

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL, PART 1

1 Samuel 21–24

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It has been my hope to take four chapters of 1 Samuel today—chapters 21–24. We will deal with the question of what to do when life gets out of control. But early on in the week, I realized that was way too much material to bite off in one Sunday. There are eight different instances in David's life in these chapters where his life is beyond his control. So I thought we'd simply focus on one verse in chapter 20 and then focus on chapter 21. The verse I want to refer to in 1 Samuel 20 is one in which Jonathan is talking with David and says to him, "The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone." I would suggest to you that David helps us understand what to do when life gets out of control. At that moment, his life is beyond his control. He had been a young man much in control once. He had been discovered by Samuel and later by Saul. He had become the court musician. He had become the great war hero. He had become a member of Saul's inner circle. He had become the best friend of the crown prince, Jonathan. And he ultimately became a son-in-law to the king himself. He was upwardly mobile and successful. He had everything going for him. But now, life's circumstances had turned against him. He finds himself waiting behind a large boulder to learn his destiny from Jonathan. At that moment in his life when he hid behind that rock of destiny, decisions were being made about him in Saul's capital which would alter David's destiny. He was powerless to participate in those decisions.

There are many times in life we find ourselves waiting for someone else to decide for us. Or waiting for some circumstance to occur, and we are powerless in respect to our future. We have no control in that aspect of our life. That is troublesome for people who like to be in control.

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Especially for us, Americans, who are so achievement oriented. Sometimes we find ourselves by a rock of destiny, and our control and our fate are passed into the hands of another. There are all kinds of circumstances in which that can arise.

You may be a young person and discover that the person you want to marry is going to marry someone else instead. That decision has been taken out of your control, and you're powerless to do anything about it. Or you may be in a marriage where your spouse has decided to divorce you, and you seem powerless to change that situation. Or you may have gotten involved in an automobile accident, become incapacitated, and much of your mobility has left you. You no longer have freedom of movement and the freedom of decision that goes with it. Or maybe you made an investment, you trusted in something to come through, and it's fallen through. Now your financial situation is out of control. Or you received word from the doctor that you had a disease, and you've lost control of your life.

I think one of the things that happens as we go through this process of life is we go from life to death. Then gradually about middle age we begin cresting, and we find ourselves losing more and more control. Then death brings us into a position where we have no control at all. That's a rather morbid way of looking at things. But sometimes that's the case. Certainly all of us in this room, if we were honest, would probably find an incident or two—and maybe even one right now—in which we were not really in control.

David had been in control up until the rock of destiny. From that moment on, when the decision comes from Saul's court that he's an unwanted person, he must flee. So, chapters 21 and on find him in flight. As I've looked at that theme "What to Do When in Trouble," I find there are two broad themes of an answer that should be given. One is that we can almost count upon the fact that we are going to do some things wrong. That's what I'm going to talk about today. Next

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Sunday, we'll look at what David did right when his life was out of control. Because even if life is out of control, that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to be out of control in regard to our own responses to what's happening.

I want to look at what David did. I must share that I desire to try to deliver us from a false understanding in the Christian life. I find so many people have this perfectionist idea of the Christian life. We find people who refuse to come and make a commitment to Christ because they've already persuaded themselves they can never live it. And "live it" means to never make a mistake. There are others, who after making errors of the kind that David makes, really feel that God has abandoned them. They feel there's no hope, so they either walk away from their faith or are traumatized in their Christian experience until the Lord calls them home. It is normal and natural that God's people in times of crisis get themselves in situations where they just flat make a mistake. They do something wrong. We have to bear the responsibility when we've done something wrong. David made some critical mistakes, and I want to underline that. Scripture says that the people in the Bible were given as an inspiration for our instruction. One of the things we ought to see is that God doesn't cut people off when they've made mistakes—even when they've committed sins.

Sins have bad consequences, but God does not cut people off. What are the mistakes David made? There are three of them.

I. He lied.

He was in a jam, and he had to lie. He tried to protect himself and get out of that jam. You see it in chapter 20 where David and Jonathan are having a conversation. David says, "There's but a step between me and death." His confidence, his exuberance, and his trust in God have faded. From that moment, he resorts to a direct lie. He says, "Jonathan, tell your dad I've gone to my

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family in Bethlehem—to our annual sacrifice—and that’s why I’m not at the banquet.” David knew that was not true. And Jonathan knew it was not true. But because David was afraid, he lied. He entered into that lie, and there are no painful consequences he suffered as a result. And that’s sometimes the case with us. We tell an untruth, and the only consequence is the impact it has on our own conscious. We don’t live with any evil, external consequences. That is God’s marvelous shield around us when that happens—a sheer gift of grace.

But David goes on, and he tells a second lie. That second lie—and there are more lies to come—is recorded early on in 1 Samuel 21. He comes to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech is the descendant of Eli. And parenthetically early on in 1 Samuel, Eli was told by young Samuel on orders from the Lord that because of his disobedience to the Lord, the priesthood was going to be stripped from his family. Ahimelech is one of those descendants. As a result of David’s lie, Ahimelech and eighty-four other men in his family are going to be killed, plus women and children. Everybody is going to be wiped out as a result of David’s lie, except one relative who escapes to be with David. And all during David’s lifetime, he will be David’s high priest. But when David’s gone and Solomon comes onto the scene, the story is told in 1 Kings. The priest participates in rebellion against Solomon and is exiled and stripped of his priesthood. So, ultimately the prophecy comes to pass. It was prophesied that Eli would not have a descendant that would keep the priesthood. There would come a time when his whole house is wiped out. But when that time comes, the people who do it—Saul and this Edomite named Doeg—cannot justify their actions on the basis of killing these people by saying, “It was prophesied, therefore it was ok for me to kill them.”

Scripture holds us morally responsible even if something is prophesied. Even though God is sovereign, we’re always held accountable as humans. Just because the Lord knew it would

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happen, that doesn't excuse people committing massacres to accomplish "His will." One must always do God's work His way. Certainly from God's point of view, He had another way of dispatching Eli's household than the kind of heinous act committed against them.

But David lies. He tells two lies. He says, first of all, "I'm on a mission for the king, and that's why I'm here." Ahimelech is scared of him. "What's going on? I know there's intrigue in the court. Am I going to get in trouble for sheltering him?" So David tells lie number one. Then he tells lie number two. He says, "My men are waiting. I've got to get some food for them." In fact, he had nobody with him. At that time, he was alone. As a result of his lie, there is a serious consequence. Eighty-five priests, plus their families, lose their lives. It was a terrible error. We pay a consequence often for our dishonesty.

Yet after that happens, the Lord doesn't say to David, "I'm through with you and your lying." This Edomite named Doeg, who is Saul's chief herdsman, picks up on David's lie. Chief means strong. Herdsman can mean not only cattle, but also mules—like a strong muleskinner. Here is a guy who has no conviction or conscience. When he gets a change to wipe out a group of innocent people, he does it at Saul's direction. But David's lie brought it on. Doeg hears the conversation and gets back to Saul. Doeg says to him, "Ahimelech is indeed a conspirator with David." But Ahimelech wasn't a conspirator. David had said, "I'm on a mission from Saul," and he tricked Ahimelech. As a result, David's lie is costly to others.

II. Secondly, David was afraid.

He's afraid of Saul. See 1 Samuel 20:3, "There's but a step between me and death." In the middle of chapter 21, he's afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. In 23:17, he is once more afraid. He is so much afraid that Jonathan comes to him in hiding, and his first words to David are "Do not be afraid."

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That happens to us. When life gets out of control and circumstances are beyond us, we get apprehensive. We become fearful. In the midst of that fear, our faith drowns. Faith and fear are always enemies of one another. Rather than relying upon the Lord and saying, “If the Lord took all the trouble to have Samuel come and anoint me as king, certainly God has a plan for my life. I need not fear.” Instead, David becomes humanly very afraid. His fear develops in company with his deceit. The more he lies, the more he fears. The more he fears, the more he lies.

When we get into trouble, isn't it the case that we look at the downside of things? We're always looking at what is the worst that can happen. Our eyes get on that. That's where the enemy wants our attention—not on how God might help us through the situation, but on how this is finally going to be our undoing. We say to ourselves, “I can't last!” David's fear, by the way, was very real.

Fear is a natural thing. But David let his fear grow on him, and when you let your fear grow on you, you begin to think “I'm not going to make it through!” Sometimes, the best we can do in a situation where we're out of control is say, “By God's help, I'm going to make it through this day.” We can't even envision the long-range possibilities of a year or five years. All we can say is, “Lord, if I can just make it through this day—if I can just make it through this week.” There are times in our life when it's ok to think that way. God knows that. Maybe instead of having long term faith, just have faith for today. “God can help me make it through today.” David fears.

III. Thirdly, David makes a very stupid mistake—he takes Goliath's sword.

It's blunder of incredible proportions. In 1 Samuel 21, you see that when David went to Ahimelech the priest and asked “Have you got any weapons?” Ahimelech said, “Yes. We've got Goliath's sword.” Think how tall Goliath was. He was over nine feet tall according to the Scripture. Goliath's sword—I don't think it was a little dagger. David says, “I'll take that.” So he

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puts it in the ephod, which is a robe the priests wore. He's trying to hide from Saul, and he's going down the road with a six-foot sword tucked away in his clothes. He's going to hide. He was in the mountains, down the coastlines, and to one of the five cities of the Philistines named Gath. Goliath was from Gath. David's stupid enough to go to Goliath's hometown to hide in refuge with Goliath's sword tucked under his clothing. He's got the evidence—the goods are on him. It's interesting that in Gath they know who he is, except they're a little confused—like rumors get confused. They say, "He's the king of Israel." But he's not. But it does show us another interesting thing. The music of one country has infiltrated over to another country. In Philistine, they know that the number one tune in Israel is "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands."

So here's David. I'm sure that day when he walked into Gath, turned around, looked at those doors as they were bolted from the inside—realizing there's no Howard Johnson's or Motel 6 to sneak that sword into—he thought, "How could I make such a stupid mistake?" His only hope is to act like a crazy person, and that's what he does. He crouches down and acts like an animal. He scrawls graffiti on the town gates—letting spittle go down his beard, so he's slobbering like a mad person.

While he's acting mad in the daytime, he's coming to his senses. During this time in the evening hours, he's writing some Psalms. He called on the Lord, and the Lord saved him out of all his troubles. In the midst of his acting crazy, he was coming to a new and deeper level of faith in God. He's finding that when we make the stupidest mistakes in life, God's still there. God doesn't cut him off in his mistakes. He doesn't say, "I'm through with David. Anybody who'd lie like that doesn't deserve to be king of Israel. Anybody stupid enough to wander into Gath with the sword of Goliath doesn't have enough sense to be king of Israel. I recall My selection of

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him.” Isn’t it great that God’s attitude toward us remains rather fixed over a period of time?

Within that fixed attitude of love, acceptance, and calling he gives us room to fail—and to get back up.

I’d be unfair to David to only say he acted wrongly. That’s why this must be a two part message.

Because he did some things right. If he’d only done things that were wrong, we’d never have heard of him. But he also does some things right. I want to say to you—if you’ve done something wrong, that doesn’t mean God can’t restore you, reclaim you, and use you for His honor and glory.

There is a principle called imputed negligence. As a pastor, I have to be concerned not only with people’s spiritual welfare, but with the health of the church. Things like—are we properly insured? When people are employees or volunteers of the church, are they acting within the course and scope of their employment or volunteer service? Are we, in any way, liable? Are we sufficiently covered with liability insurance? The doctrine of imputed negligence says that if I, in my official capacity as pastor, come to you and ask, “Would you pick up these children?” and you go do that, have an accident, and you injure persons or vehicles, they’re going to sue you, and chances are, you’re not going to have the kind of liability insurance the church does. So they’re going to say that the church is liable. You won’t even count in the lawsuit. They’re going to go after the church. All under the doctrine of imputed negligence that says you pass the negligence of the volunteer or employee on to the superior—on to the church. The church pays because it ought to be responsible for what you did, even though the church had nothing to do with your driving accident. Your wrong can be imputed or shifted to another.

That’s a legal doctrine that’s well fixed in this country. People use it all the time. That same legal doctrine carries into the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it applies to David’s situation here. We need

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to recognize that when we've done wrong, there is someone at the cross that's going to say, "I'm going to pick up the check. You can shift your liability to me. You don't have any assets to pay for this sin, so therefore I'll take it. I'll be the superior, and you can shift (or impute) your negligence, your words, and your sin to me. I'll bear it. I'll take care of it for you."

That same one who lets us shift our sin onto Him, in turn shifts His righteousness back to us. If we can transfer our guilt to Him, He can also transfer His righteousness back to us. We become the righteousness of Christ. Why? Because we're righteous, or we always do everything right? Not at all! We're righteous because He's righteous. Through the legal doctrine of the cross, Jesus is able to transfer His righteousness to us because He's satisfied judgment against us at Calvary. He can transfer that righteousness to us, which then gives us freedom. It gives us the freedom when we've erred, when we have made mistakes, or when we have lied to say, "We have a God who still loves us and cares for us. He justifies us, not on the basis of our wrong, but on the basis of His cross."

You might say, "If that's what the Christian gospel is, are you saying I can just go out and do anything I want?" Paul faces that same question in Romans 6. He says, "No, if you really understand what Christ has done for you, you'd never do that." But on the other hand, since we all do wrong, we desperately need this understanding of Christ. Christ's righteousness is transferred to us because we're going to be absolutely destroyed in our Christian life. We think the only way we can be a successful Christian is to do everything right every moment of our life. We are going to have some failures. We need to recognize that. We need, in the midst of that failure, to realize as David did that God does not cut you off at the pass. Neither did David quit serving God because he failed. He came back. He depended on God, and he does some things right.

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Closing Prayer

Our Lord, we come to You in this moment of prayer and worship, and we recognize how true Your Word is that tells us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Not just David, but me and all of us here. There have been times in each of our lives when we stepped outside of Your will. There have been times even as a Christian when we've stepped outside of Your will. Often we do that when our life is out of control—when it seems like there's such intense pressure and there aren't any alternatives for us. Like David, we seem to be a victim of circumstance rather than a victor in our circumstances.

Forgive us, Lord, of those times when we've let the pressure get to us. Not only have we born the consequences, but other innocent people have born the consequences for our failures. Help us in the midst of our mistakes and failures to trust You.

I pray for the friend here who had an abortion. They have not been able to come to grips with the fallout of that in their life and in their own emotions. Lord, what that person did was wrong, but that wrong is not one that will forever separate them from You. I pray, Lord Jesus, that You would move Your healing in that life and cause that friend to know Your forgiveness is just as real as their guilt.

I pray for the person in this audience who, after committing their life to Christ, has experimented with drugs. They find right now they have lost control of their life. They wonder if You will give them another chance. Lord, let the power of Your gospel flood into that life. Give them the courage and confidence that You want to bring them out of the horrible pit they are in—their own sin, mistakes, and their need for exhilaration of some kind. It's not a mistake of character that would forever banish them from You. Give them healing in the midst of their mistake.

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I pray for the person who has turned to immorality in thought or in deed. And they have failed You in that area as well. Lord, I pray that they would know Your grace in the midst of their mistake and sin.

I pray for someone who has let their anger get out of control in the midst of pressing circumstances, and they have taken their anger out on someone else. Lord, will You reach down and by Your grace, forgive? We've been afraid when we've lost our cool, when we have panicked, or we have been depressed. Help us, Lord, to know that when our life is out of control, You have control.

Help us to realize that when David was fleeing and wondering if he was going to be able to live a normal life, You were using that time to forge great character and strength in him. You used that wilderness experience in his life in ways he couldn't envision at the time. We believe You're doing that for us, Lord. There are moments when all the windows in our life have shades on them. The shades are drawn, and we cannot see out. We can't see Your pattern or Your plan. Help us to realize in those moments when our own rooms are dark on the outside that things are not dark to You. And that You will, in Your time, pull the blinds for us. You'll help us realize the plans You have for us are not for evil but for good—to give us purpose and a hope.

I want to pray especially, Lord, for those of us who see ourselves as very weak Christians. Who, as a result of that feeling, live very carelessly with no discipline in their life and with a feeling of tremendous defeat. They feel they have so demonstrated a record of failure that they could never get off the mat. Lord, be their Helper today. May they reach up a hand to You and get Your grip on their life. And bring them to a place like You brought David—to great strength, productivity, and control. We ask this, Lord Jesus, in Your name. We know You are more pleased to answer this prayer than we are even to pray it. In Jesus' name. Amen.