

Introduction

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Verse 15 says, "The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps." Verse 16 declares, "One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless." Together these wise sayings warn us to process carefully what seems right to us. They tell us to think scrupulously before we act. And as we look to the life of David this morning, we could add that we must be determined to process what seems right even when we are the ones advocating to ourselves for that particular way.

[Read text and Pray]

Some have called 1 Samuel 27 a God-less text. There is no mention of the Lord at all in the verses of the chapter. None of the characters refer to him. Unlike chapter 26 which reports that there was a deep sleep from the hand of the Lord, this one says nothing of the Lord's involvement. We do not even get a straightforward statement of his point of view about what is going on. As a result, interpretation is a little challenging. Commentators arrive at different conclusions. However, you read and study the scripture in the context of the scripture, and I believe that the Lord's point of view is quite noticeable even if not specifically stated.

From the outset of the chapter, David's reasoning is in direct conflict with assurances he has embraced in previous texts as well as in the psalms he himself wrote. Upon my very first reading this week of this chapter I wrote down these words, "Wait a minute, David, what are you thinking?" It seems that in this chapter David has turned from rock-solid assurances based upon the person and word of God to interpret his circumstances in light of his own perception and arrive at solutions based on his own thinking. His thinking is just as Godless as the chapter. It is fitting that the Lord is not mentioned by direct reference because it seems he is not considered in the mind of David.

Now, that is not to say that we should have no sympathy for David. It would be difficult for us to imagine the stress and fatigue under which he has been operating non-stop now for an extended period probably of years. You and I crumble under far less. We all look for relief. When we get a headache, we reach for relief. When circumstances are hard, we pray for a quick end. So let's not be quick to think we would never have fallen to David's temptation, but let us strive nonetheless to learn from what clearly appears to be a low point in his life. Four developments move the text forward.

I. David Flees to Gath. (1-5)

Remember a few chapters back. David has done this before. He went to Gath by himself previously. He pretended to be crazy in order to escape. We wondered then what he was thinking and we have good reason to wonder again. But there are answers here as to why—at least we get a sense of what was going on in the mind of David.

David was talking to himself. He told himself deep in his heart that if he did not do something different, something extreme, then it was only a matter of time before he would end up dead at Saul's hands. He reasoned that if he was able to find shelter in the land of the Philistines, Saul would no longer keep seeking for him. So he crossed the border. He "went over." He went again to Gath, the hometown of the giant he had killed. This time, however, he went with 600 men and their

families. This time the king of Gath was receptive to him. Perhaps he is aware of the hostility between Saul and David. Probably he figures that when two men share a common enemy, they can be friends and benefit from one another. It was his eventual plan that David and his men would join the Philistines in fighting against Saul and Israel. Anyway, David's plan to elude being hunted by Saul worked. Saul no longer sought him.

A couple items stand out here. First, David's very strong faith had wilted. Remember the reasoning he presented to Abishai in the previous chapter. In order to persuade Abishai against thrusting the sword through the skull of Saul, David assured him that the Lord would bring Saul down. It might be that the Lord would strike him down immediately. It might be the Lord would let him live and die naturally. It may be that Saul would die in battle. Either way David trusted in the Lord to eliminate him and fulfill his intentions for David. Saul himself had said that he knew David would sit on the throne of Israel and would flourish. Abigail chimed in as well that the Lord would certainly make David a sure house. But what others know about us is sometimes harder for us to believe about ourselves.

But David also expressed great confidence in the Lord on other occasions. One was when he stood before Goliath. Another is found in Psalm 62:1-2. There David wrote, "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken." It is just not the case here in 1 Samuel 27. David appears to be taking his protection into his own hands. He is not waiting for God alone. He is not waiting for God at all. He is crossing over the border of Israel and seeking safety in the land of the enemy. Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, David's great, great grandfather, had done a similar thing. Admittedly the times were hard. There was a famine in the land. He took his family and left his hometown of Bethlehem and went down into the foreign land of Moab. It just makes sense to go where the food is. It was a way that seemed right, but down in Moab his family met disaster and death.

Now, here is David, and to David it just made sense to get out of the land if he wanted to avoid having to be on the run. What is wrong with David's reasoning? Well, it seems his faith has wavered. His focus is not on the assurances of the Lord and the protection of his God, but leaving the land of his God and trusting in his own understanding.

Solomon taught in Proverbs 3:5 to trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. He did not mean that we are not to USE our understanding, but we are not to LEAN, or put all our weight on our own understanding. Many times David did not lean on his own understanding, but when he returned to Gath he definitely was.

Our understanding is a precious gift of God. And rightly we use it every day. Our understanding tells us not to walk out in front of a moving truck. It guides us in determining when we need to wake up, what we need to do to be ready to face the day, how to start the car and drive, how to perform tasks at work. We are certainly meant to use our understanding. However, there are times when the path the Lord would have us take may not make sense to our thinking. It may require us to walk by faith and not by sight. This is when we must distrust our own understanding but acknowledge the Lord. Your mind tells you compromise is the only way out of a sticky situation. But to compromise is to give in to sin. We must not compromise. We must trust.

There is a second aspect of David's decision to go to Gath that stands out. It came as he talked to himself. David said in his heart. Dale Davis asserts that the text literally says, "David said TO his heart." Psalm 42:5 is not specifically ascribed to David, but it is an example of the kinds of things

one should speak to one's heart, especially when one is in the kind of situation David was in. "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." David did write Psalm 28 which in verse 8 says, "The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed." These are the truths we need to tell ourselves. What you keep saying to yourself has an enormous impact on the direction you take and the decisions you make.

Think how this has become true in our culture today. The news media has basically become a propaganda machine. Journalists are supposed to be objective and leave the listener to form their opinions. But for the most part the news media in the United States has become more and more involved in telling us not just what has happened but what we should think of it as well. And I am convinced that the news media has an enormous impact upon the direction of the country because people listen to and are shaped in their thinking by the world view through which information is presented. We need to be careful as we absorb news through the worldview of unbelievers because it propagandizes us to lean on our own understanding.

We also need to be active in propagandizing ourselves. We need to preach to ourselves. In fact we do preach to ourselves. We propagandize our souls through what we think, through what we meditate on, and through what we speak to our souls. We need to be careful that we are giving ourselves the truth. As Paul says to the Philippians, "Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." This is what you need to speak to your soul.

I have one more observation here. We saw that David's plan worked. When he took shelter among the Philistines, Saul no longer sought him. That tells me that David's understanding was working pretty well from a human point of view. He was a sharp fellow. What he thought would result from his seeking shelter among the Philistines did in fact come to pass. But Jeremiah warns the wise man not to glory in his wisdom. And just because a plan works in phase 1 or 2, does not make it a great plan. And just because a plan achieves a desired result does not mean it pleases God.

It is called pragmatism when we justify what we do on the basis of the results. Pragmatism simply asks, "what works?" It does not ask what is right. If you get what you want that is success. But here is a point to learn and have etched in our minds. Just because a plan is successful, that does not mean it is faith-full. And pragmatism really gets off if our definition of success is off. David's definition of success in the current situation was to escape Saul, to get to a place where he did not have to run any more. But we are going to see that put him in a situation in which he could have become a traitor to his own people. Let us determine to be more concerned about doing what is right and being more godly than extricating ourselves from pain and inconvenience. God will extricate his people from the reach of the roaring lion for all eternity in heaven. For now we need to engage in the continuous exercise of being on watch for the roaring lion trusting that the Lord will deliver us from his reach.

So David flees to Gath. That is development #1. Next ...

II. David Settles in Ziklag.

David was not a traitor. He did not go to the Philistines as a defector. But he could not stay there comfortably unless he convinced Achish otherwise. So he sought a place outside the city limits of Gath where he could engage in operations without being monitored. Achish gave to David the city of Ziklag.

The thing about Ziklag is that the city was originally part of the territory of Judah but apparently had fallen into the hands of the Philistines. In spite of the faults of David's scheme, the Lord returned the city to the territory of his people. It became a royal city in Israel.

God's plans and purposes are intriguing to behold. He uses us in spite of ourselves. To him be the glory. Next, we observe that ...

III. David Deceives Achish.

David spent a year and four months in Ziklag. It was command central for the conducting of raids against the folks mentioned in verse 8. These were enemy peoples perhaps both of Judea and the Philistines, but that is not what David was telling Achish. Whenever he would return from a campaign, Achish would ask David, "where have you been?" David played the part of a traitor to his own people, telling Achish that he was attacking parts of Judah. These lies were designed to cement the trust of Achish. And in order to preserve that trust, David had to be sure that he completely obliterated each city's inhabitants when he raided them. He could not risk anyone surviving to dispel the deceit according to which he was operating.

It has been asserted that David is legitimized in eliminating these enemies from the land. After all that is exactly what the Israelites were supposed to have done in the land when they took over, but they had done a poor job. However, this does not appear to be David's motive and purpose. He was not slaughtering to fulfill a divine directive but to protect his lies. I don't see any way of legitimizing the lies or the killing. Indeed, David has sunk low. He has become trapped by his dishonesty. So you see what happens when a man or woman begins to listen to bad propaganda, especially when that propaganda comes from your own mind?

Finally, we realize that ...

IV. David Endangers Himself.

David's scheming brought the kind of success he had hoped for. Achish, who had been deceived by David before when he feigned to be insane, was being deceived again. Achish trusted David thinking he had become an enemy to his own people. All seemed well until the Philistines started gathering for a big battle with Israel. And Achish indicated to David that he DID EXPECT him and his men to join with his army in the battle. Uh-oh. Now what to do? David was not ready for this. He bought some time to think, speaking political mumbo jumbo. He said, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." Achish did not catch the vagueness in David's reply. "I will make you my bodyguard for life," he said. What will David do now? We are left with a cliff-hanger. And suddenly the narrator begins talking about the death of Samuel.

We have to wait until chapter 29 to find out how the suspense is resolved. For now what we know is that David's scheming according to his own understanding has finally caught up with him.

Conclusion

This chapter in the life of David reveals to us that Bathsheba was not the only significant downfall in the life of David. I agree with those commentators who say so that this chapter of the narrative is at the same time both sympathetic to David and yet reproachful. I mean it does not lead us to join in to condemn David as though we have not also been through similar circumstances and failed to trust God ourselves. We can surely identify with stress and fatigue, the sense that we just can't take any more. We have to do something. We have to just get some relief. These experiences do not provide an excuse for leaning on our own understanding and failing to trust in the Lord. But we can identify with the same kind of temptation and sadly acknowledge our own sins like these.

And the sins are significant. David is NOT a perfect example of what every Christian should be. He is NOT brimming with virtue. Achish was hoodwinked by David, and we will be hoodwinked as well if we see David as the hero of the narrative. David points us to the hero of the Bible, but the hero he is not. To go from telling yourself God alone is your hope and seeing him demonstrate over and over that he can be trusted to saying, "I am going to die at Saul's hand if I do not escape to a foreign land" is quite a pendulum swing. Then there is the inexcusable deceit and the brutal carnage. Quickly one's regard for David up to this point might be turned to disdain. And one might well wonder how in the world God would say, this is a man after my own heart.

This text actually helps us understand what is meant by that phrase "a man after God's own heart." I said this last week, but it bears repeating, and since I repeat it as something so significant, I need to put credit where credit is due. This remark came right out of the mouth of one of my favorite Scotsman preachers—the one by the name of Begg. Anyway this phrase "a man after God's own heart," says much more about where David is in the heart of God than where God is in the heart of David.

This is what grace is all about! God's grace is what puts people in God's heart. Without it no one would be a person after the heart of God. We all need grace. None of us needs justice. All of us humans are cut out of the same cloth. We all proceed from one ancestor—the seminal sinner Adam. And the potential to be a Stalin or a Robespierre or a Hitler is in every one of us. God does not come to reward with salvation people who are good. The physician does not come to heal people who are basically healthy but those who are sick. And all of us like sheep have gone astray, we have turned EVERY ONE to his own way.

This is how we begin to grasp how great is the love of God and how wonderful the death of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul says it. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the UNGodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

Because he died, sinners—SINNERS—can be reconciled to holy God. How does it happen? Through faith alone. It is trust, belief, assurance, confidence, conviction by which we personally embrace Jesus Christ and his saving work of dying and rising for his people. And in this David is an example. He was a sinner; there can be no doubt. But he also looked ahead to his Lord to whom the LORD speaks and says, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." For this Lord was also a priest forever. It was as priest that Jesus entered heaven with his own blood and satisfied the holy demands of divine justice for all the sins we have done against his holiness.

Christians share in a reminder of his death through the Lord's supper. What a privilege is ours to take the elements as reminders that we have partaken of his death as we did earlier today. But until you truly believe in Christ you stand condemned before God. So if you feel yourself to be a sinner and realize you need forgiveness, come and be cleansed, redeemed, forgiven, washed, and set aside for God himself. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. This is not a way that seems right to man, but this is the way of God. Any other way may seem right to men, but it ends in eternal death.

The first step any of us makes toward drawing near to God is not trying harder to do good. It is not getting our house in order. It is not raising ourselves to the level at which we think we are somehow worthy of God saving us. No, the Bible says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."