

July 31, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: The Life of David
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2016 David J. Whitcomb

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS A PROCESS

1 Samuel 30:16-31

Do you ever skip to the end of a novel to learn how it ends instead of reading all the way through? I cannot imagine why someone would do that. At the very least it ruins the whole story. What is the point of working your way through the plot that involves many different characters if you already know how the story ends? That is like someone telling a joke and someone else who is in the conversation blurting out the punch line before the teller gets there. Way to ruin a good joke!

We are kind of like that with God's promises. It is true that God has promised to bring all things out to His glory in the end of the age. We believe Him. But most serious Christians are so concerned about how God is going to make that promise work that we forget to enjoy the process of getting there.

For example, from the moment our human parents Adam and Eve introduced sin into God's perfect creation, God promised that He would defeat Satan and, thereby, redeem the fallen creation through the Seed of the woman. But the long story to that end has to wind its way through Noah and his sons, especially Shem, in whose line Abraham would be born. And God chose Abraham by which to make a nation of people, in whom would be born the Redeemer who brings blessing to the entire world. To those people God gave His law so that we all could understand how we have failed to achieve His righteousness and need a Redeemer to pay for the penalty of our sins. And all who look back to that payment on the cross of Calvary are forgiven and look forward to spending eternity with our Savior.

That is the short version of the whole story of the Bible. Sure the end is great. But let's enjoy watching God fulfill promise after promise along the way.

David believed God when God told him to pursue the Amalekites. He believed he would overtake them and he believed he would defeat them, even with one third of his army gone. David acted according to what he believed and God proved faithful to His promises. David enjoyed the process.

God Keeps His Promise (vv.16-20).

We should be very encouraged to learn in this part of David's story that this special servant of God discovered that what God had promised He fulfilled. God gave the promise when *David inquired of the LORD*, "*Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?*" *He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue"* (1 Samuel 30:8).

As our last study revealed, David and his men had acted on God's promise. No other response would have been acceptable. Why seek God's will if we do not intend to do it? David's inquiring of the Lord would indicate his desire to know God's will, and knowing God's will implies the desire to do it. Too often it is possible to ask God to reveal His will so we can decide if it fits with our will.

But what if a person is not walking in fellowship with God and, therefore, does not even desire to know God's will? God is kind to put us in circumstances that cause us to desire His will no matter what the consequences. A great example of that kindness is found in this story where David and his men lost everything. Is it necessary for God to allow something so catastrophic to get our attention? No. The more sensitive we are to fellowship with God, the less extreme circumstances will be needed order to help us desire God's will.

A key to being sensitive to God's will is keeping sin out of our lives – even little sins like lying or pride. We know that David had fallen into the slough of lying. A second key is maintaining continual fellowship with God through His Word and prayer. It would naturally seem that if we are busy doing the second key, the first key will be automatic.

David sought to know God's will, and God graciously revealed His will to the weary and grief-stricken men. He uncovered His will by answering through the Urim and Thummim which was somewhat unique even in Old Testament times. We don't do that in this day. We don't need to. We have the clear instruction of the Bible, prayer, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to guide us in God's will.

Because God answered him in that unique way, David was absolutely certain that God's will was for him to pursue the Amalekites because God would deliver them into their hands. Sometimes God's will in matters like that is not as clear to us. But as we pursue the clear matters, those commands that God has written in His Word, the other matters will become more clear. One step in the process of bringing about God's will was for God to provide a sick Egyptian who would be able to guide David and his men.

The man led David and his men to the Amalekite band that had sacked their city. And there in the valley lay the fulfillment of God's promise. How encouraging that is. *And when he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah (v. 16).*

Right there before the eyes of David and his men were all their possessions, their families, and the rascals who had stolen them. In normal human life, what are the odds of making such a complete recovery? When God is actively involved in our lives, they are not normal. What David's men saw was that the enemy celebrated too early. It appears that they were not "home" yet but had to stop and camp for the night. They decided to have a victory celebration. How did the captives feel as they watched the enemy rejoicing? They probably felt like we feel sometimes.

We probably share a certain amount of discouragement and frustration when we see reports of the ungodly rejoicing and celebrating over a military victory, or a political victory, or a judicial victory. It seems like those kinds of victories have been coming along fairly regularly for the ungodly lately. But what do we know? We know that often God raises up an enemy against them and they go down in unexpected defeat. And even if that does not happen, we know that those individuals who are rejoicing will cease to live sooner than they can imagine. And ultimately, we know that God has

already determined that He will punish and destroy all the ungodly and their ungodliness for eternity. In times like that we need to remember what King Ahab said to King Ben-Hadad: "Let not him who straps on his armor boast himself like he who takes it off" (1 Kings 20:11). Of course that was the warning of one ungodly king to another ungodly king.

How encouraging it must have been to the weary soldiers to see their enemy unaware and ripe for the slaughter. How encouraging for us to pray about God's will, be convinced about God's will, and then to actually watch God's will unfold before us. Do you ever stop to thank God for answering prayer when He arranges His will for you?

Because God was actively involved in processing His will, God's servant experienced exactly what God had promised. God had promised victory. Remember that when David sought the Lord, *He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue" (1 Samuel 30:8).* As David and the men hurriedly planned their attack, they had to have this promise in mind. The over ruling sentiment might have been, be wise, be careful, be sure, but . . . we can't lose. Even though God promised victory, the men were still responsible to be wise. Yet they could approach the battle with great confidence.

Is this revelation any more relevant than simple revelations of God's will to us? For example, what about the will of God expressed in one of the most well known passages in the Bible: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).* That is plain enough. Would we be more likely to follow God's will and expect Him to keep His promises if He revealed His promise through Urim and Thummim? Frankly, I think I trust the written, inspired, eternally settled Word of God that has been proven true so many times over the casting of dice.

So what do we do with this great promise from Proverbs? We should do just what God said. We should wholly depend on the Lord in our thinking, our emotions, and our decision making. We should depend lightly to not at all on ourselves. We should give deference to God in every aspect of our lives. Then, we should expect God to direct our paths. And that process is no different than David planning

to attack the Amalekites with complete assurance that he was going to defeat a larger and uglier army.

David and the men attacked and God miraculously delivered victory. Somehow 400 weary warriors defeated a larger army. *And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled (v.17).* Granted there would have been an element of surprise in the attack. When they launched the attack is somewhat nebulous because the wording in the Hebrew is a bit hard to pin down since the *twilight* and *evening* can be interchanged. It seems like the battle was engaged early in the morning—a common tactic of surprise. Then the battle raged until that evening.

Maybe David's men got a little rest the night before the battle. But even if that were true, the odds were stacked way against them. This army was so large that the comparatively few who escaped was the same number as David's entire army. The victory was possible only because God gave unique, special strength. As a result of God's intervention, David did what Saul had refused to do (1 Samuel 15). So thoroughly did he defeat these people that the Amalekites are not mentioned again for 300 years in the reign of Hezekiah and that as a remnant (1 Chron. 4:43).

Miraculously all was recovered. *David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all (vv.18-19).* This too was due to God's amazing intervention. Yes, but God could have prevented the entire episode. He could have, but chose to create it instead. God needed to get David's attention and chose the loss of all things as the means. But even in that discipline, God protected the innocent. When we analyze the details of God's work in our lives we should stand amazed at His goodness and wisdom. Generally it takes a few years after the fact to figure these things out.

The battle was over, the victory won, and much credit was given to David. *David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, "This is David's spoil" (v.20).* Obviously, David got the lion's share of the reward. This appears to be an expression of thanksgiving to him from the men who the day before were ready to stone him. Human nature is fickle;

God is faithful. Be thankful for the times when fickle human nature can acknowledge God working in us and through us. By the way, what was David going to do with all those flocks and herds?

Wise Sharing of the Lord's Reward (vv.21-31).

The whole body of soldiers shared the Lord's reward (vv.21-25). No one was left out. And that created a bit of a rift because a law of human nature requires that where there is a windfall, there will be greed. In the eyes of the fighters, it looked like the men who stayed behind were going to ask for some of the spoil. *Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people he greeted them (v.21).*

What made them think David was going to be generous? The story says that David *greeted them* which means more than saying "Hi." The word means that he inquired as to their welfare. The fighters might have noticed that David did not chide these fellows for lagging behind and not participating in the battle. David's kind and compassionate attitude was obvious. That signaled a time for action for the wicked and worthless fellows. Those legalists quickly pointed out how wrong sharing would be. *Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart" (v.22).*

Before we condemn these wicked fellows, we need to stop to think about how we think. Doesn't common sense say, "To the victors go the spoils"? Four hundred men risked their very lives to rescue the people and the possessions. Should men who were too lazy to go to war share in the spoils? It wasn't a question of being slothful. The men truly did not have strength to go on. Should they not enjoy some reward too?

David's response to this veiled greed lays down some very important principles about body fellowship. A "whole" body is an undivided body. If the victory is God's, all should share. That was David's conclusion. *But David said, "You shall not do so, my*

brothers, with what the LORD has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us (v.23). These are the words of a man who trusts God. He sought God's will. He learned God's will. He obeyed God's will. He experienced God's blessing as He was faithful to His promise.

Therefore, David concluded that this whole victory and recovery was about God. Notice that he pointed out that God had given. He reminded the guys that God had preserved. Gaining booty then was not the primary reward from God. Rather God showed that His reward was: 1) Personal protection and 2) Defeat of the enemy.

In light of God's grace at that time, David established a good rule that would endure during his reign as king. *"For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike."* And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day (vv.24-25). In simple terms David meant, "The share of the man who guards the baggage is to be the same as the share of the man who went to battle." This new law might partly stem from the fact that no one stayed behind to guard Ziklag in the first place.

This is a very important principle because it is actually the same rule God uses for the Body of Christ. Paul wrote to believers in Corinth, *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).* Everything God gives us as individuals is for the common good of the Body of Christ, the Church. Our abilities, times, talents, possessions are all gifts or rewards from God that intends for us to share.

In fact, we use these things to help those who are weaker or in need. That text in 1 Corinthians continued, *"On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member*

suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12:22-27).

How does that work? We have just come through a time of need, even crisis in our assembly. A week ago, we had two funerals in four days. That is a need. That is suffering. How did you share your gift or reward during that time? It is always very encouraging to watch people "step up to the plate" in times of need to share what God has given them with the suffering members of the assembly.

An important point in the story is that future citizens of David's reign shared the Lord's reward (vv.26-31). Maybe you have heard someone say, "The future belongs to those who prepare for it." When I was in the ninth grade, I had a history teacher who was also the football coach. Too often, a football coach teaches a class not because he is capable but because he is supposed to have a job in the school besides coaching. Such was the case with this man. I cannot remember hardly anything the man tried to teach except this one challenge he repeated often: "The future belongs to those who prepare for it." In that he was right. . . . eternally right.

David prepared for the future. *When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD" (v.26).* Taking care of the elders of the people who need to accept you as king is a good idea. This too was part of the process of God fulfilling His promise to make David the king. Obviously, at this point David also remembered the future God had promised and participated in the process to that end. If you don't believe God's promise, you don't participate in the process. David believed God and, therefore, he did something about God's future plans. That response is quite like the fact that if I really believe what God says about the end times and about eternity, I will warn whoever will listen.

Generosity is often compelled. David also won the favor of the first people who would claim him as king. *It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir, in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa, in Racal, in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, in the cities of the Kenites, in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach, in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed (vv.27-31).* In this case, it

appears that David won the favor of the people by returning what the Amalekites had stolen.

Some of the “booty” David’s men collected belonged to the people in these cities to begin with. We read earlier that the Egyptian slave confessed, *“We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against **that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb**, and we burned Ziklag with fire” (1 Samuel 30:14)*. Also we read in verse sixteen about *all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and **from the land of Judah** (v.16)*. The people of Judah would be grateful to get something back.

In all, this story is a wonderful picture of what Christ, the victorious eternal warrior, did for the Church. Paul told the Ephesian Christians that in His victory over sin, death, hell, and Satan, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to His Church (Ephesians 4). *Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:8-13)*.

This picture is especially pointed to in David’s defeat of the Amalekites. They were fierce and perennial enemies of God’s people like sin and Satan is. God ordained that they should be wholly defeated just like sin and Satan were defeated on the cross. David simply carried out what God ordained in Deuteronomy 25:15-17. Christ carried out what God ordained in Genesis 3:15.

We can be satisfied and happy that God makes His will known. The greater part of His will is obvious in His Word. It is good to know God’s will and important to do it. Often the implementing of God’s will is a process. It doesn’t always come about overnight. If we are truly trusting God and not ourselves, we will be participating in the process of God’s will being fulfilled.