

24. Walking through the valley of the shadow of death

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We've been following the new character, David in the Book of 1 Samuel. First, we started with a prophet named Samuel, followed by a people's choice, king Saul who disobeyed God, and now we are studying the life of David who is God's choice and has a heart after God's own.

To train David in the way God wants, God systematically started to remove all of David's spiritual crutches from him. Starting with his position, his wife, his mentor Samuel, his best friend Jonathan, God isolated David to the point where he couldn't turn to anyone except himself and God. David is on the run, he is a fugitive with a bounty on his head – dead or alive, but emphasis on dead. He is the very man who killed the Philistine giant known as Goliath, 9 feet 9 inch tall with one stone shot. It was not the stone killed the giant, but it was the Lord who used David's simple faith and complete trust in Him. While others looked at Goliath and said, "He is too big to destroy," David with God in his heart could say, "He is too big to miss."

Yes, this is the same man. His faith is faltering, and he is running away from his enemy like a scared little puppy without looking onto the Lord who saved him from harm's way.

Heb 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Finally, God has to take away one more thing from David – Self-respect that often turn to relying on our own strength and schemes. God doesn't want us to compose our own ways, but He wants us to depend on Him. Because He has stored up the best things for us while we try to settle with anything but God's best.

A. SCHEME NO. 1 - DECEPTION

1 Sam 21:1 Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one is with you?"

David begins his days as a fugitive in a good way - he comes to the house of the Lord.

David was Saul's son-in-law. It seemed strange, and dangerous to him, that David was traveling alone. Plus, we can imagine that David looked tired, weary, disheveled, and probably looked like he had been crying a lot!

1 Sam 21:2 So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place.

This was a plain lie. David has come to the house of the Lord, but when he came, he lied to protect himself.

In many ways, we can understand why David lied, and even sympathize with him. Many of us would have done the same or worse in the same situation. However, the lie David just made up costed Ahimelech's life and his family's lives.

There is no such a thing is a harmless lie. All the deceptions have costs one way or another, and whether it is big or small.

B. NO BREAD

1 Sam 21:3 Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found."

David didn't have any bread, because he was running away from Saul without any provision. Starving physically and spiritually. David didn't have the Word of God in his heart, that is why he was running away from Saul.

1 Sam 21:4 And the priest answered David and said, "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women."

The tabernacle of the Lord had a table which held twelve loaves of bread that are known as 'holy bread' or 'show bread', symbolizing God's continual fellowship with Israel.

Once a week, the bread would be replaced, and priests were to eat the old bread (Leviticus 24:5-9).

What did the showbread mean? Literally, showbread means "bread of faces." It is bread associated with, and to be eaten before, the face of God. To eat the showbread was to eat God's bread in God's house as a friend and a guest of the Lord, enjoying His hospitality. Eating the showbread was a powerful way of saying, "Lord I love You and I seek Your face. I'm in Your presence and I want to be transformed by seeing Your face."

Ahimelech was only concerned that those eating the bread be ceremonially clean according to the standards of Leviticus 15.

1 Sam 21:5-6 Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was sanctified in the vessel this day." So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.

In giving David the bread, Ahimelech broke with priestly custom, but not with God's word. He rightly understood that human need was more important than Levitical observance.

Once, when Jesus' disciples were criticized for breaking religious custom by eating against traditions, Jesus used what Ahimelech did to explain the matter (Matthew 12:1-8). Jesus approved of what Ahimelech did, and Jesus honored him by standing on Ahimelech's same ground!

The point with Ahimelech and Jesus is powerful: human traditions are never more important than God's Word itself.

1 Sam 21:7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul.

The plot is getting thicker now. We will find what kind of low life scum this Doeg is.

C. NO SWORD

1 Sam 21:8 And David said to Ahimelech, "Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste."

It is also sad that David continues his same lie about being on the king's business. David is desperately trying to avoid the king's business, because right now, the king's business is killing David.

David didn't have a sword with him. He was unarmed physically and spiritually. The reason why David was running scared like a puppy putting his tail between his legs and yelping is because he didn't put the Word of God in his heart. He forgot or preferably chose to not remember the faithfulness of God who came to his rescue when he faced a lion and bear which attacked his sheep, the God who came to his aid when he faced Goliath.

1 Sam 21:9 So the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

The priest was reminding David, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah." Shouldn't David think about God's faithfulness? Yes, he should have. Even though David said there is no better sword than Goliath, I disagree with him. The Word of God which is the Sword of the Spirit according to Ephesians 6:17 is much better than Goliath's.

Before we get all hyped up against David's shortcoming, we too have the same problem like him. Instead of looking at the One who created heaven and earth with his command, the One who calmed a storm in the presence of the frightened disciples, the One who parted the Red Sea and allowed over two million people to cross the bottom of the sea bed and with the same sea, He drown the entire Egyptian army, we tend to look at the situation around us. There is no one greater, no one more loving, and no one more caring.

Instead of demanding God to explain the situation we are in, we should ask Him what we can learn from it.

D. OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE

1 Sam 21:10 Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

After fleeing to Ahimelech, priest of Nob, David escaped to Gath, Goliath's hometown. Saul would never look for him there. Unfortunately, David is facing a new danger. The people of Gath immediately recognized him as the giant's killer.

1 Sam 21:11-12 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands'?" Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

The people of Gath called him as the king of Israel. Some "king" David was. He had no country, no queen, no subjects, and no friends. All he had left was his self-respect, but even that was stripped away when he feigned insanity to save his skin.

It didn't make sense for the man who carried Goliath's sword to go to Goliath's hometown. It didn't make sense for the man who was sustained by the sacred bread of God to find refuge among the pagans. It didn't make sense for the man after God's own heart to change his address to Gath, his enemy's hometown. This is a kind of things we do when we are doing things without God's direction and the Word of God.

David's words in Psalm 56 help us understand what happened here. The title of that Psalm identifies as the song he wrote when the Philistines captured him in Gath. Apparently, although 1 Samuel 21 doesn't detail it, the Philistines captured David when he came to Gath. David thought he could find anonymity or sympathy among the ungodly Philistines in Gath, but he was wrong!

Psalm 56:1-4 To the Chief Musician. Set to 'The Silent Dove in Distant Lands.' Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath. Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; Fighting all day he oppresses me. My enemies would hound me all day, For there are many who fight against me, O Most High. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?

In Psalm 56, **David shows a different heart.** Instead of trusting in his own cleverness or refuge among the ungodly, he says, "whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You."

Psalm 56:5-11 All day they twist my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather together, They hide, they mark my steps, When they lie in wait for my life. Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, Then my enemies will turn back; This I know, because God is for me. In God (I will praise His word), In the Lord (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

In Psalm 56, **David renews his relationship and confidence in God.**

Psalm 56:12-13 Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, That I may walk before God In the light of the living?

In Psalm 56, **David gets back in touch with God's word.**

E. FROM NATIONAL HERO TO MAD MAN

1 Sam 21:13 So he changed his behavior before them, feigned madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard.

If we rely on our own strength, sometimes it takes us down to the level we have to act like crazy or frantic people though that is not what we are. This gives an opportunity for those who are around us to ridicule us and ultimately our God.

1 Sam 21:14-15 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

When a person loses his or her self respect – not as pride, but realization of existence, the person becomes suicidal.

In NIV, it renders in more funny way:

14-15 Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"

I guess Achish had enough nuts and fruitcakes in his kingdom that he didn't need to import another crazy person. His kingdom must have been like California.

From national hero to madman, David had fallen from the pinnacle of success to the depths of disgrace. Even his enemies had discarded him. Would God abandon him also? We are going to find out more in chapter 22.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Peace of God will guard our hearts in any situation as long as we choose to trust His faithfulness and promises. Let's not forget His faithfulness that bring God's peace into our hearts.

Phil 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

2) It is absolutely normal for us to be scared if we are spiritually hungry and unarmed. The Word of God is our bread and sword. Let's not forget them.

There is no other way to get fed and putting on the spiritual armor unless we put the Word of God into our hearts. Many people come and go to churches. But when the time of trials and tests, they fall apart and running scared. Why? Because they just come listen to what pastors teach and don't read the Bible all week long until they come back to the churches. In other words, spiritually they have been starving for a week and come to the church and eat one meal until next Sunday. It is no wonder why they get whipped. It is no wonder why they get defeated by satan, because they don't have the Word of God in their hearts. It is so important for all of us to memorize the Bible verses systematically.

Ho 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

Spiritual body needs to be fed daily through our daily devotion just like our physical bodies. It also needs exercise by serving others. Otherwise, the spiritual body is going to be either malnourished due to lack of the Word of God or become glutton because they hear the Word of God, but not doing what they've learned.