

Following Jesus is a little like hiking through a wilderness.
It is beautiful and rewarding, but sometimes the way forward is not easy or clear.

And in God's Word we have been given a map and instructions on what paths to take.

We have been told which paths to avoid.

But sometimes God's way is not easy and even dangerous.

It leads us through valleys of the shadow of death or over rocks.

And we can be tempted to take a shortcut.

Instead of going the hard way of Christ, we can blaze our own trail.

This is the temptation David is going to face this morning.

And it is the same temptation we face every day.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 21-22

I. Taking matters into our own hands instead of faithfully trusting God leads to disaster.

This is David's mistake.

He is going to let the pressure get to him.

If you remember back in chapter 13.

In that chapter, the pressure got to Saul.

And as the people deserted him.

And rather than faithfully trusting and waiting for Samuel.

He took matters into his own hands and made a sacrifice.

Here we are going to see David make a somewhat similar choice.

We are going to see that doing the right thing is risky and dangerous.

To do the right thing would require extra extraordinary faith.

And David is going to fail this test.

In verse 1, Ahimelech is called THE priest because he is the high priest.

The high priest comes.

And it seems that Ahimelech is the high priest.

He has trembling as he meets David.

He knows that something is wrong.

He probably knows that Saul and David are not on good terms.
And so he asks him.

This is the chance David has to be honest.
This is the chance David has to trust in the Lord.
When David went to the prophet Samuel, he was honest and he told him everything.
Now here is the high priest who was asking, and David does not show the same faith.

Instead, David lies in verse 2.
He makes up a big lie.
He is telling the priest of God that he is on a super secret mission.
So secret, he can't explain it.

And so he asked the priest for help.
Because he needs bread for his men, he says are with him.
They just aren't here yet.

And in verse 4, the priest tells them they don't have bread.
The only food that they have is the holy bread.

We hear later in verse 6 that this is the bread in the tabernacle.
This is the bread that goes on the table before the ark of the covenant.
They are 12 loaves one for each of the tribes of Israel.
And they are to be in God's presence always.
Pointing to the reality that the people of God are welcome to eat at his table.

And they cannot be eaten of anyone except for the priests.
And only time they eat them is when they are taking out the bread from that day and replacing it with fresh bread.

And the high priest is willing to bend the rules.
And Jesus will quote this instance later when he's teaching on the Sabbath.
Cause their priest recognizes that if lives are in stake, then this is a time when it's okay.

However, this is still holy bread.
It still should be treated with some kind of reverence.
It can't be treated just like any bread or like a snack.

And so this is why the priest says you can have it if you have been abstaining from sex.
Because this is something the soldiers were to do before they went to war.
Not because there is anything wrong with it in marriage.
But because they are to abstain and fast.
Because they are not just soldiers at war, but holy soldiers for God.

This is another check and another chance for David to be honest.
This is David being confronted.
The Holy Spirit is whispering and asking "Are you clean?"
Can you freely eat of God's bread with clean hands in a clean heart?

And instead of being honest, David doubles down.
He continues to lie in verse five.

He says not just are they clean now but they are always clean.
And in fact that there are extra abstaining today.
They have never been so holy and righteous.

To be clear, this is not the right answer.
And this does not seem to be true.
David was just at home with his wife last night.
And we don't know that anyone is with him at all.

But he seems to think unless he lies to the high priest, God can't feed him. That somehow, the God who can rain manna down from heaven and send birds to feed Elijah could not feed David for one day.

Verse 7, we get this important information about Doeg.

We see it come back in chapter 22.

But one of the servants is there.

And we don't know anything about him yet, but even if this was your first time reading, you should know something wrong.

Not just because this is a trusted servant of Saul.

But he is from Edom.

He is one of the ancient enemies of God's people.

And now sometimes these people from other nations, come and worship God.

Even it is appears that he is doing as he is detained here for some reason.

But we should know if he is working with Saul.

That he is not truly righteous.

So David asked for help again in verse 8.

He needs some weapons.

He is telling the high priest that he had to do the King's business so fast he had no time to get any weapons.

That defies logic and explanation.

And David again gets this reminder.

It is like constant nudges from God and the Holy Spirit.

Verse 9, The only weapon they have is the sword of Goliath.

They only have a physical reminder of God's previous faithfulness.

That on a day when no one trusted God.

David did.

And even though he was a little boy with nothing but stones and a shepherd's tools.

He was able to defeat the greatest enemy as people had known.
Because he trusted in God.
And especially because he trusted that God had delivered him from the hands of enemies before.

And so now David faces not a bear or a lion or a giant, but a king.
And in his face is the physical reminder of the last enemy of his that God destroyed.
Will he be honest?
Will he be faithful and true?
He will not, and he takes it.

I also think it's significant that we get the detail. It is behind the cloth.
It is behind the place where priest would inquire of God what to do.
David should inquire of God what to do like he did before.

But he does not.
And we see him, flee from Saul, and he leaves the promised land.
He goes to a very unlikely place.
He actually goes to Goliath's hometown.
We are not sure why David goes here.
Maybe it is just the closest place.
Maybe he thinks he is unlikely for Saul to find him.
Maybe he thinks the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

But the king hears it in verse 11.
The king recounts the prophetic word of the people.
The king recounts two David's ears.
Isn't this the one God made promises about?
Isn't this not the one that God has delivered greatly?

In verse 12, David takes the words to heart which should be good.
But instead of being encouraged he is afraid.

Instead of being encouraged and reminded of God and his faithfulness, he worries.

He is filled with anxiety.

And he takes matters into his own hands again.

Verse 13, He pretends to be insane.

He acts like a madman.

He spits over himself and scribbles on the walls.

And he does this because he's afraid this king is going to kill him.

And instead of trusting in the Lord.

Instead of trusting that God will protect him.

He tries to protect himself.

It is a kind of madness.

And the king responds in 14 and 15.

He wants David to go away.

It almost seems as if he would've accepted David.

We certainly know God would have protected him.

But I think David should've trusted in God.

Every choice that David has made so far is out of fear and doubt.

He is not showing faith.

Sometimes there is a tendency for preachers for people to try and defend these things as really smart.

I don't think so.

I don't think the Bible wants us to see them as something to emulate.

I think it is showing us that David is not trusting in the Lord.

He is trying to take things into his own hands.

He thinks he needs to sin and lie.

He thinks he can't trust the high priest and so he'll maybe just tell a little.

Maybe he'll just exaggerate to only tell him what he needs to know.

And we have the same temptation as David.
We do the same thing.
We try to take things into our own hands.
We think that we need to sin in order to bring about God's will.

This happens in small ways and in large ways.
A small way I see this in my own life is with my children.
There are times that they are listening.
And I feel the need to scream.
Even though I know, I shouldn't make a habit of yelling at my children.
I start to think no this must be the only way to train them up in righteousness.
And the reality is I've lost patience and I don't wanna do the hard work parenting requires.

A woman knows that she should only marry a Christian.
But she has been single for long.
She has prayed and God hasn't brought a husband.
And even though this guy doesn't love the Lord, he is good.
So she will just marry him anyway and hope God gets a hold of his heart.

A Christian police officer knows this person is guilty and they have escaped from justice over and over.
So, they decide to plant some evidence to make sure that justice is done.

A Christian politician is in a tight election.
And they know it is wrong to lie.
But they believe their opponent would do things that don't honor God.
So, they allow attack ads that make up slander and nonsense.
Because that's just how the game is played.

A single mom is struggling to provide for her kids like she dreamed.
She decides to not report all of her income and cheat on her taxes.
Because the government takes too much anyway.

I could go on and on.
Examine your own heart.
How many times this week have you justified your sin?
And tried to explain how the ends might justify the means.
This is what David tried to do.
And I am sure he had really good reasons.
After all, his life was literally at stake!
But it is going to lead to disaster.
And it will lead to disaster for us, if we live this way.

We see the disastrous consequences of David's choices in chapter 22.
First, we see David escape to a cave.
His brothers, his father, and all his family come with him.
Which, tells us that David's escape was not unknown or very secret.
Plenty of people know where He is.

And in verse 2, there are over 400 men who join him.
They become his followers and his army.
But they are not who anyone would want.
They are the least reliable people you could imagine.
These are the resumes you laugh at and throw away without looking close.
And these are exactly the kind of people God is going to use.
These are the kinds of people God loves to use.
These are people like the disciples.

That's besides the point.
When then see David escape.
And he goes to the king of Moab.
And he asks that the Moabites would keep his family safe.

It is interesting that we see him go here.
We know Ruth his grandmother was from Moab.
Maybe the King of Moab remembers, or he has extended family.
But we are not to think of Ruth here.

Because David should not go to Moab.

God has given His people the promised land.

And part of the law and his commands is that they not leave.

Even if the land is in famine or their lives are in danger, to leave the promised land is to flee from God.

They are to trust that God can protect them.

So, David fleeing to Moab is not a good thing.

It is another example of him taking matters into his own hands.

Which is why the prophet comes to rebuke him.

In verse 5, a prophet named Gad tells David to return.

He must go back to the land of Judah.

He needs to stop trusting in his own power and strength.

He just needs to trust the Lord.

And His failure is going to have seriously negative consequences.

In 20:6, we see that Saul hears where David is.

And Saul is lounging under a tree.

Which is not just a nice place to hang out.

This is an official place for kings.

He is holding court with his spear.

Everyone is standing around the king wondering what is next.

And Saul starts giving a speech in verse 7 that is pretty whiney.

He addresses the people of Benjamin.

Which is his tribe and his particular people.

And he is telling them how much better he is than David.

He says that he is the only one who can bless them.

He has power to give them riches and fields and vineyards.

Which he can only give out when he takes them from other people.

He also promises that he can put them in charge of armies.

He has the power and the throne, which David does not.

So, he wonders why everyone is against him in verse 8.

Why nobody told him about the covenant Jonathan made with David.

Why no one feels bad for him.

Or that no one has told him about his son's coup he is sure is coming.

This whole thing reveals Saul's heart.

But there is someone who speaks up now.

Doeg the Edomite returns to our story.

And he tells Saul where he last saw David.

But notice how he frames what happened.

In verse 10, **"He inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."**

Now, one of those things is definitely true.

The rest are exaggerations or stretching the truth.

We never saw the prophet ask God what David should do.

And he gave David a few loaves of bread.

That hardly sounds like great provisions.

It certainly did not seem like the prophet was happily conspiring with David to help remove Saul from the throne.

So Saul summons Abimelech the priest to him.

But he does not just call for the priest.

He wants everyone to come.

The High Priest's entire household is to come with him.

Which should warn us that someone unusual is going to happen.

But Saul confronts them in verse 13,

And he accuses Ahimelech of working with David.

Especially of trying to overthrow Saul.

And Ahimelech objects.

He says that this is not true at all.
And he tells Saul about David's righteousness.
He reminds Saul how faithful of a servant that David has been.
He reminds him that David has been honored in his house.
David is one of Saul's servants and been placed over Saul's troops.

And he goes on to say that he has not done anything different than normal.
Publicly, he has gone to ask God about David.
He also says that he has never known David was the king's enemy.
How was he supposed to know?

He is clearly innocent.
And there is some pushback.
He is pointing out how foolish Saul has been.
He is actually the one conspiring to destroy David.
He may have not been that secret about it.
But he has not banished or decreed David as an outlaw.

And this is where disaster comes.
Verse 16, **"And the king said, 'You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house.'"**

He sentences him to death.
Not just Ahimelech.
But his father.
And all of his entire house will be killed.
Because he gave David some bread.

This is obviously an overreaction.
This is the kind of tyranny that Samuel tried to warn Israel about and they would not listen.
When they asked for a king like the nations.

And it is so obviously wrong that Saul's servants do not listen.

When he commands them to kill the priests.
The servants do not listen.
They cannot believe Saul would want something so wicked as to kill priests of God.
Especially for such a minor offense.
But there is one who is willing to do it.

Doeg the Edomite is commanded to do it.
And he does.
The Edomites are the enemies of God's people.
Descended from Esau they have always opposed Jacob's kin.
And though this one is living in Israel.
Even though he was going through some motions of worship earlier when he was detained before God.
He is more than happy to kill 85 priests in cold blood.
This massacre is wrong.
It is immoral.
And I cannot believe the endurance and effort he must have been willing to exert, all to kill the people of God.

And if you thought Saul was done there, then you are mistaken.
In verse 19, he destroys all of Nob.

Let me read it because it should sound familiar.
"He put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey, and sheep, he put to the sword."

This should remind you of 1 Samuel 15.
Saul was commanded to put the Amalekites to the sword because of their sin against God.
And Saul failed.
He was unwilling to do it when God commanded it.
But now he is more than happy to do it.
But he does it just for himself.
He is willing to kill this way when he is offended.

And only one person escapes and lives.

We read in verse 20 that one of Ahimelech's sons, Abiathar, escapes and runs to David.

And he tells David all that has taken place.

And David makes a confession.

As soon as he hears the news of this tragedy.

"I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house."

This is exactly why David acted that way.

This is why David was lying and taking things into his own hands.

He knew Doeg was there.

And he thought something bad would happen.

And instead of trusting in God, he tried to do it himself.

This is David confessing and acknowledging his own sin.

This does not mean it is only David's fault.

Obviously, Saul is responsible for commanding this.

And Doeg and any other men who participated in this slaughter of Nob will be held responsible before God.

But David is also at fault.

He recognizes that this is a consequence of his actions.

Him trying to do things on his own led to disaster.

We don't know what would have happened if he trusted in the Lord.

But we do know what happened because he made this choice.

It is a costly lesson.

And I do think it is one that David will take to heart.

Moving forward, we will see him exhibit much more faith.

He will do a better job trusting in the Lord.

But this lesson was painful.

And it is one that we need to learn.
When we take things into our own hands.
When we try to bring the kingdom of God into the world through
backhanded means.
Or we try to sin to do what is right.
Or when we act like the ends justify the means.
We will experience disaster like this.
It may not lead to the deaths of entire towns.
But sin is always destructive.
It always destroys.

And the ultimate disaster is the spiritual disaster.
It is not just that we will experience negative consequences.
But it will lead to our spiritual death.
You cannot walk with Jesus and do whatever you want.
You will never grow to be more like Christ while refusing to act like Christ.
Following Christ often means we have to trust God.
It means we refuse to choose between evil options.
It means that we do what honors God even if it is costly.
And if we refuse to do that, then we are like those who will hear Jesus say
"Depart from me, I never knew you."

But the good news is that there is grace.
David causes this to happen because of his foolishness.
But God does not abandon him.
God disciplines him yes, but David will still be king.
God's choice is irrevocable.
David cannot ruin it.

And neither can you.
We will make mistakes like this or worse.
And our choices may lead to disaster like this one, or lesser ones.
But if we return, there is mercy and grace.
There is no disaster that the blood of Jesus cannot restore.