

Opening Scripture: Psalm 33:4–9

In 1 Samuel 20, David seeks refuge with Jonathan, fearing Saul's plot against him. Jonathan denies knowledge, and David proposes a plan to test Saul's intentions. Tensions rise at a feast, leading to a confrontation where Jonathan defends David. The chapter ends with a secret covenant between David and Jonathan as David goes into hiding.

Chapter 21: David flees for his life and takes refuge at Nob where the Priesthood is located.

- **Ahimelech greets** him and wonders why he's alone.
- **David concocts a story about being on a secret mission** for the King, having brought only a small contingent of soldiers with him. David asks the priest for resources, bread, weapons, and anything he can provide.
- **Ahimelech offers him consecrated bread** with the proviso that David and his men have remained consecrated to the Lord and not slept with any women while on their mission. The bread of the presence of the Lord had grown cold and stale and was due to be replaced by warm, fresh bread. So, rather than throwing it out, the priest Ahimelech offers it to David.
- **Unfortunately, one of Saul's household slaves had been stationed there in Nob**—a man named Doeg the Edomite. Edom was just southeast of Israel, and historically, the Edomites were Israel's enemies.
- **David asks for a sword or weapons** and as it turns out, the only weapon on hand is Goliath's original sword—the one David used to decapitate the giant. David urges Ahimelech to give him this heirloom.
- **David then flees to the Philistine city of Gath**, just northeast of Gaza and east of Ashkelon. King Achish of Gath recognizes David as King of the land, he even knows the popular tune about him killing tens of thousands while Saul only slayed thousands.
- **Fearing that Achish would execute him, David pretends to be insane**; the text says he acted like a madman around them, scratching and clawing at doors and dripping with drool.

We pick up the story in Chapter 22 verse 1. So David left Gath and took refuge in the cave of Adullam. When David's brothers and his father's whole family heard, they went down and joined him there. ²In addition, every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented rallied around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

³From there David went to Mizpeh of Moab where he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother stay with you until I know what God will do for me." ⁴So he left them in the care of the king of Moab, and they stayed with him the whole time David was in the stronghold. ⁵Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Don't stay in the stronghold. Leave and return to the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

The text gives us five scenes and we'll cover two today.

The first scene paints the picture of David as a fugitive...

1. A Desperate Gathering and a Desperate Request (1 Samuel 22:1–2)

"So David left Gath and took refuge in the cave of Adullam. When David's brothers and his father's whole family heard, they went down and joined him there. ²In addition, every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented rallied around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him."

- **Observation: God sovereignly brings David a coalition of oddballs and nonconformists to accomplish his will.**
 - **The despairing**—those who have nowhere else to turn in the face of a godless regime that has now turned evil.
 - **Those in debt**—debt isn't a modern invention; these people had mortgaged their lives, their land, and their future in service of the Kingdom, which now lay in shambles because of the King's pointless pursuit of David.
 - **The disgruntled**—If you're discontent in a representative democracy, you have the opportunity to change or decide who is in power. But in a monarchy where the King is appointed and deposed by God, you have no such expectation. As Pastor Ryan mentioned, the word about David as the future King of Israel has likely gotten around; people seem to instinctively know that he's

God's chosen man, so this group of malcontents rallies around David as their leader.

- **Principle: A godly and effective leader can shepherd the overlooked and the marginalized into a great team, but only if he can see their potential.** David has to learn to see what God sees. David must lead this ragtag, motley crew of broken people to ultimate victory as they become all that God intends for them to be. In fact, many of them will become David's mighty men (2 Sam 23)—feared and battle-hardened warriors, though today they are bankrupt, bellyaching, whiners. But, under David's shrewd, faithful, and courageous leadership, they will grow into the company of warriors they need to become.

Ecclesiastes 11:1–4 says, “One who watches the wind will not sow, and the one who looks at the clouds will not reap.” Solomon tells us that if we wait for perfect conditions before we plant the seed— if we wait for all the resources we need to come in before taking a risk, if we procrastinate and demand that all events and circumstances align perfectly before moving forward, then we will never accomplish anything for God—we will never reap the harvest. We are called to shepherd hurting, broken, and sinful people. David has to work with the people that God sovereignly brings him. And this is truly a test of his leadership. What begins as a gathering of distressed and discontented individuals rallying around David evolves into a makeshift army of four hundred men. Before David leads Israel's armies as King, he must first prove faithful—can he lead the Island of Misfit Toys?

- **Application: A dire situation may require a change of perspective.** Sometimes we have to change our mindset. Think about what the word “mindset” means—it means a mind that is set. And sometimes, we need a mind reset. Maybe that grumpy husband, or that rebellious child, or that impossible manager/supervisor at your job—maybe what seems like a misfit, what seems like misery is actually God's way of preparing, refining, and shaping you so that we'll be ready for the responsibility he has in store. Before David's ship comes in, he must be prepared by God to captain it. He must learn that patience and faithfulness precede the crown.

Now this just is the Christian faith. Think of Jesus, who had to suffer

greatly before his glorious ascension to the throne of David. Luke 24:26: “Wasn’t it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” *Jesus casts the mold for the Christian life.* The author of Hebrews 2:10 “For in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God—for whom and through whom all things exist—should make ***the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.***” How did he enter his glory? He was made perfect through suffering. How does he bring many sons and daughters to glory? He suffers on their behalf a violent, horrific death as the sacrifice for our sins.

You say, “Well, I mean, that’s just Jesus, right?” No. Jesus sets the pattern of Cruciform living, a life formed in the image of Jesus is a life formed and forged in sacrificial love for others.

Paul says to the Romans 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.” Regardless of what goes down in your life, the Christian has the unspoilable, untarnishable hope that our present misery, the imperfect conditions in which we find ourselves, will be swallowed up in the victory of resurrection glory. And the stuff is not even worth comparing.

But someone may say, “Well, that’s fine for eternity but what about now? I need some help, some consolation in the here and now not just the hereafter.” But this hope of sharing in His resurrection glory is our consolation—that consolation delivered to us in the midst of our angst, our fear, and our pain.

Paul and the Apostles simply assume that believers will join in Christ’s suffering, that we will follow the master in carrying our cross. But our present comfort is also in the midst of our heartache. He says to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 1:7 “And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort.” Notice the correlation—you can’t have one without the other. You can’t have the comfort without the conflict. You can’t have his restorative justice unless you first face the fire.

Peter likewise tells us, 1 Peter 4:13 “Instead, rejoice as ***you share in the sufferings*** of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed.” The promise of rejoicing when his glory is revealed is contingent on our receiving comfort and rejoicing in our present sufferings.

Lastly, Peter tells us what kind of consolation the Spirit brings in this present darkness: 1 Peter 5:10 “The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself **restore, establish, strengthen, and support** you *after you have suffered a little while.*” Is there anyone here who needs God’s restorative grace today? Anyone with shaky faith that needs to be rooted, grounded, and established today? Anyone made weak through sorrow needs strength and support today? Well if so, you are in the right place because this, Peter says, is what the God of all grace provides for us. All of this (restoration, establishing, strengthening, and support) would be quite unnecessary for the person who has already arrived.

Instead of thinking of your situation as a punishment, perhaps you need to change your perspective and begin to think that the place where you are right now is an opportunity for God to perfect your faith as you anticipate sharing in His future glory, and receiving the comfort, consolation, and restorative power of his grace now.

The second scene in the story is one of...

2. Unflinching Obedience to God’s Word (1 Samuel 22:5) “Then the prophet Gad said to David, ‘Don’t stay in the stronghold. Leave and return to the land of Judah.’ So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.” This sentence just strikes me and I feel the need to unpack it. It flashes at me like a neon light I can’t ignore gnawing questions: (1) How in the world does David know this is a legit prophet from God? How is he able to discern that so quickly? (2) Why is David so unflinchingly, instinctively submitted to God’s Word?

- **Observation:** As Saul intensifies his pursuit, David seeks guidance from the prophet Gad, leading him to the forest of Hereth (we don’t know where this forest was, but we know it was in Judah). As the danger mounts, David turns to God’s appointed messenger. This pattern of

seeking and yielding to God's Word is the pattern of David's life, even when he is confronted with sin. While Saul is killing off the prophets and priests who can remind him of the covenant and his responsibility to be faithful to the covenant—even while he is assassinating those who can speak truth into his life—David seeks and submits to God's guidance and his Word.

Notice that Hereth is in Judah. That's going in the wrong direction because that's where Saul is. Why not tell him to flee north to Galilee or flee east to the sea? David is told to go into the belly of the beast in the direction of your tormentor. David doesn't even question the Prophet's guidance. He just instinctively obeys. But that instinct, as I will contend, is honed because David is already a man of the Word.

- **Principle: David knows that God's Word is his lifeline in times of uncertainty.** God's truth is the ground of our hope and faith. God's precepts are the foundation on which the house must be built. God's commands constitute our moral duties to Him and to each other. God's guidance is coveted above all else, because unless the LORD builds the house the laborers labor in vain.
- **Application: Seek God's guidance in desperate times, even when it seems counterintuitive.** If you're uneasy and you don't know why, seeking divine guidance is crucial. How do we approach God in our moments of need, and are we willing to listen for His direction?
- **Illustration: Just think of how often God commands people in the Bible to do something that seems counterintuitive**—going against the status quo, taking risks that seem to not make sense, doing something that doesn't seem humanly possible.
 - **Jesus called Peter to walk out on the water.** Should a human being be getting out of a wind-swept boat to walk on the lake? If God hasn't called him, the answer is "Oh no. You definitely shouldn't." But if Christ commands and bids that man to walk, he can do nothing else.
 - **Should Paul be preaching the Gospel of Jesus in the Roman world** throughout their cities where there is already a gospel of Caesar who bears the titles *Kurios* and *Soter* (Lord and Savior)? Does that sound wise? But that's what the Apostles were

commanded to do.

How many times does God command someone to go in the very direction that nothing on earth could convince them of short of God's calling? Often, God calls me to do the expected, the thing that's in my wheelhouse, the regular order item on my agenda. But sometimes, God calls me to do the unexpected—the very thing I would have thought is foolish or doesn't seem to make sense. It takes faith to get in the boat at Jesus' command. It also takes faith to get out of the boat when Jesus says "come."

But how do we know when God is calling us? How do we discern to hear his voice? Have you ever thought how a missionary knows what country to go to? What's the key to discerning God's will and guidance of the Spirit in matters to which the Bible doesn't speak?

To discern God's will in areas where the Bible is silent, familiarize yourself deeply with His revealed truths in matters where He has spoken.

Romans 12:1–2 "Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."

- In light of God's mercies through Christ, we are urged to daily present our bodies as living offerings—holy and pleasing to God—that is, a genuine act of spiritual worship.
- In doing so we will not be conformed to the pattern of this age—which is evil, false, and corrupt.
- Instead, we will be transformed, altered by the renewing of our minds in God's truth—his Word.
- The result—then we will be able to discern and recognize what is the good, pleasing and perfect will of God.

The key to knowing what God wants in matters where he hasn't spoken is to live submitted to his Word and truth where he has already spoken.

There's no such thing as a theologically ignorant prophet.

Illus. Years ago we had a very prominent person in our church in Spokane who considered herself to be a prophet.

Rachel occasionally would share with the pastoral staff a so-called prophesy that usually was some kind of strange, apocalyptic picture, which, at times, she had an interpretation for, and sometimes she didn't know what the vision meant. So, I tried to hold two commands in Scripture in tension—the first one is not to despise prophecy, because if a word is legitimately from the LORD and you despise it because you don't believe in modern prophetic words, or because you think God doesn't still speak today—then you could find yourself actually opposing God. So, we have to take the admonition in Scripture very seriously to not despise words of prophecy or guidance that has prophetic significance.

On the other hand, I was deeply committed to Paul's command to test all things, to determine whether or not those alleged "words" from the LORD were not just personal sentiments or weirdness. I was likewise committed to John's instruction to test all the spirits because not every spirit that claims to be from God is.

One day she delivered some strange vision-inspired word to me and I said, "Thank you. I'll be sure and test that to see if it's a word from the LORD or not." She was offput and frankly a little offended. Later, she wanted to come in and chat with me about what I meant and I took her to Paul's instructions to the Corinthians and John's letter and she said this, "I didn't know that was in the Bible." Which shocked me a little.

She attended my foundations course and the first session was on how to read and interpret the Bible. My first principles were: Read the Bible asking "What did the author intend to communicate to his original audience" (the principle of authorial intent)? And secondly, "What is the surrounding context of this passage—immediate, literary, canonical, and historical" (the principle of context)? She later told that in 25 years of prophesying in the church, she had never been taught those two simple, foundational principles.

I want to be clear: There is no such thing as a biblically illiterate prophet.

I'm struck by David's instinct to simply obey God's commands when it is evident that it is God issuing the command or giving guidance.

I'm also struck by his discernment. David knows when a prophet is telling him the truth because he is a man of the Word.

Illustration: I've been preparing to do a series next summer through some select Psalms—the Gospel in the Psalms. So, as I've gone through them, I can see foreshadowing of the Gospel everywhere.

But the thing that has struck me the most is how much of Torah there is in the Psalms. These future prophecies about a future Davidide/son of David are supplied oxygen by Moses' law. David is not just prophesying a new covenant. The very fabric of his hymns is Scriptural—I am struck by how biblically literate David is. He knows his covenant. He knows his Word.

If we haven't renewed our minds in God's revealed word, we are in no position to discern God's will and direction in matters to which God hasn't spoken in the Bible.

Recap:

Application:

Is it time for you to see your situation as an opportunity for God to refine, restore, and renew you in the midst of your challenges?

Do your less-than-ideal circumstances require a change of perspective as to what God is doing right now?

Are you struggling to discern God's will, but if you really did an inventory on what your mind has been dwelling on, it's clear that your mental life is not being renewed day-by-day in God's revealed truth?

Might God be pursuing you and nudging you to take a risk, to go in a direction of your tormenter, or to go in the direction that seems counterintuitive, doesn't make sense, why would God want me to that?