

MONDAY, 5/13

Read 1 Samuel 25:1-44.

Just a word of warning: this week's scripture readings will be longer than usual. We're going to take a chapter a day to keep up with our sermon series through 1 and 2 Samuel. We'll try to keep the devotional content a little shorter to compensate. We need to hear more from God's Word than we do the thoughts of your pastors.

Coming off the previous chapter where David displayed righteousness in his actions, this chapter is a bit of surprise. After Samuel's death, David has an encounter in the wilderness with a man named Nabal. Nabal in Hebrew means "fool," which gives us an accurate snapshot of his character. Rather than repaying the kindness David shows him, Nabal insults the king in-waiting. Confronted with a fool, David's righteousness from chapter 24 goes out the window. He chooses 400 of his armed men in order to kill Nabal and all the men under his household. Yikes. There really isn't any reason for David to kill Nabal other than his own pride. Was he a jerk? Sure, but why do such a thing? Before, David chose not to do wrong because he trusted God to do what was right. It seems he has forgotten this lesson. As I said in the sermon, before kings, David was righteous; before fools, David was foolish.

The faithful person in this chapter is Nabal's wife, Abigail. She gathers the resources to care for David's servants and meets David along the way. She pleads before David not to do anything evil that might come back to harm his future reign as king. The Lord uses her wisdom to open David's eyes. He relents and calls off the execution. In the end, it is the Lord who avenges David. Nabal's heart fails him and his body stiffens like a stone, a reflection of his hard heart.

There are many lessons to draw from this passage. We need to remember how easy it is for us to be inconsistent like David, displaying righteousness before some while lowering ourselves to the level of fools when confronted with foolishness. Perhaps, a positive lesson is to look at Abigail, who serves as a peacemaker. She does what is right when faced with two men who were both bent on doing wrong. I wonder how the Lord might use us as peacemakers.

Praying Together:

"God, thank You for Abigail's witness. In a world where conflict like this abounds, help us to be peacemakers. By Your grace at work within us, help us seek to be reconcilers for You are a reconciling God. Amen."

TUESDAY, 5/14

Read 1 Samuel 26:1-25.

Chapter 26 has many parallels to chapter 24. With another opportunity to take Saul's life, David once again spares Saul. It might seem strange to consider why David would go to such lengths to prove he could have taken Saul's life only to let him go, but we have to remember that David has been on the run from Saul for years. He has endured misery at Saul's hands. Now that the tides have turned and David has an army of his own, he feels the need to prove his faithfulness to Saul so that Saul will relent.

One difference here is that David acknowledges that Saul's life will end in due time. As Saul appears to be losing influence and power with each chapter, David knows that his end is inevitable. David will soon be king, so he feels no need to seize an opportunity to speed up the transition. As the saying goes, "You live by the sword; you die by the sword." Here David

chooses to not do wrong because he trusts God to do what is right. This is consistent with his attitude in chapter 24 and a correction to his attitude in chapter 25.

When Saul learns that David has spared his life again, he shows remorse. He is grieved here even more so than in chapter 24 for his actions against David. Saul promises not to harm David, a promise that isn't easy to trust given his penchant to break them in the past.

Saul does go one step further here in that he blesses David. He acknowledges that David will have success because he is righteous. We will see this in David's life. When he seeks the Lord and does what is right, he will be blessed, but when pride flares up and he does what is right in his own eyes, the failures begin to pile up.

David's story, in this way, is a reminder for us to continue seeking the Lord. We want to chase after His character and His will for our lives. We need to ask for Him to lead us and give us His wisdom. God will indeed guide us if we seek after Him.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we need You. We need Your wisdom, Your Spirit. Without Your presence and power at work in us, we will become like the worst in Saul and David. Fill us with Your life and Your love. You alone make us righteous. Set our eyes upon You and continue Your work within us. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 5/15

Read 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2.

In an odd turn of events, David goes to the Philistine king Achish for refuge from Saul. While Saul has pledged to preserve David's life, David doesn't trust him. You can't blame David for not trusting Saul. "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me," as the saying goes.

It seems strange that David would go to the Philistines for safety. He was responsible, at this point, for a number of victories over their people. David did go to Achish in chapter 21, so this isn't the first time he seeks him. While I'm not sure this is faithful action on David's part, the Lord uses it for the benefit of His people.

Achish orders David to go out on raids against the Israelites, the Philistines' enemies and David's own people. David, however, uses his territory, which was far out of Achish's sight, to conduct raids upon Israel's enemies instead. This proves to be a smart play as the victories he wins benefit both the Philistines and the Israelites.

Since he was deceiving the king by failing to fight against his own people, David chooses to kill all of the people he conquered in order to cover up his deception. This is neither commanded nor condoned by God. It is just what David chooses to do.

David's victories endear him to King Achish, even though Achish thinks David is fighting his own people. King Achish will invite David and his soldiers to be his royal bodyguards. This access to the Philistine king will give David the upper hand against his enemies. It feels like David is playing chess while the rest of them are playing checkers.

It's difficult to know what to make of this season in David's life. God offers no commentary on David's actions. We have examples in 1 and 2 Samuel of David's pursuing God's direction when he sought what he thought was right. We don't know where his actions here fit. I'm sure this resonates with our own experience. Sometimes we don't know if what we're doing is God's will

or our own. The surest way to know that we are seeking what God wants is to bathe our actions in prayer before we act and to make sure that our actions align with His character and Jesus' commands. If we do these two things, we can then act in great confidence.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Lead me. Show me what is true and how I can live fully into the truth. I want to follow Your ways. Guide me. Direct me. Teach me. Correct me. I want Your will more than anything else. Amen."

THURSDAY, 5/16

Read 1 Samuel 28:3-25.

Chapter 28 is the last picture we get of King Saul, and it isn't pretty. This man, who once stood head and shoulders above the others in Israel, is reduced to a shadow of himself. Years and years of fear and foolish decisions fueled by anxiety have led to a failed leader. Saul's constant pride made it to where God could not trust him to lead His people. It was time for Saul's reign to come to an end. This chapter sets that event into motion.

When the Philistine army assembles to challenge Saul, he is consumed by fear. Saul inquires of the Lord, and He doesn't answer. I would say that the Lord always answers our prayers with either a yes, no, or wait. This appears to be a no. God would not rescue Saul. It was time for a king after God's heart to lead His people.

Out of his heightened anxiety, Saul breaks his own rule. He goes to a medium to consult with the ghost of the prophet Samuel amidst God's silence. The sorcerer is concerned that Saul, who had expelled all such mediums from the land, was trying to trick her. She ends up summoning Samuel's spirit, who repeats the same judgment upon Saul that he did in 1 Samuel 15. Saul's kingdom would be taken from him and given to another. It was time for his reign to end.

By the end of the chapter, Saul is a mess. As a result of his unfaithful leadership, Saul has been rejected by God. He is in no shape, physically or spiritually, for the coming battle. The medium shows kindness to Saul by preparing him a meal to build his strength, which enables him to carry on.

So, what do we do with this part of Saul's story? We do not have to fear being rejected by God in the same way as Saul was. God is merciful to us, certainly more than we deserve. We need to remember that due to his calling, Saul was held to strict account by God. He is rejected because he is untrustworthy. This does not take away our responsibility to pursue the Lord and live with our trust in Him. While we will fall short at times, we do not want to repeat Saul's pattern of unfaithfulness. We want to look to the Lord for grace to both forgive our sin and to empower us for faithfulness.

Praying Together:

"Father, we are grateful for Your patience with us. You love us more than we deserve. Forgive us when we turn from You and Your way. Give us Your grace to transform us into people who serve You wholeheartedly and reflect You completely. This is only possible because of Your work within us that You are pleased to do. Amen."

FRIDAY, 5/17

Read 1 Samuel 29.

David has been on the run for years now. For his own protection, he joins forces with the Philistines, lying to gain the confidence of King Achish, the king of Gittite, while other Philistine commanders, unsurprisingly, are suspicious. They doubt David's loyalty to Achish. Even if his loyalty were genuine, allowing a Hebrew to be part of their army as they fight other Hebrews made no sense. The Philistines are afraid that David could wreak havoc if he decided to turn against them. As you can imagine, they begin looking for ways to get rid of the infamous David and his men.

Known for their strength and success in battle, the Philistines are a force to be reckoned with. The Israelites were not known to be smarter or better trained than the people of the surrounding nations. The main reason the Israelites stood above all the rest was because of their relationship with the Hebrew God. So when they turn away from God's covenant and stop representing God to the surrounding nations, they become just like those living around them. They would soon learn that non-believers can be both intelligent and pleasant, while at the same time, be in opposition to God and God's people.

Believe it or not, King Achish asks David and his men to leave their ranks because it became clear that other Philistines were going to harm David if they did not. It is clear by the way Achish speaks about David that he respects him and his faith, even though his trust in David is based on a lie.

Again on the run, David and his men put some distance between themselves and both King Achish's and King Saul's armies. It was time to return home.

Praying Together:

"Lord, with what seems like a long road ahead, we often lose sight of the most important things. Show us how we can be that beacon of hope in a world that struggles to see Your light rising from the shadows. It is in Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

SATURDAY, 5/18

Read 1 Samuel 30.

Just a few miles away from home, David and his men feel the weight of exhaustion and disappointment. They had been hoping to fight King Saul as part of the Philistine army to stop Saul from pursuing David. Moments after they arrived home, they realize something was terribly wrong. The men become distraught as they realize that their families have been taken captive. They are devastated and blame David. As they weep for their losses, their anger rises from their necks to their faces. In desperate dismay, their growing fury and frustration are taking its toll on David.

Despite the dire situation, David finds strength in God. Psalms 41 and 55 give us access to his thoughts as he finds reasons for hope and patience in his darkest hours. We, too, can draw strength from the Lord in our weakest moments. As David dons his ephod (a linen apron worn during religious rites that symbolizes God and God's blessings), the men are encouraged and begin to hope again. They realize that they are not just plotting revenge; the plan is to search and rescue their families. While some stay behind, most of David's men, as tired as they were, stand strong again and make their way to their enemies' camps.

After it was all said and done, David's rescue mission is successful. He recovers all the property and people taken from his own town and a whole lot more. His enemies had obviously taken this opportunity left by the absence of the main Philistine and Judean armies to wreak havoc on the

southern regions. At this point, David understood two things. First, it was the Lord who had brought them victory. There is nothing they could have personally done as an army. According to verse 23, God had protected them and delivered them. The raiding party attacking them was easily overthrown.

Second, Israel won or lost as a community. David's army may have been officially exiled, but they were Israelites. David wanted them to recognize the strength and importance of community life.

Praying Together:

"Lord, it is so easy to think about what is right for us, ignoring what is right for the greater good. Forgive our self-centeredness as we seek to pay attention to those affected by our choices. Hold a light in front of us so that we may look to You for guidance and for a bigger perspective than just our own. Thank You for Your Presence in all things. Amen."

SUNDAY, 5/19

Read 1 Samuel 31.

There is always that moment while watching scary movies when you can tell exactly what is about to happen. You see the frightening scenes coming so you hold your breath, knowing that there is nothing you can do to stop the action. This is exactly how King Saul feels at the end of that final battle against the Philistines. His jealousy of David has driven him into madness. And Saul knows there is nothing anyone can do to prevent his army's defeat. What will become of the royal family after their defeat?

Three of Saul's sons are dead. Saul is wounded by an arrow. When his armor bearer would not take his life, Saul takes his own life instead. Saul's armor bearer soon follows suit. His armies fled on foot. The Israelites are defeated. The neighboring villages leave in haste when they realize there is no one left to protect them. The Philistines naturally want to take full advantage of their victory, greedily searching the bodies for weapons or plunder. They take Saul's recognizable head and armor to convince their own people of the extent of their victory, thus further demoralizing the Israelites. The hanging of the royal corpses on the wall of Beth Shan is another way of celebrating their victory to the detriment of Saul.

The Philistines place Saul's armor in the Temple of Ashtaroth and his head in the Temple of Dagon. This act parallels putting the ark in the temple of Dagon, likely to show that the Philistine gods are stronger than the Hebrew God. It was said that the Philistines proclaimed the news of their victory in their temple to their idols.

Israel might be defeated. Saul might have failed as king of Israel, but God is still God. This stands as a reminder to God's people today who live in situations where the Church appears to have been defeated by persecution or by indifference. God is still the God of promises.

Praying Together:

"Lord, in all ways, we recognize that Your character, Your promises, Your grace, and Your love are all consistent and persistent when the battles, successes, and failures of humanity seem so unpredictable. We trust and obey You, Lord. Show us how we can follow You consistently and persistently, like You follow us. In Your name. Amen."