

As Blameless in My Sight as an Angel  
1 Samuel 27, 29  
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## Introduction

I want to start today's sermon with a quote from the guy who paraphrased the Bible as "The Message," Eugene Peterson:

"Love – God's love in particular – is fundamental to the world's existence... But enmity is the actual condition in which more often than not we find ourselves. We're criticized, teased, avoided, attacked, shot at, abandoned, stoned, cursed, hunted down, snubbed, stabbed in the back, treated like a doormat, and damned with faint praise. Not all of those things, and not all the time, but enough of them and often enough to realize that not everyone shares God's excellent attitude toward us."<sup>1</sup>

Do you ever feel that way? That life should be easier, kinder, gentler; that people should love you more. Why is everyone so angry, why do people manipulate and use one another? And yet we all know that in a fallen world, our selfish desires alienate us and pit us against one another. Job 5:7 reminds us: "*man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.*"

As we head back into the life of David after two weeks off, we should remember that David has been handling well the enmity - the attacks and threats to his life - up to now. He has successfully dodged King Saul's spear throws and escaped out a window when soldiers were sent to arrest him. Prince Jonathan, David's best friend, helped him leave town, and so David has been on the run from Saul for a few years now. Twice he has snuck up on the king and had the opportunity to kill him, but both times he refused to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. He almost plunged into darkness with a rude, greedy landowner a few chapters back, but cooler heads prevailed in the form of the man's peacemaking wife. In today's chapters, David has come to a place where he's tired of all the conflict and the running, and he's lost faith in his ability to survive Saul's attempts to kill him. He has decided that it's time to do something drastic and throw his lot in with the enemy. The author of 1 Samuel might have been tempted to leave this episode out of his history because it would have been an embarrassing skeleton in David's closet when he came to the throne. But it's here because it happened and because the Bible presents its main characters as they were, warts and all.

The first seven verses of chapter 27 show us that David had found

### **I. Favor in the Land of the Philistines (27:1-7)**

*1 Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." 2 So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. 3 And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. 4 And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him. 5 Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" 6 So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. 7 And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.*

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), p. 48.

David had been told by the prophet Samuel, his best friend Jonathan, his wife Abigail, and even King Saul himself that he would become the king of Israel, but at the beginning of this chapter we see that David's hope in that future was faltering. In his heart, which is to say, David's inner thoughts, he had convinced himself that Saul would find him and kill him. Despite the abundance of evidence that God had been protecting him over the last few years, "*David said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul.'*" He didn't say, "I might perish," he says "I shall perish," as if he knew the future. As if the past hadn't proven that God was looking out for him and as if the future didn't hold security for him. He looked around and saw his situation from a purely humanistic viewpoint, neglecting to consider the Lord, effectively pushing the "panic" button assuming the worst was going to happen.

This should remind us that we should be careful what we say to our hearts. Do we speak negative, unfaithful thoughts inwardly? Do we discourage ourselves by focusing on the bad that could happen, forgetting the promises of God in the Scriptures? Now, I'm not trying to make this a goofy pep talk on "name it, claim it self-talk"; I'm not trying to sell you on Norman Vincent Peale's "Power of Positive Thinking." But there's real value in identifying when our thoughts are getting away from us, when our minds have embraced lies over truth, unbelief over faith. A couple examples:

"Why should I pray? It's not going to do any good."

"If I share my faith with this person, they won't listen."

"I'm not going to pursue reconciliation with that person, they'll never change."

Those are just a few examples of how we talk ourselves out of good things, how we tell our hearts that we're defeated just like David convinced himself that he wouldn't survive. Instead, let's immerse ourselves in the Scriptures, ask for God's courage, and step out boldly in faith. Let's talk back to our negative inner thoughts and remind them that we have all-powerful God on our side.

OK, back to the text: David thought that his best strategy to avoid Saul was to live in enemy territory, so he headed there for the next sixteen months. For some reason, David kept thinking that Achish, one of the Philistine kings, would enjoy having him around. Earlier, in chapter 21, David had hoped to live in Achish's city, Gath, incognito, but was quickly recognized and had to act insane to escape out of the city. This time he arrived in Gath with his own private army of 600 men, so he was not concerned about his personal safety this time. And, whereas Achish wanted nothing to do with David in that earlier chapter, he now allows him to stay, probably seeing that David has strategic value and his small army could be an asset.

David had the nerve to ask that Achish give him his own town from which to operate, prefacing it with "*if I have found favor in your eyes.*" Maybe Achish looked on him with favor, maybe he just didn't want the headache of feeding and housing 600 fighting men with their wives and children, so Achish gave David his own town. Ziklag is mentioned in Joshua 15:31 as one of the cities that the tribe of Judah had been allotted when they first got to the Promised Land, but they hadn't fought for it, so it remained in Philistine hands. The net result is that David cunningly secured it without a fight, simply by gaining Achish's trust.<sup>2</sup> Verse 6 notes that Ziklag was won over to Judah for good.

The last five verses of chapter 27 show us how David was

## **II. Deceiving the King of the Philistines (27:8-12)**

<sup>8</sup> *Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt.*

<sup>9</sup> *And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away*

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<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), p. 465.

*the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish. <sup>10</sup> When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." <sup>11</sup> And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, "lest they should tell about us and say, 'So David has done.'" Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines. <sup>12</sup> And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."*

We saw back in the chapter with Nabal and Abigail that David and his men had made a bit of a living protecting the shepherds in the area from groups that would attack them. Now they have become the attackers. They are in the southern lands where they could attack a variety of different groups, and David used that ambiguity to help him formulate a strategy: he would strike one of Israel's enemies, listed in verse 8, and then report to Achish that he had actually raided one of Israel's cities, the ones listed in verse 10. He couldn't attack Philistine cities because then he would have made an enemy of his hosts, and he also couldn't leave any of the inhabitants alive so that word couldn't reach Achish that he was lying about his targets.

And his plan worked like a charm: not only did he defeat some of Israel's enemies so that he wouldn't have to deal with them when he came to the throne later, but he gained Achish's trust. The king thought that David was a traitor to Israel and that he would be able to keep David as a servant because he would never be able to return to his own people, having killed so many of them. The reality, of course, is that David has not attacked any of his own people. He's basically taken control of a Philistine city that had always been meant to be inhabited by God's people, and then cleared out God's enemies around them.

I don't think that we're supposed to be holding up David as a hero in this chapter, however. As John Woodhouse notes: "In himself, (David) was more than capable of doubting God, of giving way to fear, and of self-protective action with no reference to God. The alarming conclusion... is that David possessed all the weaknesses that led to Saul's downfall... The sad truth is that the brilliantly gifted David eventually failed because of unrighteousness and unfaithfulness... the seeds of that failure... can be seen in 1 Samuel 27."<sup>3</sup>

We're going to skip over chapter 28 this morning because it switches the focus to Saul and we'll work through it next week. Chapter 29 continues this narrative, detailing how David was

### **III. Displeasing to the Lords of the Philistines (Chapter 29)**

*<sup>1</sup> Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. <sup>2</sup> As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, <sup>3</sup> the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day." <sup>4</sup> But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? <sup>5</sup> Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" <sup>6</sup> Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the Lord lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that*

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<sup>3</sup> John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), p. 506.

*you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. <sup>7</sup> So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.” <sup>8</sup> And David said to Achish, “But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” <sup>9</sup> And Achish answered David and said, “I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle.’ <sup>10</sup> Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light.” <sup>11</sup> So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel.*

As the Philistine armies gathered to fight Israel, the other commanders looked over at David and his men in total shock: “Achish, what are they doing here? It’s one thing to have him hang around our land, it’s another thing to bring him into battle with us, where he can double-cross us.” The other Philistine commanders did not trust David at all. They knew his reputation in battle – they hadn’t forgotten that he was the one who defeated Goliath as well as thousands of others. They figured that in the midst of battle he would switch sides and start killing Philistines to work his way back into Saul’s graces. It’s the classic dilemma of the double agent – where do his true loyalties lie? A man who is willing to betray his own people is also likely to be willing to betray his former enemies.

And what’s interesting is that I don’t think we can be sure what David was thinking here. He seems like he earnestly wanted to help the Philistines, it seems like he was begging to go with them to battle – what have I done, why can’t I help? But it’s just as likely that he just wanted them to think that. He may well have planned to double-cross them and start killing them once the fighting began, but we can’t be sure of that. He may have finally had it with Saul and decided it was OK to take up arms on the side of the enemy. It’s possible that the author is being vague in his wording so that the reader has to decide what he believes about David and his motives. My feeling is that David was just pretending to be loyal to Achish, and that actually when he said, “*that I may go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king,*” that he’s making it sound like he’s talking about Achish as the king, but he’s really referring to Saul (that’s exactly what David called Saul back in chapter 24 – “*my lord the king.*”) This also harmonizes well with David’s destroying those other tribes, making it a fuller effort on David’s part to destroy Israel’s enemies even as he was living in exile.

So the Philistine lords had most likely figured out David’s true intentions, but King Achish defended him, continually asserting that David was blameless and loyal to him. But ultimately, for the sake of making his fellow commanders feel better, he dismissed David to head back home. Which, of course, could have been David’s secret goal the entire time. This whole narrative could be read as a situation that David thought he could control that had spun out of his control, and he was on the verge of having to betray his whole country just to prove his loyalty to his latest king. Thankfully in the end, what we see is another of David’s escapes, which have been piling up as of late.

## **Conclusion**

Whatever you decide about David’s intentions, this might be the first text where you were revolted by him. It won’t be the last. But this can be a bit jarring, to hear how deceitful and violent he was, playing both sides of the Israelite-Philistine conflict. We know that God rejected King Saul for his unfaithfulness and his consistent need to please people and not his Lord, but it’s harder to understand how God has lined up the future kingship for a man as flawed as David. Dale Davis would argue that if we’re feeling very disappointed at David and God as we read this text, it’s understandable, but it’s also possible that you

“may have fallen into the trap of hero worship, of looking on... Bible characters and exalting them too highly. Why should you be surprised, shocked, offended?... The text is saying that this chosen, anointed servant is made of the same stuff as all the Lord’s people. Must we throw out God’s kingdom because not only its subjects but even its premier servant are sinners?... Instead you must get a grip on grace... We should not criticize the Potter because of the clay but rather marvel that He stoops to work with such stuff.”<sup>4</sup>

The main theme this morning is David’s attempting to live a double life. He sought to hold onto, but downplay, his Israelite identity by blending in and making the Philistines believe that he was one of them. And that’s where we should ask ourselves if we do the same thing: do we try to downplay our true identity to fit in with those around us? Are we living a double life trying to balance allegiance to both God and the world? Our true identity is rooted in our faith in Christ and our citizenship is in heaven, but we don’t want people around us to look down at us, so we blend in. The Scriptures tell us that we must be “in the world but not of it,” but too often we are “full of” the world. We want pleasure and approval, and we set our hearts on every new toy out there. And it’s easy to live just like everyone else around us, to run after what everyone else runs after, but we risk losing track of who we are and how a true Christian should act.

We used to live down the street from a guy named Chad who had worked as an undercover police officer for a while. He didn’t go into a ton of details, but he told me a couple wild stories. But one of the things that he said stuck with me: he said that after being undercover and acting like a criminal, it was really hard to shed that behavior. He had a family but he felt distance from them; he was a churchgoing, godly man but he couldn’t stop thinking and talking like a criminal. His fake life bled over into his real life, and he eventually had to make a clean break of undercover work or he felt it would take him down. We’re in danger of the same thing if we hide our identity and conform ourselves to world.

1 John 2:15-16- *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world.”*

Romans 12:2 – *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

In the end, David would rise to his throne by avoiding death, by staying away from Saul. He gave himself over to his enemies as a way to escape death. Jesus, while He avoided His enemies for a time, knew that the way to rise to His throne was to give Himself over to them because He knew that the Father’s will was for Him to die. I heard a story about when the Armenians were being slaughtered by the Turks at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the invading soldiers went into a church to destroy it and set it on fire. There was an Armenian Christian there hiding who overheard two soldiers talking to each other. One of them looked up at the wall where there was a painting of Jesus hanging on the cross and he asked, “Who is he?” And the other soldier said, “That’s their king. They think their king died for them.” And the first one said, “That’s funny, because we know that’s not the way it works. We know that people die for their king, not the other way around. These people are crazy.” Who ever heard of a king who dies for his people?<sup>5</sup> -> **Lord’s Supper**

Benediction - Philippians 4:19-20 - *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

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<sup>4</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (England: Christian Focus, 2000), pp. 231-32.

<sup>5</sup> Ray Cortese’s sermon “Character” from 8/25/13, found at sevenrivers.org.