

What a Mess!

1 Samuel 27:1–28:2

The Twenty-Ninth Sermon on First Samuel

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Is there anyone here today that has not experienced the messiness of life? The complications of being a Christian in a non-Christian family? The dysfunction of families being divided by sex, drugs, and divorce? The struggles of our sins mixed the sins of our families, in-laws, and extended family? Check me down for all three! Life is messy, isn't it? It's messy because we live in a world that suffers the effects of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. We live in a world that the apostle Paul says is full of "sufferings," "subjected to futility," and is in "bondage to corruption" (Rom. 8:18, 20, 21). Children, this means that your parents aren't perfect, that you fight with your brothers and sisters, and that you are tempted to fit in with others like you when they want to do something wrong.

The world we live in is no different than the world David lived in. It's a mess. And just like us, he contributed to that mess as well. We've been reading of the wonderful hand of God guiding and protecting David over and over again—but now we come to this. I want to make two big points that will help us organize this story in our heads:

1. *The Messiness of David*
2. *The Message of God*

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The first point, *the messiness of David*, will be looking at the details of the story. The second point, *the message of God*, will be looking for what God wants us to learn from the story.

May the Holy Spirit write these words upon the tablets of our hearts!

The Messiness of David

First, I want you to see in this story *the messiness of David*. And what a mess is it! But remember, every story has to read in its context. So ask yourself this: what has been going on until now? We've been reading over and over again of the Lord's preservation and protection of David. The Lord chose the youngest son of Jesse to be king over all Israel. The Lord saved Israel through this young teenager by guiding his sling and stone into Goliath's forehead. And the story from chapter 18 through chapter 26 has been the Lord delivering David time and time again from Saul's spear, scheme, and seeking of David's life. And most graphically of all, not only did the Lord spare David, but David spared Saul in a cave and in Saul's own tent, which, if you remember, he was able to do because the Lord caused Saul and his three thousand men to fall into a deep sleep. There's all that, then there's this!

What a mess! Notice here the mess of David's faith. **Then David said in his heart**, verse 1 says, "**Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul.**" What? David, *you* just spared Saul's life because the Lord has put you in the driver's seat!! But David doesn't believe the Lord can preserve him again. You see that in the verb **perish** in verse 1. This is the same verb David used of Saul in 26:10 when he said,

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“the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and *perish*.” But now he’s saying *he* will perish despite all that the Lord has done for him! Where is your faith, David! Hebrews 11 says of David that “through faith” he “conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises...escaped the edge of the sword, [was] made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” (Heb. 11:33–34). What the life of David illustrates so comfortingly for our sakes is not just faith but the angst of faith, the struggle of faith, the spiritual warfare of faith. We know God’s promises, but we do not rest in them. We know God’s power, but we utilize our own.

Notice here the mess of David’s identity. In faithlessness what does he do? “Oh, I’ll just leave the borders of the Promised Land and go over into the land of those that I defeated in the Valley of Elah and elsewhere.” We read of David’s internal conversation: **“There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines.”** What? His faithless logic seems logical: **“Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand”** (v. 1). Like he did back in 21:10–15, we read in verses 2–3 that David goes back into Gath, the city of Goliath! And we read that this move was successful as **when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him** (v. 4).

Notice here the mess of David’s morality. What does he do while in the land of the Philistines? In verses 5–7 He persuades king Achish to give him his own city. Why? He wants to be away from accountability and influence so he can do his

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thing. I know no one who would ever do that! Where is **Ziklag**? Way down in the south, away from the arm of Achish and from Saul. And the next episode of David's life in Ziklag lasts **a year and four months** (v. 7).

But worse of all is what David does while there. He goes berserk! He starts taking his six hundred men to make **raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites** (v. 8). He starts killing everyone! **And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish** (v. 9). Now, you have to always see David in comparison to Saul in 1 Samuel. And here we see that again. They both fought the Amalekites, but Saul needed three thousand men while David only needed a mere six hundred. Back in chapter 15 the Lord gave a new commandment to Saul to devote to destruction the Amalekites. But Saul didn't do that. Now David is...well, he's not really. You see, while the Lord commanded the destruction of the Amalekites, back in the law of God in Deuteronomy 20 the Lord listed the peoples the Israelites were to completely devote to destruction. And these people here in our text are not among them. Further, just like Saul did in chapter 15 David now is taking all the plunder of these peoples' animals. The point of the story is that David is doing nothing in obedience here—he's warring against those not commanded and he's taking the plunder even if he were.

You see his morality made a mess in the further details of the story about his raiding. Whenever king Achish would ask what David what he was up to,

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notice that David would deliberately deceive by withholding the full truth and by speaking in vague generalities. He said he was fighting **“against the Negeb of Judah,”** or, **“against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites,”** or, **“against the Negeb of the Kenites”** (v. 10). If you remember from chapter 23, the “Negev” was a generic term for the far southern wilderness. David’s not really telling him anything here. But he adds the buzzword “Judah,” for example, to cause Achish to think he was fighting against Israel, helping Achish. That’s why in verse 12 Achish **trusted David, thinking, “He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant”** (v. 12). Oh, and remember how David was slaughtering all the men and all the women? We read why: **And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, “lest they should tell about us and say, ‘So David has done.’” Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines** (v. 11). So when the text ends with the opening two verses of chapter 28 with Achish starting a war with Saul, guess who goes with him? David! What a mess! Here is the future king of Israel! Here is the man after God’s own heart! Here is the forerunner and picture of Jesus Christ!

The Message of God

So can we actually learn anything from a Godless text like this? And it literally is God-less. Did you notice who is never mentioned in this story? God isn’t. It is God-less as well full of godlessness. But I want you to meditate with me

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on a second and most important point. I want you to see in this story *the message of God*.

Seeing the World Through God's Eyes

First, the message of God here is *seeing the world through God's eyes*. We all know the tired objection that the Old Testament is so full of violence and that the Christian god is a moral monster. But we're the only ones who can make sense of this kind of mess. What? That's right. The only way to make sense of this story, the dozens like, the stories of dysfunction, mess, and suffering in the world, and your own messy life is by seeing them through the eyes of faith in the God who orchestrates history. Without God you cannot make a value judgment that anything in this story or in the world is right or wrong. Only God can do that. And only a God who gives us the story of human history in its brutal living color and not in whitewashed myth or fairy tale can make sense of the world.

Seeing My Life as Evidence of God's Patience

Second, the message of God here is *seeing my life as evidence of God's patience*. David is such a sinner. David is such a screw up. He lacks faith. He deceives. He steals. He murders. And he's going to do even worse in 2 Samuel! And guess what? God has chosen him and God is using him.

What a message of hope to us all today! What I see today is nothing but a motley crew of depraved, vile, and wicked sinners. But we have a God who puts up

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with people like us! And this is a message of hope for you today if you have yet to give your life to Jesus Christ. He did not come to save the righteous, but sinners. That means he did not come to save those who thought they could help themselves but he came to save those who are helpless. He didn't come to die for good people, but he came to die for wicked people. And here you are today. And here is God putting up with you, being patient with you. Will you respond?

Seeing that God is Supremely Gracious

Third, the message of God here is *seeing that God is supremely gracious*. What is the message of the Bible? Three words: *God saves sinners*. That's it! And David is such a clear example of this message. And because God has always saved sinners, there is hope for sinners like David, sinners like me, and sinners like you. Jesus offers his grace to you today. Will you receive it by believing in him?

What a mess our lives are. What a mess David's life was. But we have a God who is in control of it all, bearing up with us so patiently, extending his hand of grace to us so continually. We're a mess, but Jesus makes us whole. Amen.