

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been lonely? Perhaps you are a people person and any period of time without human company has an effect upon your mood; perhaps you are the sort of person who enjoys your own company; and you choose to be alone; but as we move into chapter 21 David is alone not through choice but as a result of circumstances.

He has had to flee for his life because Saul is now out to get him and this means that David has to leave his wife and home behind and say good bye to his closest friend Jonathan. But now where does he go? He is alone and hungry and fleeing for his life so what should he do now? Sadly some people in David's situation see no way out and take their own lives but David is a believer in God and He is now in a situation where his faith is being tested and stretched to the limit. How does one show faith in God when the circumstances of life leave you in such a horrible mess. Well David must act to save his life and he must trust God even in the most extreme of circumstances.

1. GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS CARE FOR DAVID (vs. 1-9)

David flees to Nob which was where the tabernacle was sited at this time apparently it has been relocated from Shiloh but of course it does not have the ark of God as we saw in the earlier chapter of this book the ark is now in Kiriath Jearim. The chief Priest at Nob was Ahimelech who was the great grandson of Eli and grandson of Phinehas.

When David arrives at Nob Ahimelech is concerned; he knew something must be wrong for a person like David from the King's court would never travel without his entourage being with him (v 1). Ahimelech is fearful because if David has offended the King then anyone who sides with him will be guilty of treason and execution is sure to follow. So David tells Ahimelech a story about being on a top secret mission from the King which was so urgent that he left without his sword.

He claims that he is to meet up with his men again in a certain location (vs. 2 & 8). His deception is successful for Ahimelech seems to believe David's story and so David asks Ahimelech for two things. He needs food (v 3) and he needs a weapon (v 8). But before we move on to look at how David's needs are met it is worth asking why David came up with this story; is there any redeeming features at all in David's deception. In truth we can only speculate but perhaps David was trying to protect Ahimelech, he was trying to protect him from being implicated in aiding an enemy of the crown. If David did not tell Ahimelech the truth then he could rightly claim that he knew nothing of David's status at the time he helped him (22:15).

So David's story may have been a genuine attempt to protect Ahimelech from Saul but whatever his motives were it does not excuse his deception. David's actions are not condemned because the Bible is simply telling the drama as it happened; it is not seeking to give moral evaluations of the events. We might be able to understand David's difficulty or may we call it panic?

For he seems to be at wit's end; he is alone, hungry and in danger, he is sitting at life's edge but none of that justifies David in jeopardising Ahimelech's life for as we will see next time the Priests at Nob paid a heavy price for the help they gave to David (22:18-19).

Now what does David ask for? He asks for five loaves of bread or whatever Ahimelech can find (v 3). As it turned out the only available bread was the consecrated bread which was only to be eaten by the Priests (Leviticus 24:5-9). Every Sabbath 12 loaves of bread were placed on a table within

the holy place of the tabernacle. They were a reminder that God sustains his people and supplies their needs. Ahimelech's willingness to give this bread to David shows that he understood that the claims of compassion as well as the symbolism of God's provision would be well served in giving this bread to David who was in genuine need.

Jesus commented on this incident in Mark 2:25-28 to show that the true meaning of this ceremonial law was expressed in this bread being given to David; for it was an act of compassion and mercy providing for real need which is what the bread of the presence as it was called was suppose to symbolise. In giving the bread to David; Ahimelech was not superseding the law but fulfilling its intention.

David also asks for a weapon and as it happened the sword of Goliath was the only one available (vs. 8-9) and so David takes that one. Ahimelech's generosity towards David was bound to be regarded as treason should Saul ever hear about it even though David tried his best to protect Ahimelech but would Saul ever find out? Sadly he will for we are told that Doeg was present although I am not sure what the phrase "detained before the Lord" (v 7) means; it could be that he was in prison but whatever it means the significance of his presence as we will see next time is that he is the informant in the camp and Saul will soon find out and Ahimelech and the Priests pay a heavy price for their willingness to help David. But what do these verses teach us? They teach us a very simply lesson that God provides for our daily bread. In the midst of confusion, danger and fear David is sustained by his God.

Here was David in desperate need and the God that he trusted provided for him. You may be saying but David's actions were deceitful; surely he does not deserve God's care but to think like that is to misunderstand the grace of God; for no one deserves God's care. If God's care of his people depended upon us deserving it then we would all perish with hunger. The only reason that God provides for our needs is not that we deserve it but because He is gracious and loving towards us.

So you see God is teaching us that in the midst of the most intense trials of life and the most difficult of circumstances He provides for our needs. Even though for some Christians life is full of incredible difficulties yet the fact that we all eat every day tells us that God cares and if He cares to provide for us then can we not depend upon him and trust him in all the circumstances of life. So if you feel intensely lonely; is the Lord God not able to meet all your emotional needs. He often does this by providing us with company at just the right time. We may be facing some financial concerns at the moment; well is the God who feeds us everyday not able to provide for all our financial needs. However we must be careful for the Lord only provides for our needs not our desires or wants or even our debts that have been racked up due to our own folly.

But we can be assured He will provide us with our daily bread. Is the Lord not able to provide for our physical needs; as age makes its mark upon us and our limitations are increasingly exposed? Of course He can; therefore we must learn to trust him daily and depend upon him totally and pray daily for our daily bread.

2. MORE EXAMPLES OF GOD'S CARE (21:10–22:5)

Having had his needs for food and weaponry met at Nob David still had the need for security. Saul was hounding him and so for some unexplained reason David decides to go to Gath (v 10). I think this shows just how desperate David is at this time; it is clear that his desperation is clouding his judgement for what did he expect to receive in Gath. Here he is walking into Gath with Gath's favourite son's sword by his side looking for security and protection from the hand of Saul. David was by now known as an exterminator of the Philistines, yet he walks into a Philistine city looking

for political asylum. What was going through David's mind? What was he thinking off? David was jumping out of the frying pan into the fire and that became clear when the servants of Achish reminded Achish of the famous song about David (v 11).

They were in fact saying that these tens of thousands were mainly Philistines; "Achish this man is dangerous" no wonder David became very afraid of Achish (v 12). But David is about to find out that there is no running away from the calling as God's anointed; the king of Israel should not be found in the land of his enemy and God was not going to allow David to run away from his calling.

David is about to find out that his running from God's purpose is about to be disturbed and he is about to be redirected by the unseen hand of God. How many of God's people have tried to run away from the purpose which God has ordained for them? Perhaps it's a true believer who has drifted from God and has gone back to their unbelieving ways. Will the God who called them allow them to live happily at the expense of neglecting their calling to be a servant of the Lord? Of course not unbeknown to them God's unseen hand is at work redirecting them back to the pathway that they once embraced. Sometimes it takes years before the Lord finally redirects them and sadly they waste those years in ungodly living but God never neglects his people or allows them to run from him forever.

In the midst of his fear David decides to act insane while in the presence of the people of Gath (v 13). He acted like a madman, scribbling graffiti on the doors of the gates and dribbling all over his beard (v 13). David's plan worked and Achish has enough madmen in his town without welcoming another one (vs. 14-15) and so David escaped to the cave of Adullam (22:1).

Poor David is on a downward spiral he is running from Saul and he has deceived Ahimelech; and fooled the Philistines at Gath but his actions are a reflection on his spiritual state at this present moment; he was depending on his own wisdom rather than trusting completely upon the Lord his God. His physical weakness and vulnerability were having an effect upon his spiritual well being which is usually the case.

If we are physically weak or mentally low then there is a great danger that we will be feeling spiritually low; but at such times we must not give into the temptations of our heart but we must continue to trust in our God and depend upon him to bring us through every difficult situation. God actually brought David out of Gath but in doing so He is in no way honouring the lies and deceit of David but is showing David and us just how gracious He is towards his people. God often shows his grace to us and makes the best out of a bad situation but He is never pleased with the bad situations that we get ourselves into because of our own sin and failure to trust in him.

However David has not been abandoned by his God and in spite of his poor and foolish decisions and his sin of deception David was in his heart still trusting in his God. Perhaps he realised the mess his own foolishness had got him into and looked to his God to redeem the situation. I know this by reading Psalm 56 which was written while David was in Gath. This Psalm expresses his fear and anxiety in vivid terms; but at its heart it is a cry for mercy and a Psalm of faith.

He cries out for mercy because only God is able to have pity upon him and rescue him from this mess that he has got himself into (v 1). But in the midst of this mess David encourages his heart to trust in his God for He is in control and the people of Gath cannot harm him unless God gives them permission to do so; therefore David is not going to be afraid (vs. 3-4). David is confident that God will deliver him and by doing so He will demonstrate once again that God is for his people (vs. 9-11).

So you see even when we have made a mess of things; even when we make wrong decisions and allow sin to dominate for a time; we can still know God's grace and mercy and we can trust our

God to bring his good purposes about through our own foolishness and sin. God is sovereign and his sovereignty means that even in the messes of life God works for our good and his glory.

Even when we make a mess of it all, God is still on our side and shows grace and mercy to us because God's Son died for us so that we could belong to God and therefore God will never let us go for his Son paid a high price to purchase us for God. So my dear friend there is always a way back to God from the dark paths of sin; if you find yourself in a spiritual mess today then do what David did; call out for mercy and be assured that the sovereign God is for us and will act on our behalf for our ultimate good and for his glory.

The final example of God's care is seen in 22:1-5 where we are told that David escapes from Gath to the cave of Adullam about 12 miles east of Gath and on the border of Judah. His family probably fearing for their lives under Saul's regime heard where David was and so they went down to him along with 400 other people who probably felt they were never going to get justice from Saul (v 2).

They were a ragbag bunch of people those in distress, in debt and the ones discontented with Saul's reign. They were looking for a leader and it would not be easy to mould this motley crew into some sort of army. David then arranged asylum for his ageing Parents in Moab probably using the fact that his grandmother Ruth came from Moab in order to achieve his goal. David's desire was to find out what the Lord would do in this situation (vs. 3-4) and he wouldn't have long to wait. For what God did was to send his word to David through the prophet Gad who told him to get back to Judah and David immediately obeyed (v 5). How does this section show us God's care for his people? What did David need at this time in his life? He needed to be redirected; he has lost his way and had made some foolish decisions and what he needed was for God to guide him again and that is what He does through his word spoken by the prophet Gad.

As a result of his experience David wrote Psalm 34; 57 and 142 during this time and if we look at Psalm 57 we can see that God was teaching David that his refuge should be in the Lord; his protection is found only through faith in the Lord. David had run from Judah to Gath and then to the border area of Judah probably because he was no longer trusting in the Lord as his refuge.

Now God's word comes to him and he is told to get back into the heart of Judah for he has been appointed as king and God has work for him to do. David was to serve the Lord as the leader of God's people. David has been brought to the position where he is able to praise God because of his love and faithfulness towards him (Psalm 57:10); he simply has a fresh understanding of the love and mercy of God.

That my dear friends is what the Lord does for us when we have foolishly lost our way and have gone in a different direction. God comes to us with his word and tells us to get back on the pathway for he has a task for us to perform and He assures us of his love and mercy so that we are enabled again to sing his praises and exalt his name because we have found our refuge to be in him alone.

Have you lost your way in your walk with God? Then hear his word and be assured of his love and come back to the Lord; trust him as your refuge and start to fulfil the purpose that God has for you in this church. Once you have experienced his love and mercy and are sure that He is your refuge then like David you will be able to say:

"Be exalted O God above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth" (Psalm 57:11)

Amen