

# The War on Christmas

*Faithfulness of God*

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Old Testament to the book of 1 Samuel 29. For those of you that have been with us for some season, we've come to the end of the journey. For those of you that are guests and visitors, allow me to explain. Over the last few months, we've been walking very slowly and strategically through what we know as the book of 1 Samuel and even if you're here with us as a guest, don't worry, don't panic, we're going to put a big old Christmas bow on it today, so don't worry about not being here previously, it's all going to come together.

One of the things that we've observed in 1 Samuel is this: it's a picture for us of what it looks like not just then but today when a culture, a society, when a group of people make the decision to migrate or move from the sacred to the secular. At the beginning of 1 Samuel, the people of God were ruled by the judges of God according to the word of God, but in chapter 8, they began to get jealous and envious of all the other countries, the activities they saw them participate in, the clear conscience of their carnality, and so they began to declare openly, "God, give us a king," and even though God warned them of what that would mean for their lives and their families, they insisted upon it. Throughout the entirety of 1 Samuel, we see the people of God, this community slowly migrate into this wretched secularism, materialism and carnality, however, through the persons of Saul and David, we see a microcosm of this struggle, Saul picturesque of the people of God, and David picturesque of what does it look like as an individual when we stay committed to the ways, the will, and the word of God in spite of what is happening around us.

Today, we get to chapters 29 through 31. The story is going to draw to a close and Saul's life is finally going to come to an end. I want to draw a parallel today of these last three chapters not just of what we see in our culture but particularly this season. I want to talk about the war on Christmas. I want to talk about our society that every time about this time of year makes this decision that they're tired of hearing the music, they're tired of putting up nativity sets, and that somehow, somehow, what we know as the message of Christmas is antagonistic to them.

The story begins in chapter 29. David is among the Philistines, that's important to our story. Remember, he's hiding out from Saul, and you know you're in a bad place when you have to hide among your enemies to keep away from the main enemy that you have

in life. I want you to hear what the Philistines say to David here in chapter 29 because it really pictures for us the resentment that Saul had for David and as well as the culture has for Christmas and Christianity today. It says,

1 Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel. 2 And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish. 3 Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, [listen to this] and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?

Do you find it interesting the Philistines, the same people that David has been warring against for years and years and years basically say, "Why does Saul hate you so much? Why are you having to hide among us to hide from him?" I almost see this picture of the front steps of Pilate's palace hours before what we know as the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Remember that Pilate's wife had come to him and warned him. His own conscience was stirred in him and so he contrived this incredible illustration, he brought Jesus Christ and Barabbas thinking surely this man who healed the sick, this man who spoke great words of wisdom, surely when given this choice they will not choose the other. Do you remember what the people said? "Give us Barabbas!" Remember Pilate washing his hands almost as if to say, "I do not understand why you are so resentful to this man."

You see the same thing here in 1 Samuel. "Why? Why, Saul? What is about David that just so goes against the grain of your life." And forgive me for being somewhat rhetorical with just a hint of sarcasm this morning, but I want to walk through David's relationship with Saul through 1 Samuel and let's analyze what Saul has to be upset with. To begin with, when he was a young man, Saul was struggling sleeping at night. He was having bad dreams. He was waking up what we might call night terrors. And so he sent a message out, "I need someone to soothe my soul. I need somebody who can bring some peace to my home." And they sought out David and David came into his home; while Saul was sleeping, David stayed up all night making sure he got the rest that he needed. Saul rewarded this incredible behavior by throwing a javelin at David and trying to pin him against the wall. David was there in the wee hours of the night to benefit him, and if you've journeyed with us in 1 Samuel, it's amazing. I have lost count of how many people have come to David and said, "Can we just kill this guy off?" Remember what David says? "No. Do not touch God's anointed." Not only did he defend him publicly, he defended him privately, and there were occasions where he had the opportunity to end Saul's life. Remember the story in the cave where he cut off the hem of his garment? Later on, they actually take the sword from his side and he declares to him, "If I had wanted to, I could have killed you. I could have eliminated you." Basically what we see is David, nothing but graciousness, nothing but mercy, not even an ill-spoken word, and if he did, he repented of it and said, "I wish I had never said it."

Can I draw a parallel to our culture today? What is it about Christmas that is so irritating to this world? You know, it's kind of like David and Saul. Think about it for just a moment. Think about Christmas season, it's a lot like Saul and David. The music that's playing in every store is Christmas music. They wouldn't have music if it weren't for Christmas this season of the year. And think about what Christmas music does, the familiarity, the tunes, it brings, does it not, a calmness of spirit in the midst of a very hectic society? Think about the message of Christmas, and if you're in a store where the music is being played and the words are actually being sung. We talk about phrases such as "peace on earth, joy to the world." Are those not things that everybody should desire in their life? This is the season more than any other where we put aside our differences and we sit at a common table and we share a meal. This is the season more than any other season on the calendar that people will give of their resources, they'll give of their time. This is the season of generosity and giving.

You know, Christmas in our contemporary culture is very similar to David to Saul. It brings nothing but good but it is despised in every aspect. I know what you're thinking is what's the "why" behind this? Do you remember what happened to Saul a couple of chapters back? It said that he was infused with an evil spirit. I'm going to be honest with you this morning, only an evil spirit says we shouldn't sing peace on earth. Only an evil spirit says we shouldn't say joy to the world. Only an evil spirit says, "I just wish you would quit being so generous." You see, what happened in Saul's life has happened to our culture today and we're living it out in real time. What's interesting is in light of this realization, the Philistines make an odd request of David.

I want you to fast forward to verse 7 of chapter 29. They say, "Wherefore now return." In other words, "David, we want you to go back home, you don't need to be among us anymore." It says,

7 Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines.

Now David has done nothing wrong to Saul and really the Philistines are saying, "You've done nothing wrong while you've been here." So what is their accusation? Their accusation is simply this, "David, you offend us." That's what they said, "You're displeasing us." It reminds me back in the book of Amos. If you're not familiar, Amos, we refer to him as one of the minor prophets not because his message is minor but just the size of the book compared to Isaiah and Jeremiah and others, that here's this man by the name of Amos, he comes up and he preaches this basic message of, "Repent for the Lord is going to hold you accountable to your sin." It was the priests among the Jewish people who said, "Amos, I think you'd better go back home and preach the same message somewhere else because we don't like it here." I don't know about you, but we have become a society that has become so thin-skinned when it comes to being offended. In fact, I have a slogan I use quite regularly. I don't know if I plagiarized this from somebody else, if I did, I apologize, but I just like it. It goes a little something like this: I'm offended that you're not offended by what offends me. Now think about that for just a moment. We have a people today that are offended that you don't get offended by what

offends them, and that's exactly what the Philistines said. They said, "David, you're not doing us any harm," Christmas isn't doing out culture any harm, "you're not doing anything that is necessarily bad, we just find you offensive, we just find you displeasing."

So the question is what is so offensive about Christmas? What is so offensive about saying peace on earth? What is so offensive about saying joy to the world? What is so offensive of gathering together and eating and giving presents and being generous and benevolent? What is so offensive about this? Can I tell you why Christmas is really so offensive? It's because if you listen to all the verses of the songs, and if you read the story from the scripture that the season is based on, there is this word that is used over and over again: Messiah and Savior. Why are those words offensive? They're offensive because to use them means that we are wrong. You realize you don't need a Savior unless you need saving. You realize you don't need a Messiah unless you need delivering. And so when these words or these constructs are at least inferred, a world who thinks they do no wrong, a world who thinks that you ought to rationalize and justify and celebrate every aspect of their carnal lives is offended that how dare we declare that they are in the wrong. You see, the message of Christmas is that humanity could not save themselves, God had to interject his own Son in flesh to live and to die and to raise again.

That is the message of Christmas. By the way, speaking of Christmas, have you noticed how many of the second and the third verses of the Christmas carol are about the Second Coming? Why? Because there wouldn't be a Second Coming unless there was a First Coming. There wouldn't be a celebration of his birth if there wasn't the resurrection of the empty tomb. It's the total package. And so when we talk about Christmas and we talk about the request that the Philistines had of David, understand that as we see a culture consistently trying to push the message of Christmas and the celebration of Christmas away from the forefront, at the heart of the issue is they are tired of being convicted of their own sin. They are tired of having to think that somehow, someway, they are not perfect in every expression of their lives.

So the question today that we have to ask ourselves and we need to look to David, is how did he respond? Now I can tell you in the flesh what I would want to say when the Philistines said this. I can tell you what I would want to do, but what did David do? I want you to turn to chapter 30 and I want you to see that David actually leaves, and I want to read verses 1 through 11. I want to walk through three things of how David responded because these are life lessons for us. How do we respond to a culture that continually wants to silence the message? How do we respond to a society that is so easily offended by a message that honestly should offend us because our sin should offend us. Verse 1 of chapter 30 says,

1 And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; 2 And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way. 3 So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their

sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. 4 Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. 5 And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. 6 And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God. 7 And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. 8 And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all. 9 So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed. 10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor. 11 And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water;

Now this sounds just like a military strategy on the surface but there's so much at play here, there's so much below the surface. I want to walk through what David observed and how he responded.

The first thing he observed in the first six verses is that their families had been taken captive. Now notice the cities had been burned, the lives had not been destroyed but their families, their children, were at the current moment – listen – being razed by those who were contrary to the faith. You and I need to observe, we need to realize that right now with the very expeditious push of Christianity out of the vernacular of our culture, it is going to produce a generation who one day will say, "What does Christmas mean?" It is going to produce a generation one day that says, "Jesus, who's Jesus?"

It reminds me of when what we know as the gospel spread forward to the Midwest in the US hundreds of years ago when this country was being settled. There were in those days what we know as circuit rider preachers. If you're not familiar with circuit riders, basically they didn't pastor a local church, they pastored a community and they would go from each town to each town and sometimes they wouldn't return for months because they were "on this circuit." There's diaries of these men as they went through the wilderness of this nation for years and years and years. One of my favorite stories is about one of these circuit riders who stumbles upon a man who's just working his land, just doing his best. He strikes up a casual conversation with him and he says, "Sir, I have a very important question to ask you." He said, "What is it?" He said, "Do you know who Jesus Christ is?" He says, "Hm, I don't think I've heard of him. Does he live around here?"

Now let that story settle in. Do you and I really want to live in a culture where those who are growing up in the culture don't know the word Christmas, much less the meaning of

it? Do we really want to live in a culture where joy to the world and peace on earth is not declared this time of the year? What David recognized in chapter 30 is that there comes a point where the culture takes the future captive and that's exactly what happened. They were distressed and they were distraught so how does David respond? Notice what he does in verse 7 and 8, he does not go to Ziglax and start slaying people. He does not scream and holler for those in high authority to come to his rescue. What does it say? He says, "Go get me the ephod." The ephod as we've described through 1 Samuel, was the linen garment of the priest that not only held the stones of the 12 tribes but more importantly was the means by which God communicated to his people about what to do and how to respond. Can I put it in today's terminology? As we see what we're seeing in our culture today, our response to realizing that not only Christmas but Christianity is simply one generation away from becoming extinct, our first response should be what does God say about it, not what does our flesh say, not what do our friends on social media say, what do our elected officials say, what do the lobbyists say. No, no, no, no. Our first response should be, "Okay, time out. What does God say?"

You know, it reminds me of the story in the book of Jude. If you're not familiar with the book of Jude, it's about one to two pages in your Bible right before the book of Revelation. There is this story of Michael the archangel. I mean, he's the biggest of all the angels and it says there came a time where he disputed with the devil about the body of Moses. Now you go back into Deuteronomy 34, it says that Moses did not or was not allowed in the Promised Land. He died on the other side and according to Deuteronomy 34, nobody knew where his body was buried. The Lord sent Michael the archangel to get the body. Now the reason for it is a whole other message on a whole other day, here's why it's important: the devil shows up and does not like what Michael is doing. Do you know what Michael did not do? He did not say, "Ha-ha, man, I've been waiting for a 12 round fight. Let's go, brother." Do you know what he said? He took a step back, he said, "The Lord rebuke you."

You know, when we hear the message like today, there's a tendency for our flesh to creep up and say, "Alright, let's get the battalion together and let's start slinging." What did David do? He actually pulled away and said, "What does the Bible say?" And what's interesting is after that experience in verse 9, he did not go and slay a bunch of people, he did not go and make a large noise, he simply went back to where everybody was taken captive and here's where it's really interesting, it says in verses 9 through 11 that he found an Egyptian, he found a man who could help him bring his family back home. Now you do understand that the Israelites and the Egyptians are not long-term friends, right? You do realize that this man was a part of a group of people that had held David's people captive for over 400 years. David in his flesh could have easily said, "Pfft, we can't work with this guy. This isn't gonna work." What does he do? He pulls him in, here's what's fascinating about this story, he feeds him and he gives him water to drink. Do you know what he showed? It's called benevolence. He showed graciousness. He basically said, "You know, let's treat one who should be our enemy as one who is our brother and see how the Lord works this out."

You do know the Bible has statements in it that I'm not a fan of. You know, the Bible says pray for your enemy. Do you know what I wish it said? Whip 'em. But it doesn't. The Bible says pray for them. You see, this is why it's important: if verses 7 and 8 weren't there, David probably would have tried to whip him but verse 7 and 8 are there and he went to the word of God and he realized, "Do you know what? God knows what he's doing even if it doesn't make sense to me."

So he solicits him and, you know, a modern-day illustration that I think is important to hear. There's a very important place or a piece of dirt on the other side of the world that we know as Israel, the Holy Land. If you're not familiar, it is surrounded on all sides by those who are the enemy of the people and the place of Israel. On the northern side there's a country by the name of Syria and Syria has a regular habit of invading and shooting rockets and doing all kinds of military things against the Israelite people. If you've ever been to northern Israel, I've been there, you could actually walk up to within a couple of hundred yards of the border. It's a pretty intimidating scene. Can I share with you that there's a fence there that the Jewish people call the good fence. You say, "What do you mean? Why do they call it the good fence?" Because when the Syrian army decides they want to destroy or send rockets into Israel, one of the things they do is they come down to the border, they kick their own people out of their houses and the military takes it over. So their own people are starving, their own people are suffering from dehydration and from the elements outside, so in the middle of the night – listen to this – in the middle of the night the people who are being shot at, the Jewish people, go to the fence and they give people food and water. The very people whose leaders are trying to annihilate them. You know, other than just the hand and providence of God, that might be one of the reasons that they still have the land that they have.

It's being employed here. He goes to the word of God and he says, "Alright, I know what my flesh wants to do, I know what my mouth wants to say. Let's pull this Egyptian aside. Let's see what he knows." And if you read the rest of the story, do you know what he found out? This Egyptian who in his flesh he wanted to just whip, actually gives him the strategy to get his family back, gives him the strategy, for lack of better terms, to win this fight in Ziglax. And so what we see here is there's this incredible response that David gives.

I want to look at the results. If you and I decide today in the culture that we live in to respond as David did, to realize that we cannot allow the next generation to not know the message, to realize that it's the way God wrote it out, not the way we want to respond that is the mechanism, and to realize that even if we desire to, it is not our place to enact vengeance on those that we wish we could. What are the results? I want you to notice what happens in verse 18 of chapter 30. It says,

18 And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. 19 And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all.

Now why is that verse so important other than the fact that his family is back home? The reason that verse is so important – I want you to hear me very clearly – is nowhere does it say that David was the king. Nowhere does it say that David was in charge. Nowhere does it say that finally Saul had kicked the bucket and David was calling the shots. I'm going to ask you a rhetorical question. I've asked this before. It's not one that even believers like to hear but I'm going to ask it anyway. Are you really interested in God moving in people's lives or do you just want to call the shots? You see, we live in a society today that even under the umbrella of Christianity, it's really not about the message of the Messiah, it's really not the message of Christmas, it's really about we don't like who's sitting in chairs of authority and we want us to be sitting there. That's not what happened. David received his family back and by receiving his family back he received his future back.

You know, it's interesting in 1 Timothy 2, there's a statement in there, a series of statements that are not necessarily pleasing to our ears. It says that you and I as believers, we should pray for all men, not just some men but all men, kings and rulers and those that are in authority, and as I like to remind, those of us who have the privilege of voting in November, it doesn't say just pray for those who you voted for. It says pray for all men. Here's what's important: that we, the believers, might live a quiet and peaceable life. You see, one of the issues that we have in our context today, one of the issues that we have in our culture is that there are way too many people who are wanting to be in charge and not enough people who say, "Can we just talk about Jesus and leave the rest to everybody else?" Because Christmas is about Jesus. Christmas is about the baby born to die and to give his life. And at the end of the day, what we really should desire, church, is just to be able to sing the songs we want to sing, and to tell the message that we want to communicate, and to be able to communicate what we know as the biblical story. That should be our desire. We should just want our faith to be lived out in our lives.

David, he comes back and he says, "Do you know what? If I can get my family and my future back, I'll be satisfied." I've got news for you: God can work with that. Then we get to chapter 31, the event that most of you have been waiting for for way too long. It says,

1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. 2 And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. 3 And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. 4 Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. 5 And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.

Saul is finally dead but here's the result that you need to hear. This isn't the last enemy that David would face. This isn't the last antagonist of his life. There would be others that



rise up. I want to close today by reminding you of one of the brief biblical speeches of one of the wisest men in all of the Bible. It's found in the book of Acts 5. There's a man by the name of Gamaliel. He's a Jewish leader. He's a Jewish teacher and those that he has trained up are upset, they are frustrated because everywhere they turn there are these people talking about Jesus, there are these people singing about Jesus. Can I put it in our context? They are upset that we've got Christmas music and Christmas stories, "Why does this stuff keep happening?" Do you remember what Gamaliel says to them? He says, "Boys, I've got news for you. If this is of God, you're never going to stop it. And if this is not, it'll just simply fade away." How many leaders and how many cultures have tried to squash the message of Jesus, tried to dismiss the message of Jesus, have tried to relegate the person of Jesus just to the archives of history? You see, Saul has died, another will rise. Today those who are antagonistic to the faith will die out and guess what? A new one will rise up. Again, the great lesson for you and I today as we walk through 1 Samuel is simply this: do whatever God tells you to do and leave the consequences to him.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. In light of that last statement, the Bible makes it very clear in the book of Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Basically God has called us to believe, God has called us to repent of our sins, and the consequences are left up to him. He says very clearly in his word those that believe on him will have everlasting life and those that do not will not. Today through song and message, you have heard the story of Jesus, not just the "what" but the "why," that Jesus came and he lived and he died and he rose because we have a sin problem that we cannot solve or fix ourselves. And maybe today in the midst of a culture, in the midst of a society that so desires to diminish that message, you realize how desperately you need it. Maybe today is the day that you call on the name of the Lord. It's not about repeating a certain phrase. It's not about checking off a box or jumping through a hoop. It's a heart's cry where you basically confess to the Lord you've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. Maybe today wherever you are, in house, online, on the radio, maybe today is the day where Christmas doesn't just become a "outward celebration," it comes an inward reality. Maybe your conversation would go something like this. "God, today I'm just gonna confess and own what you already know about me, I've got a sin problem. God, I've been places I shouldn't have been, I've done things I shouldn't have done. God, I've had words come out of my mouth that should have never left my lips and you know alone the thoughts between my ears that should have never taken place. God, I realize that your Bible is true. It says the wages or the result of my sin is death and, God, I'm here to tell you, I deserve it. But it also says but you offer me eternal life through Jesus Christ. So God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that when they nailed him to the cross he was bearing the pain, the punishment of my sin. And God, I believe that when he rose from the grave victorious over death, he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have the answers to all the struggles of this world and the discord of this world but I do know one thing, that the struggle and the discord of my sin can only be solved by Jesus. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who cried out to Jesus. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing. We want to invite you just to step out and step forward. We've got a whole team set aside. We've got a room set aside. We just want to hear your story, if necessary we want to cry out with you. We want to pray with you. We want to pray for you. Or maybe today you say, "Pastor, I've already got that covered. I took care of that years ago." Maybe today you're like others on this campus today who will follow in believer's baptism. Maybe that's the next step or the next stage, or maybe today you say, "Do you know what? I need to be a part of a Bible-believing, Bible-living church and, God, this is where you've led me." Or maybe you just need to be prayed with, prayed for. Whatever it is, we are here for you.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you, God, thank you in the midst of all that we see around us you're still faithful. God, you were faithful to David in the presence of Saul and the Philistines. God, you were faithful even on Pilate's steps when Barabbas was chosen. And God, today you are faithful in our lives, calling us unto yourself. Would we listen to your voice and none other. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*