

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Part 1

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It has been my hope to take four chapters of 1 Samuel today – chapters 21-24 – as we dealt with the theme 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. There are eight different instances in David's life in those chapters, which follow him in the moments when his life is beyond his control. So I thought we'd simply focus on one verse in chapter 20:19 and then 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 because at that moment his life is past 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 ultimately a son in law of the king himself. He was upwardly mobile and successful. He had everything going for him. But now life's circumstances had turned against him and he finds himself waiting behind a large boulder to learn his destiny from Jonathan because at that moment in his life when he hid behind that rock of destiny decision were being made about him in Saul's capital which would alter his destiny. He was powerless to participate in that decision.

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

You can 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 maybe 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 and become incapacitated and much of your mobility now has passed from you. You no longer have that freedom of movement and freedom of decision that goes with it.

Or maybe you made an investment and 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.

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Part 1

I think one of the things that happens as we go through this process of the normal life span, as we go from life to death that gradually about middle age we begin cresting and we find ourselves more and more losing control until actually death brings us into a position that 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 are not really in control.

David had been in control up to the rock of destiny. From that moment on, when the decision comes from Saul's court that he's a non wanted person he must flee. So chapters 21 and on find him in flight. As I've looked at that them, What to do when in trouble, I find that 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 Sunday we'll move into the theme of the things when life is out of control that David did that were right. 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 look at this side of it to try to deliver us from 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 of their life to Christ because they've already persuaded themselves they can never live it. And "live it" means to never make a mistake from then on. There are others who after making errors of the kind that David makes really feel that God has abandoned them and there's no hope so they either walk away from their faith or they sort of traumatized in their Christian experience until such time as 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 did something wrong. We have to bear the responsibility when we've done something wrong.

But David made some critical mistakes. And I want to underline that. Scriptures say that the people in the Bible were given as an inspiration for learning, for an example, for our instruction. One of the things we ought to see is that God doesn't cut people off when they've made mistakes and even when they've committed sins. And sins that have bad consequences. He does not cut them off.

What are the mistakes David made? There are three of them.

1. 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 and David says there's but a step between me and death. His confidence, his exuberance, his trust in God has faded and he resorts from that moment to a direct line. He says, "Jonathan, tell your dad I've gone to my 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 a mistruth and the only consequences is the impact it has upon our own conscious. We don't live with any evil, external consequences. That's God's marvelous shield around us when that happens. A sheer gift of grace.

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Part 1

But David goes on and he tells a second lie. That second lie – and there’s more lies even than this – that second lie is recorded early on 1 Samuel 20. He comes to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech is the descendant of Eli. And parenthetically early on in 1 Samuel Eli was told by the young Samuel on orders from the Lord that because of his disobedience to the Lord and because of the ungodly way he let his sons do anything and still remain in the priesthood, that the priesthood was going to be stripped from his family. Ahimelech is one of those descendants. As a result of David’s lie Ahimelech is going to be killed and 84 others of the men in Ahimelech’s 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 will be David’s high priest. But when he’s gone and Solomon comes to the scene the story is old later in 1 Kings he 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 was wiped out. But when that time comes the people that 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.”

The scripture holds us morally responsible in the midst of even something that’s prophesied. So that what we see happening even though God is sovereign we’re always held as humans to our own accountability. Just because the Lord knew it would happen doesn’t excuse people committing massacres to accomplish “His will.” One must always do God’s work in His way. Certainly from God’s point of view He had another way of dispatching Eli’s household than the kind of heinous at 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 and am I going to get in trouble for sheltering him?” So he 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 no body with him. At that time he was alone. As a result of his lie, there is a serious consequence. and 85 priests plus their families, wives and children, lose Their lives. A terrible error, number one. 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 which was picked up by this Edomite named Doeg who is Saul’s chief herdsman – 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 conscious. 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 and says to him, “Ahimelech is indeed a conspirator with David [even though he wasn’t].” David had said “I’m on a mission from Saul and he tricks Ahimelech and as a result David’s lie is costly to another person.

Error number 2 is he is afraid. He’s afraid of Saul, 20:30 – 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 chapter 23:17 he is once more afraid. So much afraid in hiding that Jonathan comes to him in hiding and his first words to him are “Do not be afraid.”

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 drowns out faith. Faith and fear are

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Part 1

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 and I need not fear. Instead David does become 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 and our eyes get on that. That's where the enemy wants our attention. Not upon how God might help us through that situation but 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.

You say, the Bible tells us that people have these things. Fear is a natural thing. But he 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 to 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 or 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 faith for that day. God can help me make it through today.

David fears.

The third thing that he does that is a clear wrong is he makes a very stupid mistake. It's blunder of incredible proportions. 1 Samuel 21, you look at the fact when David went to Ahimelech the priest and asked "Have you got any weapons?" And he said yes. We've got Goliath's sword. Think how tall Goliath was. He was over 9 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 puts it in the ephod which is a robe which the priests wore. He's trying to hide from Saul and he's going down the road and he's got this 6 foot long sword tucked away in his clothes. He's going to hide. He was in the mountains down the coastlines 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 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, while 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 the day he walked into Gath and turned around and looked at those doors as they were bolted from the inside when he was in the city and here he is and there's no Howard Johnson's or Motel 6 to sneak that sword in. He's out in a public inn and by himself and got this sword and inside the gate and they've closed them. "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 crutches down and acts like an animal, scrawls graffiti on the town gates, letting spittle go down his beard so he's slobbering like a mad person.

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Part 1

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 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 he doesn't deserve to be king of Israel. Anybody that stupid to wander into Gath with the sword of Goliath doesn't have enough sense to be the king of Israel. I recall My selection of him."

Isn't it great that God's attitude towards us remains rather fixed over a period of time? Within that fixed attitude of love and acceptance and call he gives us room to fail. Also to get back up.

I'd be unfair to David to only say he acted wrongly. That's why this must be two part message because he did some thing right. If he'd only did things that were wrong we'd never have heard of him. But he also does some thing right.

I want to say to you, if you've done something wrong, that doesn't mean that God can't restore you, reclaim you, use you for His honor and glory.

There is a law, a principle called imputed negligence. As a pastor I have to be concerned not only with people's spiritual welfare but about the health of the church and things like are we properly insured and when people are employees of the church or volunteers 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 as a pastor in my official capacity as pastor come to you and say, Would you pick up these children? And you go do that and have an accident. You injure the person or their car. They're going to not only sue you and chances are you're not going to have the kind of liability insurance the church does so they're going to come right back at the church and say 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, onto the church and they pay because they ought to be responsible for what you did even though we 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 applies to David's situation here. We need 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, impute, your negligence, your word, your sin to me and I'll bear it and I'll take care of it for you.

That same one lets us shift ours onto Him in turn impugns or shifts His righteousness back to us. If we can transfer our guilt to Him He can also transfer His righteousness back to us so that 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 and 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 the freedom in that relationship where we have been made righteous through faith. It gives us the freedom to say, when we've erred, when we have made mistakes, when we have lied we have a God who yet

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Part 1

loves us and cares for us. And who 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 absolutely be destroyed in our Christian life and 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 and we need in the midst of that failure to realize as David did that God did not cut him off at the pass. Neither did David quit serving God because he had that failure. He came back. He depended upon God and he does some things right.

Our Lord, we come to You in this moment of prayer and worship and we recognize how true Your word is that tells us 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 one of our lives when we stepped outside of Your will. There's been times even as a Christian we stepped outside of Your will. Often we do that when our life is out of control and when it seems like when there's such intense pressure and there aren't any alternatives for us. Like David we seem to be 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 that had an abortion and has not been able to come to grips with the fallout of that in their life and 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 that 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. And even perhaps finds it right now they have past control of their life to another. They wonder will You give them another chance. Lord, let the power of Your gospel flood into that life and indeed give them that courage and confidence that You want to bring them out of the horrible pit their in and their own sin and 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. I pray for the person who has turned to immorality in thought or in deed and who has 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 whose anger has gotten out of control, in the midst of pressing circumstances and have taken that 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 wonders if he's going to be able to live a normal life You're designing to use that time in his life to forge in him great character and strength. You're going to use 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 which are drawn and we literally cannot see out. We can't see Your pattern, see 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 and help us to realize that the plans that You have for us are

WHEN LIFE GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Part 1

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 and who as a result of that feeling, living very carelessly with no discipline in their life and with just a feeling of tremendous defeat. Like somehow 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. Great strength and productivity and control. We ask this, Lord Jesus, in Your name knowing that You are more pleased to answer this prayer than we are even to pray it. In Jesus' name. Amen.