's written a textbook on fear and on how to deal with it. In Psalm 57, which he wrote while hiding in the cave at Adullam, he writes in his desperation, In the shadow of your wings, I will take refuge till the storms of destruction have passed.

Or in Psalm 24, he writes, So he knows fear.

But he knows that he can trust God to deliver him. So what's changed? Why has fear overwhelmed him now?

We're not told. But I think there are two possibilities. The first is that Samuel is dead. We don't really know what interaction David and Samuel have had over the last few years.

[4 : 07] When Saul first tried to kill David, David fled to Samuel, but we don't hear of them together after that. But still, David would have been aware that there was this great prophet who had anointed him king, who was still around supporting him and praying for him.

But Samuel is dead now. And maybe he feels that the promise died with Samuel. But the second reason, and I think probably most likely, is just that the danger has been going on for so long.

He knows God's promises to him, but he's been waiting so long and his focus has slipped. It's dangerous for us to base too much on what the passage doesn't say.

But I don't think it's insignificant that God is not mentioned once in this chapter. In all the chapters before and after, he's mentioned several times, frequently explaining David's motives or David seeking guidance from God.

But in this chapter, God is not mentioned at all. That obviously does not mean he's not present and not active, but it does suggest that he's not at the forefront of David's mind.

[5 : 44] But, so instead, David takes things into his own hands and comes out with his own strategy.

Because living in Judah under Saul has become so dangerous that David considers it safer to go and seek shelter with the Philistines, Israel's enemy.

He goes by the logic that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. And it seems that Achish is willing to go by the same logic.

Unlike the previous time that David had turned up on his doorstep as a lone fugitive and had to feign insanity to escape, this time he's coming with a large entourage.

he's got 600 fighting men and their households. And Achish decides he can make use of a band of warriors with which they seem to share a common enemy.

[6 : 55] But we can already see that this is going wrong. In the last chapter, David said to Saul, they've driven me today from my share in the Lord's inheritance and have said, go serve other gods.

Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the Lord. He knows he should not be going there. He knows that's not where he should be. When David was merely a boy fighting Goliath, everything was clear to him.

These pagan Philistines were God's enemies. and here, he's basically entering into an alliance with the Philistines. He's been waiting so long for God to follow through on his promises, he's given up waiting and has turned instead to his own wisdom and cunning to save him.

Waiting can be difficult, even for people like me that give the appearance of being so laid back all the time. I think there's a good reason why patience or long suffering is listed in the fruit of the Spirit. It's not natural. We naturally struggle to wait, especially when what we are waiting on is God's timing because as Peter would write, the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness.

[8 : 29] I.e., God's timing is not ours. God's plans are not ours. But there are so many things that we need to wait for in our lives.

Each of our lives is different, the challenges are different, but for many of us there will be things that don't happen to the timing that we would like. We would like if things happen now to our timetable, but God asks us to wait.

And maybe that waiting like David is full of fear, fear about health, about family, about employment. we want answers now.

But God asks us to wait. And maybe there are things in our church that we need to wait for. We'd love to see this or that happen now.

We'd love to see much greater impact. We don't want to keep working away and only seeing little fruit. But God asks us to wait.

[9 : 40] But waiting can wear us down. We can lose patience and decide to come up with our own plans and our own clever solutions.

I'm not suggesting we should just sit back and wait. Let go and let God as the phrase was. Because we're called to action.

We're called to fight, to wrestle, to endure. But are we fighting our battles, our gods? But I think we also struggle as the church Peter was writing to, in waiting for our future hope.

Peter was writing in the first century to people who were then questioning, is this ever going to happen? heaven. And here we are, 20 long centuries later.

And like most things, it seems to be something that the church has gone to two extremes on. Either it's front and centre in our thinking, almost to the exclusion of everything else.

[11 : 00] And life here is seen as no more than a waiting room for heaven. Or it's just something vaguely on the edge of our consciousness that doesn't really affect how we think about our day-to-day lives at all.

I wonder if we're at risk here of getting caught up in the challenges of here and now and losing our perspective. I wonder if possibly that inhibits our evangelism.

the promise and threats of future realities seem so distant that it's hard for us to reconcile them with the people that we meet around us day-to-day.

It seems two very different things. But in Hebrews 11, which the first passage I ever actually spoke on, we read of how future hope shaped the lives of those who came before us.

Because we read there that Abraham was looking forward to the city with foundations. His architect and builder is God. And all these people were still living by faith when they died.

[12 : 21] They were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. They were living their lives here while waiting for what they knew was to come.

I've been recommending the songs of Andrew Peterson to various people recently. And what I really like about them is they're so grounded in the joys and sorrows of life here and now. they're also filled with longing for something beyond. One of them says, And I know you hear the cries of every soul tonight.

You see the teardrops as they roll tonight down the faces of saints who grow weary and faint in your fields. And the wicked roam the cities and the streets tonight.

But when the God of love and thunder speaks tonight, I believe you will come, your justice be done. But how long?

[13 : 33] How long until the burden is lifted? How long is this the song that we sing? How long until the reckoning? And as our Bibles would finish in Revelation 22, with that cry, come Lord Jesus, as we wait for that which is to come.

But before we go off on too much of that tangent from what's not said in the passage, let's get back to the passage. And taking most of the rest of the chapter, so from verse 5 to 12 in one section, and here we see that at first it seems that David's strategy has worked, because Saul gives up searching for him.

His hatred for David isn't enough to push him to all-out war with the Philistines. But as we read on, we see that David's scheme gets more and more cunning, convoluted, and compromised.

Firstly, we see David in apparent humility in verse 5, requesting that he's given a place in one of the lesser towns instead of in the royal city, making out that he's not worthy to be in the main city, along with the king.

But when we look at how his deception develops, we realise this is not about humility. This is about distance. He wants to be somewhere close enough to be under the Philistine protection, but he wants to be far enough away that his comings and goings won't be watched.

[15 : 36] He wants to pull the wool over Achishud's eyes. And so he's given Ziklag that he uses as a base and he carries out raids from there.

And this is where we start getting confused. Is David here carrying out raids against Israel? Against his own people?

Surely not. But then when you read the passage carefully, you realise there are two accounts of what he's doing. In verse 8, read, So David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Gerzites, and the Malachites.

But then in verse 10, when Achish asked, where did you go raiding today? David would say, against the Negev of Judah, or against the Negev of Jeremieel, or against the Negev of the Canaanites.

Verse 8 says what David is actually doing. Verse 10 says what he's reporting to Achish. The situation he's got himself into is one where he has to continually lie about what he's doing in order to remain welcome there.

[16 : 59] Because Achish believes he is raiding Israel, while actually he's raiding Israel's enemies. Now, it is possible that David's not strictly lying here.

The Negev was the desert land to the south of Israel. Israel, and so it's possible that although this is within the borders of Israel, that the peoples he's raiding against are in that land.

So maybe technically he's speaking the truth, but certainly he's intending to deceive here. In fact, the people that he claims that he was raiding, we actually will see later in chapter 30 that he's giving the spoils of his raiding to them.

He was raiding Israel's enemies, building up his support in Israel by giving them the plunder, meanwhile making Achish believe that he was becoming so obnoxious to Israel that the Philistines would have his loyalty for life.

It's not exactly clear who the Geshurites and the Gerzites are, various things seem to suggest different things, but certainly the Amalekites are one of the peoples in the land that Israel should have wiped out when they entered the land several centuries earlier.

[18 : 37] Israel compromised and never completed the task. In fact, in the next chapter, one of the things that Saul is accused of is not destroying the Amalekites.

So, is David doing right here? It's not totally clear, but certainly his motives aren't godly. His reason for total destruction is not because these are the enemies of God, or anything like that, but

pragmatically so he can continue his deception, so they can't report back what's happening, so as to save his own skin.

He's got himself into such a compromised position, and none of his actions seem clear cut. everything he does is tainted.

It's so easy for us to compromise. It's so easy for us to look at the challenges we see around us, especially when God doesn't seem to act to our timetable, and come up with our own solutions. Sometimes we're willing to be flexible on what we believe to be right and wrong, because we think it's the best we can do under the circumstances. Yeah, we might know that technically our actions are wrong, but we don't think we have any other option.

[20 : 11] Have we forgotten God? Have we forgotten David's words that we read earlier? Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

Or the words that we sang, where there seems to be no way, you make it possible. It's often interesting seeing how people's view on an issue changes completely when it affects them personally.

They have very clear views on what's right and wrong. But when it's no longer an abstract issue, they're willing to come up with excuses, exceptions, mitigating factors, why it's okay for them. Now, part of this is probably a healthy developing of a nuanced view of the complexities of the issues, but all too often it's mere pragmatism.

It suits the situation they find themselves in, and if that means they have to slightly revise their morality, so be it. But I think one question that must be asked is why is no one giving David advice here?

[21 : 35] Why is no one saying to him, I think you're making a big mistake? Remember God's promises. You can trust him. Hold on in there. Surely among all these people he had with him, there was someone that would have had the nerve to say something.

Certainly Abigail doesn't seem one who's likely to keep her opinion to herself. In the book that some of us read with Alistair recently, side by side, one of the things it challenged us to do was to confront each other with her sin.

Now, that of course must be done carefully, sensitively, unlovingly. But have we got people around us that know they have our permission to challenge us when they think we're making mistakes?

Or do we surround ourselves with people who will just politely agree with us and tell us what we want to hear? Do we have people around us that will remind us of God's promises?

Who will remind us that he is so much more glorious than anything we could possibly put in his place? And so we get to essentially the end of our passage, the first couple of verses of chapter.

[23 : 08] After all this fear, this compromise, are we left on a downer?

Is there anything positive? in the first couple of verses of chapter 28 here, we see just the difficulty of the situation that David's got himself into.

After almost a year and a half, the major challenge comes. Dachish is marching out against Israel and expects David to be there fighting with him at his side.

what's David to do? Initially, he digs himself even deeper into the hole by, in a rather ambiguous manner, pledging his loyalty.

And Dachish, who believes the reports that he's been carrying out raids against Judah all this time, appoints him to be his bodyguard, in a place of honour, but also a place where he can keep his eye on him.

[24 : 21] David's not going to have an opportunity to quietly slip away, or even go over to the other side here. But is there any hope?

Earlier I said that it's dangerous to base too much on what's not said, and in this case there's nothing in this passage to give any hope. But we'll discover in a couple of chapters that God does intervene.

All this time David may have been ignoring God, but God's not been ignoring him. David may have given up waiting for God, but God was still going to fulfil on his promises.

As Paul's devotion this morning reminded us, failure isn't final. And here we see that God gets David out of the situation that his own foolishness had got him into.

And in the meantime, God has continued to bless. In 1 Chronicles 12 we read of all the men who came to David while he was at Ziklag.

[25 : 42] He started with 600 men. By this point he's got more because they keep hearing about them, they keep hearing about all he's doing, and they keep coming to him. So his army is continuing to grow, ready for when it would be needed.

And one day David would sit on the throne of Israel with a glorious reign. And his line would be preserved, and the promised Messiah would come from it, and we would be here today.

He was a fearful, compromised, broken man, like the rest of us. But God was faithful.

This wouldn't by any means be his last mistake, or even probably his worst. And yet God could still describe him as a man after my own heart.

David may have failed repeatedly, but he came back, and God was still there, waiting for him.

Because David's the one who would write in the psalm that Graham read for us at the beginning, completely unplanned.

[27 : 01] as far as the east is from the west, so far has he taken our sins from us. But also in the same psalm, he knows how we are formed.

He remembers we are dust. And so as we go from here, let's not be burdened by our regrets of the past and our present failures, but let's bring them and leave them at the foot of the cross, knowing that they have been dealt with there.

As we head into Holy Weekend, the Easter weekend, let's make extra special effort to take time out to remember what we remember every week, in fact, every day, that we have died with Christ.

We have been buried with him and we have been raised to new life. The waiting may seem a long time, but let us have confidence in what we have believed, that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

And as we wait, let's pray in the words of our final song, Don't Let My Love Grow Cold.

[28 : 29] If someone was to write our biography, would there be chapters in it where God's not mentioned? As the song says, Don't Let My Love Grow Cold.

I'm calling out, light the fire again. Don't Let My Vision Die, and calling out, light the fire again.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.