

Introduction

With Christmas and New Years and all the busyness, time is just flying. I have had a few people mention it to me the past week. And you know what I say? I LIKE for time to pass quickly in the winter, we are already closer to summer. But with the holidays and all, it has been several weeks since we were last with David. He was running then and he is still running in our text this morning. Let's get our minds re-oriented to the situation. Saul was made king of Israel. He is just the kind of king the people wanted, but he is not the kind of king God wants. He has rejected the clear instructions of God and God rejected him. In his place the Lord had Samuel anoint David to become king. He was just a shepherd boy, but out of his love for and faith in the one true God, David has risen to prominence in Israel. That has irked Saul enormously. He is determined to end David's life so as to protect his rule and establish his dynasty through Jonathan. So David is running for his life.

[Read text and Pray]

What we have in the verses in this section of the text is a series of locations visited by David as he is desperately seeking to avoid being captured and killed by Saul. The stops seem fairly brief but something significant happens at each one. At each of the stops we will be looking for a likeness to Jesus and a lesson to learn.

The first stop in David's desperate flight is . . .

I. Gath.

Does the name of this town ring a bell? Remember who was from Gath? It was the Philistine giant whom David slew with his sling. Gath was the hometown of Goliath. It was David's victory over Goliath that had propelled David forward in Israel. The text stresses that David went to Achish the king of Gath. Was he seeking to join up with the very forces he had helped defeat? How did he think this was going to go?

I remember a few years ago. The Clemson Tigers had beaten the Alabama Crimson Tide in January 2017 to be Collegiate Football champions. The quarterback who led the tigers to victory was DeShaun Watson. Well, a couple months after the championship game, DeShaun Watson showed up at a pub in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the city in which the University of Alabama is located. Do you think he was greeted warmly? An Alabama player was there in the pub and he approached Watson and told him to leave. The rest of the patrons in the pub joined in an attempt to throw him out. Well, it was not nice, but what do you expect?

The situation is not that different for David in Gath, only I think too late David figured out it was far more serious. When David is recognized by the servants of Achish, they call him king of the land. They did not call him the king of Israel because he was not. But they did call him king. Did they actually realize what they were saying? David's reputation as victor was well-known as was the singing and dancing that the women of Israel had done in the aftermath of his victory over the giant. In desperation David had fled from Saul and his dominion. Circumstances had to have been bad for David to have thought himself better off with Achish than Saul. It seems crazy that David would have thought this way to begin with, but now he starts acting crazy, hoping to be able to somehow escape with his life. Providentially, his act works. Gath was already full of crazy people and Achish did not want another. So David escaped. But David knew that the escape was only brought about by the working of God.

Turn over to Psalm 34, if you would. The heading for the psalm indicates that it was written by David. The occasion of his writing was when he "changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away." Lest you be confused, Abimelech is either a title or another name for Achish king of Gath. David's crazy act on the outside was the cover for what really was the working of God. David had sought the Lord in his fear and in his desperate situation, and the Lord had delivered him, and he was now overjoyed and praised the Lord for his deliverance. To seize on only a couple verses, David says:

v. 4 – I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

v. 6-7 – This poor man cried and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.

V. 18 – The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Now, please turn over to Psalm 56. Again we are told that David wrote this psalm when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

The fugitive was on the run, and he felt the distress of being pursued. But he took comfort from the Lord, reminding himself that his trust was in God.

He wrote:

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me;

all day long an attacker oppresses me;

2 my enemies trample on me all day long,

for many attack me proudly.

3 When I am afraid,

I put my trust in you.

4 In God, whose word I praise,

in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.

What can flesh do to me?

5 All day long they injure my cause;

all their thoughts are against me for evil.

6 They stir up strife, they lurk;

they watch my steps,

as they have waited for my life.

8 You have kept count of my tossings;

put my tears in your bottle.

Are they not in your book?

9

This I know, that God is for me.

10 In God, whose word I praise,

in the Lord, whose word I praise,

11 in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.

What can man do to me?

Gath is a reminder to us of the protecting hand of God, especially when we are at our worst. God's watch care is not a reason to throw caution to the wind, but how many of us have been preserved by the Lord when we did crazy things? And if he was with us then, why do we fear when enemies arise against us? Why do we become anxious when circumstances threaten our well-being? Listen, the man in trouble in this text is the man after God's own heart. Never think that God shows his favor simply by preventing you from facing difficulties and threats in your life. No. He in fact allows his children to face troubles and threats so that we can behold His powerful and gracious delivering hand. He will take us through the valley of the shadow of death. He will allow us to be pursued by the evil one. But he will never leave his people, and ultimately he will deliver us. So to the one who trusts in God and who praises his word, I say, "Be not afraid; what can man do to you?" And this is the word we should preach to ourselves whenever we feel desperation as David did at Gath.

Never forget the mercies of God even in our foolishness. Trust in him and cry out to him.

At Gath, David points us to our Savior. Although Jesus never did anything that was crazy, many rejected him because crazy is what he appeared to them to be. John 10:20 records that they said of Jesus, "He has a demon and is insane; why listen to him?" Do not think that you will escape this accusation yourself if you faithfully follow Christ. Be prepared and thank God in advance for how he will use the world's mistaken perception of you for your good.

The next stop in David's desperate flight is . . .

II. Adullam.

Adullam was located about halfway between Gath and Bethlehem. David's family hears and joins him there. No doubt they were afraid for themselves. If their son and brother was being sought, then they could not risk thinking themselves safe. But others came as well. A bunch of malcontents arrived at Adullam. These were outcasts, people in distress, in debt, and discontent. They were weak and heavy-laden, but they saw hope in David. And David did not run them off. He became their captain.

These are not the people you or I would have chosen to be on our side. They were not the strongest or the wealthiest or the smartest. But that's who came. And David turned none away.

Again, David points us to Jesus. His disciples were from Galilee, a place most Jews scorned. None were well-to-do. They were common people. And the cry of Jesus was "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden." It does not matter who you are, you are invited to come and join with Jesus. He firmly declared, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out." No one is worthy to come to Jesus. But that is why he came. He came to bring the unworthy who will own that we are unworthy into the family of God. He calls us to join his band of outcasts from the world.

I get a kick out of a t-shirt that my grandson sports. Emblazoned across the chest are two words, "Dirt Magnet." That is an apt description of kids who just seem to get dirty without any effort. Well, if t-shirts had been around in Jesus's day, his could have said "Distressed Magnet." That's who rallied around David and that's who drew near to Christ Jesus. Jesus himself said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." "It is not those who are well who need a doctor but those who are sick." And if you know yourself accurately, you know you are not well.

Sin is a debilitating, polluting, and distressing disease of the soul. It brings death and destruction. And to be among the band that gathers around David's greater son, you must realize that you are a sinner, indebted to God, distressed in your soul, harassed by the world. But as surely as David did

not turn away the outcasts who gathered to him, neither will Jesus. People can be too good to come to Jesus, but no one can be too bad. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, but not all see themselves as sinners. Those who do not see themselves to be sinners are the ones Jesus calls healthy. They are not actually healthy, but they think they are. Those who see themselves as the sinful debtors that they are, they are the sick. These are welcome to come to Jesus, and he will certainly not cast them out.

And David flees again. Next stop:

III. Mizpeh.

Things did not go so well with David's idea to run to the king of Gath. This time he goes much further outside the dominion of Saul to another king. The distance was much greater. The journey was arduous, involving a difficult 3,000 foot descent down into the valley of the Dead Sea and then another steep ascent up onto the plateau to Mizpeh in the land of Moab.

David came at last to the king of Moab with a request. David's parents were now quite advanced in years. Living in the wilderness would have been quite challenging for them. So he sought a place of safety and peace for them. We get an idea of the genuine care David had for his father Jesse and his mother. A fundamental mark of righteousness is taking care of family. If you are going to amount to anything outside your home, you must be faithful at home. Our responsibility starts there. I even think here of Jesus, while on the cross. He was taking care of his mama. He looked at her and John and said, "woman, behold your son!" To John he said, "Behold your mother!" And John took her home to his house from that day forward. Jesus demonstrated care for his family.

Strikingly and thankfully, David experienced a much different reception in Mizpeh than he got at Gath. Of course he had not killed Moab's champion, but still there is a likely reason why David and his family might find a welcome there. And we find it in the book of Ruth.

A famine in the land of Judah sent a man named Elimelech in search of food. He took his wife and two sons down into Moab. And they stayed for years. The two sons married Moabite women and then Elimelech and his two sons died. Elimelech's wife Naomi returned to her Bethlehem home and she was accompanied by Ruth, one of the Moabite women who married her sons. Ruth adopted the Jews as her people and was redeemed by Boaz. Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse. And Jesse became the father of David. We cannot be certain how important Jesse's and David's family tree was to the king of Moab, but it stands to reason that the family connection would not have hurt. And surely the family connection was a factor in David's decision to go there. At any rate, this stop in Moab and finding refuge for his parents there makes the events recounted in the book of Ruth all the more significant. Naomi underwent a time of great trial and bitterness. I wonder how she might have felt, however, if she could have known how important her time in Moab would turn out to be for a point of need in the life of her great-great-grandson the king-to-be.

I wonder how we would respond if we could see the fruit of our sufferings not only in our life time but also in the next generation and the one after that. We often are so focused on ourselves that we fail to see that our trials and our faithfulness can bestow blessings on others down the road of history even when we are no longer present. If we can think ahead even though we do not know, it could add an additional incentive for us to keep going even when the going is tough.

I came across an intriguing tale in Dale Davis's commentary. He tells of a polish pilot by the name of Roman Turski who in 1938 had to make an overnight stop in the Nazi stronghold of Vienna, Austria.

He was doing a little shopping the next morning before he was to depart, and a man in a big hurry almost knocked Turski down. The fellow looked at him, his face full of fright, and he said, "Gestapo!" Turski quickly escorted the man to his hotel room where he hid him. The Gestapo came and made a search but did not find the fugitive. Turski flew the fellow out of Vienna and dropped him off in a field just over the Polish border where he would be on his own. When the Turski landed in Cracow, the police were waiting and searched his plane. They had been alerted that he had helped a Jew escape from Austria. Finding no one, the police let Turski go.

He would go on to become a WWII fighter pilot for the Polish Air Force and later the French, and still later he flew for the British in the Battle of Britain. That battle saw him injured in the air by scrap metal careening off of a plane he was pursuing. It hit him in the head fracturing his skull, causing massive bleeding, and leading to unconsciousness. Turski crash landed near a hospital in England. News reports went out how this Polish hero had shot down five enemy planes that day before crashing and that his condition seemed hopeless.

A brain surgeon in Scotland read the reports with great interest. He was determined to see who this man was. The RAF flew him to the hospital where Turski was. He performed successful surgery on Turski. When Turski awoke, he saw a vaguely familiar face looking down at him. "Do you remember me?" the doctor asked, "You saved my life in Vienna. Now, I have been able to save yours." The rescued Jew performed the surgery on the dying Polish pilot that preserved his life.

Sometimes we get to see the providential working of God before our very eyes like Roman Turski. Sometimes his work is spread over centuries as with Naomi. But God is always working. He was at work even through choices made by a faithless Bethlehemite to go to Moab. And he used those choices to provide a place of safety and comfort for David's aging parents. Be assured that God is at work in your life in the details, some of which are painful, some of which are perplexing, but all of which he is working together for good for those who love him and who are called according to his purpose. Let that fact console your heart and fuel your determination to trust him no matter what.

From the king of Moab in Mizpeh, David went into the . . .

IV. Stronghold.

With his parents in the safe keeping of the king of Moab, David went into the stronghold. We don't know exactly what this is or where it was or how long he stayed, but it seems to have been a significant amount of time. The text says that David's parents stayed with the king "all the time that he was in the stronghold." While there David was waiting to know what God would do for him. He was waiting on direction from God. He was done with trying to take care of things in his own strength and with his own understanding. For he was waiting to hear from God. And he did. At some point in time, the prophet Gad spoke. He said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

Where did Gad come from? Who is he? When did he get there? We do not know. The Holy Spirit is not interested in our knowing the answers to those questions. What he does want us to know is that David heard from the Lord. God gave direction and special guidance to David through a prophet.

It is important for us to know how God directed David. It sets David in contrast to Saul. Saul had turned his back on the Lord's word, and the Lord had turned his back to Saul. Remember when Saul had disobeyed the Lord at Amalek? Samuel came and spoke to Saul about it, but afterward Samuel went one way and Saul went another. Saul did not see Samuel again. Saul was in his own state of

desperation AND he was without a prophet from the Lord. Meanwhile here is David. And though David is in desperation, running as he is like a fugitive, he has not been abandoned by the Lord. He has nowhere to lay his head, but he has the light of the word of the Lord. And the word of the Lord is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. It would be one thing to be in the throes of desperation, but to be desperate and without God is unbearable. I do not know how people cope with their miseries who have no taste for the word of God. But if in the midst of your trouble no matter how difficult you feed on God's word and stand on his promises, you can stand and by his grace you can bear it.

Dale Davis writes, "Being in the slimy pit (Psalm 40:2) is not quite so bad if one can hear his shepherd's voice and know he is near." (223) David heard the voice of his shepherd through the prophet Gad. You and I may hear that voice through every page and every word of the scriptures. Why would we be slack to read it? Why would we be sluggish to memorize it? Why would we allow our minds to be filled with so many other things than to be steadfast to meditate upon his word? No good reason exists.

Conclusion

We learn important truths at each stop along the path of David's flight, but there is an overall lesson for us as well. The truth is our lives themselves are to be characterized by motion not by stillness. Let us run the race that is set before us. David was on the run. Jesus lived on the run as well. He pointed out to would-be disciples that birds have nests and foxes have holes, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. We should never get too comfortable. This life is not about kicking back but about running. We have a mission to accomplish. Let us press on.