

I & II Samuel

“The Lord Protects His People”

I Samuel 21

I'm going to read I Samuel chapter 21. I told you this morning, it's one of my favorite passages in all the Bible energy, because it's just got so much complexity and so many riches, and I hope to do justice to it tonight.

I'm going to start by reading chapter 21, verses 1 to 10, and then I'll read 23:14. But please keep your Bibles open as we cover the sweep of this passage. This is God's word.

21 ^{1a} *David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”*

² *David answered Ahimelek the priest, “The king sent me on a mission and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. ³ Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”*

⁴ *But the priest answered David, “I don’t have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.”*

⁵ *David replied, “Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever^{1b} I set out. The men’s bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!” ⁶ So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.*

⁷ *Now one of Saul’s servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s chief shepherd.*

⁸ *David asked Ahimelek, “Don’t you have a spear or a sword here? I haven’t brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king’s mission was urgent.”*

⁹ *The priest replied, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one.”*

David said, “There is none like it; give it to me.”

I Samuel 23:14, which summarizes what's happening in this portion of David's life, it says,

And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziff. And Saul saw him every day. But God did not give him into his hand.

Let's pray for a moment.

Heavenly father, we thank you for this portion of your Word describing the way in which you protect your people and especially your anointed King David. And we pray, Lord, that even as we see the remarkable, astonishing ways in which you protected David, you will remind us that you protect us. You keep your promises. Even the face of great evil may we be comforted by that.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

The main theme of the sermon is the Lord protects his people and protects us according to his promises. He protects us when it seems like all is against us, and he protects us even in the face of great evils. First time I went to Israel a number of years ago, our guide shared a motto with us more than once. He said in Israel we have a motto. **The motto is this the impossible takes a little bit longer.** I like that in Israel, the impossible takes a little bit longer. There's a little braggadocio in that little bit of self confidence. Maybe you like it, maybe you don't resonated with me. I like the idea that that we aren't easily afforded.

Now, of course, there's a very secular version of that. The secular version is we don't give up, we persevere. And if we try hard enough, we can be President of the United States. We can be the CEO of a major corporation. We can be the next great American novelist. We can make it on to social media and have 500 million followers according to the will of the day. That's not what we would endorse. We would endorse over the idea that things that seem impossible are possible when God is with us. That's what this passage is saying to us. It's saying the Lord will preserve his people. And every time we see David pursued and hated and death in mind by his terrible foes, we cannot help but think of the Easter season and the same idea that God's kings are always going to rouse opposition.

God's leaders always rouse opposition. That includes pastors and Christian leaders and business settings. That includes kings, of course, like David and above all, Jesus himself and David resolves to do all that he can. He does not give up. He doesn't despair. He doesn't just throw himself into Saul's hands. But simultaneously, even as he's striving, he's also trusting God to care for him.

Saul, as you know from the last few weeks, has been watching David recently, ever since he was a musician. He liked him. He killed Goliath, and Saul wanted to know, who is this guy? I mean, I know who he is, I mean him, but who is he? Is he a danger to me is he's from a powerful clan, as we learned last week, as Saeyoung led us through chapters 18 through 20, that suspicion

became a resolve to kill David. And strangely enough, he saw David, his loyal captain and his court musician, increasingly as a rival, as a threat to his throne. He feared him. He suspected him, resolved to kill him. He threw a spear at him on one occasion, and finally David and Jonathan concluded that as friendly as they were and their covenant of life together, there was no hope but for David to flee, because Saul had resolved to kill him, and so David flees, and it says that he left, you know, without, without food, without bread, without a sword.

And we think that looks like a lot of haste, a warrior with no weapon. I wonder why he didn't have a weapon or why didn't go back and get a weapon. Maybe he knew that if he even stepped back nearer to Saul one more time, he would be captured. He didn't even leave with bread. He fled with a few of his men.

Saul begins to seek him again. As we saw last week, David, the first time he had to flee from Saul, fled to chaos city where prophets dwelt, where Samuel lived. Saul attacked there. This time he doesn't go to north or north. He goes now to nab a city where priests are, and we can just pause and draw a lesson immediately in times of need go to about God's people. The first time David fled and probably barely 20 or 21 years old. The first time he fled, he went to the prophets. The second time he went to the priests. You saw help there. Now, in that town, that town of priests, a small town. There's him like the leading priest at the time, the Ark of the Covenant and Tabernacle. Apparently there not many people know that. But David does. And he wants to go to the place where you can find counsel from God's people. People seek counsel, don't they? Golfers talk to golfers about how to improve their swing. Fly fishermen talk to other fly fishermen about what kind of I don't know anything about it. I shouldn't have used this illustration, what kind of devices they ought to use to catch fish, even though they're using little threads because of bread. Consult with bakers of bread. And David, man of God, is consulting with the people of God. And he has these needs. He needs food. He needs a sword. He needs guidance. He receives from the priests the effort which contained the Urim and Thummim, which were stones that God mysteriously gave to his people, by which in times of great need, God's leaders could seek his will and get questions answered.

We have an instance of that in chapter 23, verse 11, when David flees. Later on in our passage to the city of Quila, he asks a question Is Saul going to seek me here? The answer is yes. Will the people of this city, which I just liberated from a Philistine assault, will they? Will they betray me? The answer is yes again. And so he flees. And this is what the Urim and Thummim do. They give guidance or counsel in times when there is a great need. And David, of course, is God's anointed, fleeing for his life. There's a great need and he receives them. It's a low point in David's life. I mean, if anybody is having a hard time in life, it's good to look to David's years, close to ten years of fleeing from Saul.

Now we turn to David for wisdom when we're in trouble, because he wrote 73 of our 150 psalms. But David was finding it for himself. It actually says at the head of Psalm 139 that David is running. It's a couple of the Psalms. It says this. The psalm was written when I was when David was running from God. In chapter 35 he says, they hated me without a cause. They hated me without a cause. Jesus quoted in John in John chapter 15, verse 20, there is such a thing as being hated for no reason whatsoever. Some of you probably receive that. We're going to learn more about that. And the face, the way it manifests itself when we hear a speech of Paul. But there are people who sometimes hate us for no reason.

When I was a pastor before a church, a little bit like this, there was a woman I could tell that she was a volunteer, she would do things and I would see her around, like setting up for dinner on Wednesday nights, much like what we have here. But my office was very close to where dinner was, and so I'd just come down and say hi to people, and I could tell that she had a strange attitude toward me, and I would deliberately spend time near her to see if, you know, we'll set dishes, we'll set the dishes and the silverware out together. And, and after a few months of just kind of being in the vicinity, she stopped me one day and said, you know, I joined this church because I hated you. She said, I didn't even know you, but I hated you, and I didn't know why I hated you, but I hated you. And I joined this church for that reason. Now praise be to God. Over the span of the next year, we became kind of sort of friends, and we were able to have a relationship. It doesn't usually go that way.

There are times when we are hated for no reason whatsoever, except for the sheer malice of it, which of course, is what Saul represents. Saul is a satanic figure, attacking David because he is good and for no other reason attacking him because he's the Lord's anointed and he isn't anymore. David has to wrestle his way to find peace and understanding with this in I just quoted Psalm 35 a moment ago in Psalm 34, David says,

I sought the Lord, and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears. He says, this poor man, he, of course he means himself. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him. Blessed is the man who goes from his own troubles to our troubles today. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. And so Psalm 34 and Psalm 35 and others are caught in a few moments.

Teach us to seek refuge in God in times of distress. Now he goes to hemlock, and we have to question what he did. If you read it, it doesn't say the words. David was lying and he shouldn't have done that. But we know that lying is wrong from the Bible, and we have the sense that David should not have hidden his purposes from hemlock.

We can maybe come up with a reason for why he did that. David was perhaps 21 or 22 at the time. We can't expect him to be a totally mature believer at that moment. Perhaps he knew very well the wrath of Saul, and knew everybody knew the wrath of Saul. Perhaps a hemlock he

might have thought, knows how angry Saul's at me, and if I tell him why I'm here, he'll side with Saul.

He won't help me. Maybe it was simple, selfish fear. Maybe. Maybe he thought hemlock will help me if he would. But he's too afraid if I tell him what's going on. Maybe. Maybe he thought Saul a show murderer, that if hemlock willingly helps me, a hemlock will be in trouble. And I'll spare him by lying to him and telling him nothing about the truth.

And so all will be well for him. At one point. But he definitely deceives you. Says I'm on a mission for the King. I left in such haste that I have no food and no weapon. What can you give me? In other words, Saul and reports this. Saul. Sorry, Samuel does not endorse it. He reports it. And if you're wondering, the Bible actually does allow a deception on 1 in 1 setting. And that is when people are at war and trying to kill each other. If you look at a passage like Joshua chapter eight, verses 1 to 9, God says, here's the trickery you should use to deceive the Canaanites so that you will not die. And there are other places where deception is permitted in war. But this is not warfare, and the ends do not justify the means.

David is doing something that is certainly wrong, but he does receive the help he wants. He says when he finds out that Saul killed him like what he does, that is to say Saul does kill him for helping David. David says, I count myself responsible, but in the short term he did find help. A sword, the sword of Goliath.

I remind you that Goliath was nine foot nine and probably weighed, you know, somewhere around 5 or 600 pounds is his, the armor on his chest alone weigh 125 pounds. So he must have been a big man. But he can wield Goliath's sword. So let's not have those little pictures of David as a boy. He was a strong man. And he also needs food. There's no proper food. I don't know if you know the story about food in those days, but food was offered 12 loaves of bread every day, represented 12 tribes of Israel by the priests to God. At the end of the day, the priest would eat that bread, and that bread was consecrated to the priests. That's where it went.

Now Jesus comments on this when he himself in Matthew chapter 12, was criticized for allowing his disciples to, quote unquote, harvest on the Sabbath day by rubbing grain in their hands. And he says, didn't you read? Don't you know what happened in the Old Testament? How the priest gave David the bread of presence, sometimes called shoe bread? Don't you know that this was the right thing to do? Because God says, I deserve. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. That is to say, the sacrificial system is not an end in itself, and ritual laws do not point to themselves. The grain sacrifices point to the fact that all that we have is from God, and should be given back to God with joy.

And the animal sacrifices point to the fact that our blood is forfeit. Our life is forfeit because of our sins, and the animals die as a substitute, not because the animals take away sin, but

because they point to the blood of Christ that takes away sin. So all the sacrifices point to something else, including this bread. In other words, this bread points to the fact that our whole life is dedicated to God, which David's life is. And not only is he dedicated as an individual, but he's dedicated as the leader of God's people. It is an evil king. It is destructive king. It is Israel destroying and devouring king that wants to kill David as God's anointed. Therefore, it is right for the priests to give the bread to him. We always want the law to serve God's purposes. God's law has purposes. It points to holiness. It points to a holy king. And above all, finally, it points to Christ the King. Our laws. When we have a law we hear a law from God. We obey the law. But we also understand that it's pointing us to the King and pointing to the king's ways. And ultimately, every law is pointing us to Christ.

Well, it's good to remember God's provision. It's good to remember that no matter how desperate the situation might be, God takes care of us. Even when things seem hard, even when they seem very dark. I have to tell you that one of our pastors and I didn't get permission to tell the story from him beforehand, but one of our pastors had a major water leak in his house just a few weeks ago. And it was very unsettling because it's kind of a new house. In fact, it's definitely a new house. And water is gushing and nobody knows where it comes from. And, and it's pouring out downstairs and it's, it's just so unsettling. And we were talking about it and he said, you know, it is unsettling, but we still have a house and we can still live in our house and we can still sleep in our house, and there's still a warranty on our house. And the room is being flooded with water. I found this to be almost amazing. The room that's being flooded with water is the room that we use the least at our house. And I thought, you know, that's a really good perspective, that God takes care of us even when things are hard, when our children are growing up. I think this is to the point at least I thought it was at the time. We taught them not to say the words. I can't unless it was really impossible. We said, you know, try not to say I can't try to say it's really hard. Try to say I need help. Or you can even say it's really hard and it's not worth the trouble. But don't say the words I can't. God doesn't want his people to live in the land of I can't. He wants us to live in a land where we say it's hard, but I still believe God provides for me. There are enemies, but God provides for me. There are tragedies, but God provides for me, as he did for David.

Well, it's hard to believe that in chapter 21, verse ten, we read what David did next. It says that he left that day. He rose and fled that day and went to a king of Gath. Can I just ask you if you're gasping internally when you read this, you know what Gath is, right? Gath is where Goliath came from. So David is going to walk into the city of Goliath, whom he killed with Goliath's sword. And he's going there to hide and find safety. Did I mention he's 22 years old? This doesn't seem like the best idea. And in fact, it isn't the best idea. I suppose he must have been thinking. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. You know Saul hates me. Saul hates atheist king of gas, or hates the Philistines. So since Saul hates both of us, maybe we can be friends like his

servants did not see it that way in verse 11 they we read that they recognized David immediately, and they said, he's the king of the land. And not only that, but he's the one who killed Goliath. And they say Saul was slain is thousands, but David is tens of thousands. And they have him. He's in their hand. The passage says, and so he does the best that he can. He begins to feign. But before I say that, let me just note that David's greatness was God given and providential, and people recognized that even the Philistines had to say, this is the king of the land, not the king of Israel is not the King of Israel, not the King of Felicity. They're just saying he's the greatest man around, and we've got him in our hands here. He is a king.

I remember the first time I heard Ronald Reagan give a speech. I thought, he's going to be President someday. It was electrifying. I remember the first time I heard Donald Carson give a message. I thought, he's one of the greatest speakers in America. I heard David Platt, who ministered here in Birmingham. I thought, this is a terrific preacher. I heard Benjamin Netanyahu, whether you like him or not, I thought he would be Prime Minister some day. I heard John Bolton. I said, he's going to be Secretary of State someday.

There are people that just have skill, whether they're good or evil, they have skill. And David had skill. He's the king of the land. And David says, I'm in a desperate spot. And so he pretends to be in come insane. And he lets his saliva run down his beard, and he scribbles and scrambles on the city gates, and the king looks and says, really? This is the champion of Israel? Do I like mad men that you bring this man to me? Now what's happening here is that God is blind in the eyes of his adversaries because he gets off a good line. He's insulting his own people. He's saying, I told you, you're a bunch of idiots. You're such a bunch of idiots. You act like mad men and bring me a mad man and so he says, I have plenty of mad Men in my service already. I don't need another and sends them off. And so he sends off his greatest adversary because God was protecting David. What does it say? It says Saul was seeking David day by day, but the Lord would not give him into his hands.

The Lord was protecting his anointed. Psalm 34 says, this was written at the head. It says, this was written on the day when David changed his behavior before a hemlock. He wrote these words, I sought the Lord, and he answered me. He delivered me from all my fears. David did not get lucky. David did not escape from the Philistines because he had luck on his side. He had the ability to escape, because this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. When the righteous cry for help, David says, the Lord hears and delivers them from their troubles. Later on Psalm 56, he says, When I'm afraid, I put my trust in you, O Lord and God, whose word I praise in God I trust and will not be afraid.

What can you do to me? That's a great question. The flesh of Saul would kill him. The flesh of the Philistines would kill him. If God is on our side, what can flesh do to me? So on 138, the way I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life, oh Lord. You stretch out your hand against

the anger of my foes with your right hand you save me. And so he was saved to fulfill God's good purpose for him to become king, which God does. He preserved Moses, who was thrown into the water because he was going to lead the people from the promised land. He preserved David, who was beaten and left for dead and stoned and shipwrecked in the open sea, twice receiving dozens of lashes. Because God had a purpose for him. And above all, the Lord Jesus is preserved, we might even say slain at the right time, because it's not the time until the time. And then he's raised and saved again, and that same power of God is on our side.

Well, there's a picture of evil that I come back to when I encounter woes and darkness in first Samuel 22. And I'm going to invite you all to follow in the passage that you have. It's found in chapter 22, verse six, and following turn to if you would. But as you turn, I'm going to tell you where we are.

In chapter 22, David has fled to an area called the Caves of Adam. It's an area near Felicity, near a Jewish, but not all that near to a Christian Gath. It's also near Bethlehem. It's a wilderness area where he came from, and his parents are there, and his parents come to him. But not only do his parents come to him, but it says in chapter 22, verse two, everyone who is in distress, everyone who was in debt, everyone who was bitter and sold gathered him and he became commander over them.

And there was with him about 400 men. So now we know that David is not only a singer and a warrior, he's also a leader who can take this ragtag bunch of who knows who bitter men, discontented, disgruntled men, and inform them into the beginnings of his army from which, at the end of David's life, the 40 greatest men came.

They came at this time he took these, these misfits, these nobodies, these angry people, and made them into a fighting force. At about the same time, Gad the prophet came to him. And so God is protecting him and giving him listen, giving him everything he needs. He's got the effort so we can ask God questions. He's got Gad now the prophet.

Soon, in a little while, he'll have a priest at his side, and he has an army of 400 people. God is providing for him as he goes. And the more God provide adds, the angrier Saul gets. That's the nature of evil. Evil does not like to repent, does not like to see its errors. Evil. It's angrier, more irrational and more hateful and more obtuse.

Pastors sometimes tell each other and sin makes people stupid. It makes people stupid. And what Saul says here is just plain evil and also dumb. Here's what he says. Here's where David is. He hears about the men who are with him. He's sitting under a tamarisk tree with a spear in his hand. Verse six, he's got servants all around, and he gives a speech.

The speech goes like this here now, people of Benjamin, that's his tribe. That's the people nearest to him. Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards? Will he make

you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me in all to lie in wait as it is this day. This is the most pitiful speech in the whole Bible.

First of all, he brags he's going to give fields and an armies to his people. Where is he going to get the fields? He's going to take him from other people of Israel. And? And are they all commanders have hundreds and thousands? No, they're all just sitting with him around a tree. They're just his servants. And then he has the gall. He has the audacity to say people are plotting against him on a seesaw. You're plotting against David. You want to kill him? David is running away from you. He doesn't want to kill you. He's going to tell you over and over again is your faithful servant. But none are so blind as those who will not see, and so somehow come to the conclusion that he is a pitiful person with foes in every side, and his only resort, is to offer promises of help and threats of murder.

Well, somebody says, I'll. I'll come to your help. Saul. I saw a man named Amalek - Priest down at Nob, and he gave David some help. So go get him. And Saul gets him, wonders what's happening, and Saul accuses him of plotting against him. In verses 14 and 15. Again, I love because it's one of the most stirring and truthful speeches in the Bible.

Under great duress, Himmell says to Saul, who's accusing David of plotting against him. So all who among all your servants is as faithful as David? Who was the king's son in law? David is. And the captain over your bodyguard? David was and honored in your house. David was. Is today the first time I've inquired of God for him? No. I prayed for him over and over, and I had good reason to do so. Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to all the house of my father. For your servant is know nothing of all this much or little. Don't be angry at David. He's God's servant. Don't be angry at me. I am God's servant.

And Saul says, kill him, and no one will do it. Saul servants stand there doing nothing as they should, because we obey God rather than men. And Saul service strikes down 85 men and kills them in cold blood for helping David. It's as tragic a moment as we have in Scripture an angry man ordering death, a good man arguing. It shows how tragic life can be. But I also tell you this it shows that God keeps his promises. He did not promise in every but to everybody in Israel that they would be safe and secure. He promised that David would rule, and David's moving toward rule. If I may apply it to you. Don't read promises into the Bible that aren't there. The Bible never says our lives will be trouble free. It never says that every problem will go away. It never says you will die calmly in your sleep, surrounded by family and friends. It doesn't say these things. What it does say is that God will deliver us from our troubles. He may deliver us from this life or the next life. It also says. That God will take care specifically of his anointed, which he did. David, and then the Christ. And the Lord is still here, building up David for this

moment. 400 men, an army that will grow to 600 men who increasingly have valor. And then a prophet, Gad, who becomes his friend and God's spokesman to him for years and years. So he's never isolated from God's Word, and a priest who brings the effort so he can ask questions. What is going to happen? And he gets answers to those questions so we can act so we can act what he when he needs to act for the sake leadership of the people of Israel. And so, we see that God brings good, even out of disaster. And I can't always tell in the morning who's who and where they sit. But at night I can see you better. And I know your stories by now, and I know your hardships. And I know the pains, the death, the grief, the opposition, the heartbreak that many of you received. David. Experiences we can all experience so we know we can find refuge in the Lord our God.

And what can man do to us? Lord is my light and my salvation. What can man do to me? God can bring good even out of the greatest disaster. God is our refuge, our strength. Psalm 46. The Lord is my light, my salvation. Psalm 27 And David is experiencing this, and we can too, even in the hardest moments, the hardest moment, the most absurd moment in David's life.

I think, is in chapter 23 and only takes a minute to summarize what was so strange. David is in the wilderness he's been in, eventually stays in 16 different places, but at one point he's near a town called Quila and happens that gates and the Philistines attack and they're conquering the city. And David says through the priest who has the effort, the Urim and Thummim, shall I go and rescue them?

Can I go, can I rescue? The answer is yes. And he rescues the city. And then he stays in the city a while, and somebody goes and reports to Saul, hey, David's here in our city, which he just rescued. And David hears that Saul has heard and he asks God, Saul going to come down? The answer is yes. He is. Are these people whom I just delivered, whose city I just saved from the Philistines? Will they hand me over to Saul? And God says, yes, they will. And so he leaves the homeless king, much like Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head, who still yet became the King of Israel, even as Jesus became King of kings, even as the Lord promised to preserve him.

So it was the last word. The last summary of this episode is again found in chapter 23, verse 14, which says, David returned to the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country, in the wilderness of Joseph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hands. So, brothers and sisters, I want to encourage you today, Lord, protect his people.

The Lord keeps his promises even in the face of great evil. He fulfills his purposes for us. Let's pray for a moment where they thank you for this portion of your word, which is a passage we have to dwell in at times when there is evil arrayed against us irrational, hateful, senseless, blind, self-justifying, malice. There are many forms of malice.

Satanic people who dislike us or oppose us for no reason. There is the malice of cancer, the malice of untimely death. Our great enemy, Lord, in this life, through this life into eternal life, you protect us, so protect us.

Let's pray.

Lord, teach us how to hold on to your promises, to know how to live in them. To know you are our light and our salvation. We shall not fear that the Lord protects us. Anointed Lord, even protect us every day in good days and in the face of great evils.

So we pray in Jesus name. Amen.