

## **Introduction**

Enemies of the cross and the message of reconciliation through Christ's cross alone abound. They have abounded through the centuries. It was the case in the theological darkness of the late Middle Ages out of which the Protestant Reformation took place. The preeminent figure in the rise of the Reformation was of course Martin Luther. Luther's focus on the scripture alone and justification by faith alone drew the wrath of the Roman church. The devil was mightily at work to keep the truth under wraps as Luther stood trial. He was ordered to recant his teachings, but he refused. He famously said: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God." Our text this morning reiterates that there is no safer place to be than to have our consciences held captive to God's unbreakable word.

[Read text and Pray]

Two headings sum up the text before us this morning—slaughter and safety. Many were slaughtered and one was saved. But the focus of our study needs to be upon the one responsible for the slaughter and the one responsible for the safety. Saul is the prince of darkness grim. In the semblance of power, he sanctions the slaughter of the innocent multitude while David in the semblance of weakness provides safety for the one who seeks refuge with him. We will begin, as the text does, with the heading of slaughter.

### **I. Slaughter.**

The bulk of the passage provides a number of details about the slaughter of the priests of the Lord and how it came about. Doeg the Edomite performed the deed, but the person responsible for the slaughter is King Saul.

A. The sixth verse of chapter 22 places us at the scene of a gathering of the servants of Saul around their king. Under the tamarisk tree on a high place sits the son of Kish. His is a familiar pose; his spear in his hand. Power and royal authority are on display. It is a scene he is desperate to preserve. However, the appearance of power begins to lose integrity as the text moves forward. The power of Saul is unraveling. He is full of pride but gives off the stench of resentment, insecurity, paranoia and the self-pity of a victim.

B. You can sense Saul's desperation as he charges with conspiracy the men of his inner-circle, his king's cabinet of officials. They did not tell him when his son made a covenant with the son of Jesse. He asks them if they think David will bring them as much prestige and prosperity as he has. Saul bemoans that no one feels sorry for him that David is lying in wait against him. He is angry and furious that his own courtiers have, it would seem, committed treason by withholding critical intelligence from him. They had no useful reply to make.

C. However, there was a man there who saw the opportunity to make some political points with Saul. He is Doeg the Edomite. He is a descendant of Esau. He does not possess zeal for Israel, for God, or for righteousness. Expediency is the name of the game for Doeg. Maybe he can rise in power. While the servants of Saul are being accused of complicity with David because of their silence, Doeg knows something he can share that will certainly keep him from the appearance of conspiracy.

So he reports: I know somebody who helped David. I was there when David came to Nob. He sought help from Ahimelech, the priest, and got it. The son of Ahitub inquired of the LORD for David and supplied him with provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath.

At last someone is divulging the intelligence Saul needed to quash any rebellion. The priests are in on it too! So Saul sends for Ahimelech and all his father's house.

D. The whole house of the priests make their way from Nob to Gibeah to come before the king. Saul accuses Ahimelech of conspiring with David. This was a false charge. Help David? Yes, Ahimelech admits that he gave provisions to David and inquired of the Lord for him, not this time only but also on other occasions. After all, no servant of Saul is more faithful than David. He is the king's son-in-law, captain over his body guard, and honored in the house of Saul. Why would he not help David? But this is not conspiracy against Saul. Ahimelech was not aware that there might be trouble between Saul and David.

E. This is all Saul needs to hear. He is inflamed with fury. The details are irrelevant. He suppresses the truth by an unrighteous hate for David, a desire for revenge, and a God-defying determination to hold together a rapidly unraveling dynasty. The king passed sentence upon the son of Ahitub and all his father's house. Take note of his words, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house." In the context, these words are those of a man overcome with evil hatred. In effect, Saul targets God himself in the persons of the priests who minister at his tabernacle.

F. Saul's servants are not with him in this ghastly and devilish determination. They knew the charges were false and they knew the sentence was unjust and beyond that brutal and ghastly. Saul's order to strike down the priests was unheeded by his servants. So Saul turned to Doeg: "You perform the deed." And he did. He slaughtered 85 priests that day right there. But that was not the end. For he went to Nob and did to the priests' families and land what Saul was supposed to have done to the Amalekites. Get this. What Saul refused to do to the enemies of God he now authorizes to be done against his own people, and that the priests of God and their wives and their children, even their infants, oxen, donkeys, and sheep! This he did because he opposed God, the word of God, and the anointed one (the Messiah) of God.

This is slaughter—a ghastly bloodbath of horror. These events were not enacted in war. They were carried out in opposition to justice and divine sanction. These acts opposed God in every way. Doeg the Edomite was a bloodthirsty butcher who sought political gain through this act of sickening brutality. But what he did was authorized by the king ... of ... Israel the shepherd who should have been protecting the sheep of Yahweh's pasture.

Such ghastly actions of brutality and death unfortunately are not rare throughout history. Wanton murder must have been one of the hallmarks of the generations leading up to the flood, for when Noah emerged from the ark the Lord prescribed capital punishment for the one who takes human life. He explained that murder is heinous because it strikes out at God's image-bearers. Human beings are God's visible representatives on the earth. To strike out at a human is a strike against God.

Our generation would like to think we have come beyond the uncivilized days of the past. We would like to shudder at this butcher named Doeg, accomplice to Saul, as though this type of thing does not happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it does. In the city of Milwaukee alone in 2022, police say that 214 people were murdered. And of course no act so declares the cheapness with which we regard

human life than the murder of unborn humans. It is unjust, ghastly, devilish, and selfish. Abortion is a butcher's bloodbath. It was suggested to me this week that I watch a video called "The Procedure." You can find it on YouTube. It is a portrayal of a second-trimester abortion. It is ghastly. I could not bear to watch it at times. It renewed my sense of just how despicable and callous and destructive are these acts of baby murder. Our generation has not come to a better place than previous ones. And there can be no doubt, baby murderers are storing up wrath for the day of judgment.

The motives for such killing are similar to those of Saul—selfishness, pride, self-preservation. A world-wide movement wants to see abortion all over the globe. It is not just about so-called "rights." It is also about controlling world population. Some people live in fear that the world might become overpopulated. And on that basis they believe we, the living, and future folks who live should do so at the expense of babies who give their lives through abortion so we can live and have sex whenever we want. It is ghastly. It is a punch to the gut of God himself that his image bearers are assaulted in this way. Every time we look upon a human being no matter their age or condition, we are looking on a divine image-bearer. And we should treat image bearers of God with dignity.

G. Now back to Saul and Doeg. We must notice here that what took place through these wicked villains is a fulfillment of the word spoken by God. I need to take you back in time 40 years or so to the days of Eli the priest. He is the one to whom Hannah brought her son Samuel to serve in the Lord's tabernacle. Eli tolerated the blasphemous and unfaithful desecrating of the priestly ministry by his sons. 1 Samuel 2 tells that God sent a man to Eli informing him that the hand of the Lord was coming against his entire house. Eli would be the last of his father's descendants to die at an old age. All others would die young and be killed by the sword of men. One would escape only to "weep his eyes out to grieve his heart." Eli's two sons Hophni and Phinehas died soon after at the hands of the Philistines. Now some 40-50 years later the rest of Eli's house save one is completely wiped out by the evil of Saul and Doeg. It is as ... God ... had ... spoken.

God is not the author of the evil committed by Saul and Doeg. Saul and Doeg of their own determination brought death and destruction to the 85 priests and their families and their village. But it was permitted by the Lord. Their actions fulfilled the word spoken by the Lord. And here this text illustrates with clarity an important truth. It is one that bolsters the faith and resolve of the people of God. The truth is that even at their worst, when God's enemies oppose the kingdom of God, they can do no more than fulfill his purpose and the word he has spoken. The enemies of God may be fueled by extreme hate, pure selfishness, and bloodthirsty hostility. Their only goal is to strike against God and his people and interfere with his purpose and exalt themselves. But they can never do anything other than fall right into the role predetermined for them by God's decree. God had informed Eli of this outcome as a consequence of the evil he tolerated at the tabernacle. Saul and Doeg are fully responsible for their horrid wickedness, but try as they might, they cannot thwart the power and plan and counsel of the Lord. Even the worst of the enemies of God can only prove the veracity of God's word. They can only ultimately carry out his will of decree.

The preeminent example is at the cross of Christ. The wicked and bloodthirsty Jews were crying for his crucifixion; their hearts were filled animosity and self-will. Yet while standing against the Son of God, they fulfilled the will of God. Peter preached this truth on the day of Pentecost. He said, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). The cross was not an unforeseen triumph of the power of men that God had to overcome. It was God's plan all along. And it was carried out by those who hate and defied him.

This type of occurrence does not merely happen from time to time. It is always true that the wicked who in their hearts defy God will never thwart the plan and word and work of God in the least. Dale Davis writes, "There is no way Yahweh's enemies can gain the edge. He has them completely outclassed. If they knew what they were doing they would kick themselves" (229). Though culpable, as they act in hostility against the Lord and his law, they will always and only accomplish his will. Knowing this truth emboldens God's people that we may endure with resolve of steel the most trying of times. It does not keep us from sorrow or sadness, from grief or pain. But knowing that God's opponents who threaten his people will only fulfill his word assures us of ultimate victory in Him.

We see the certainty of God's word being carried out as it regards judgment. There may have seemed to be a delay because of the years that intervened after the man of God visited Eli, but there was no actual delay. God saw that his word was fulfilled. As with judgment, we should be certain God will keep his promises as well. The overriding promise for which Christians are looking today is the return of Jesus. Yes, we belong to that insane group of humans who are looking for the return of Jesus. We believe Christ will literally, visibly, and gloriously break through the sky to call his own to himself. The world concerns itself with running out of fossil fuel, overpopulation, the sun ceasing to shine. Our main concern for the future is not a worry but our hope. We need to be reminded that apparent delay is not a failure on God's part. His waiting until he comes is a sign of patience. Many will give up and say it is not going to happen. But let us bear in mind that God is not slow. He is deliberate. He is purposeful. And his purposes will be accomplished. Don't sleep on God's warnings and do not fail to hold fast to his promises!

H. One of the reasons to hold fast to the promises of the Lord is because our faith in HIM WILL be put to the test. The people of God will experience hatred from the enemies of God. Here in this text Saul has assumed the position of an anti-Christ. David is the Lord's anointed, he is Christ or Messiah. Although Saul was also the Lord's anointed, he has now been rejected. And he has assumed the position of enemy of the Lord's anointed and the Lord himself. Saul's heart is set against God and his purposes. And it is quite graphic in that he launches a holocaust against the priests, the special servants of the Lord. They served the nation as representatives before the Lord. Now Saul has decimated them as though they were God's worst enemies. The resistance of Saul's personal cabinet to get involved shows that they themselves would not even think of doing what Saul authorized Doeg to do.

Now when we survey the biblical landscape, we find that hatred and hostility toward the people of God is not an anomaly. We can go all the way back to Cain's murder of godly Abel. Then there is Pharoah, Balak and Balaam, Jezebel, Haman to name several. And the New Testament witnesses the hostility of both Jew and Gentile as the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. Jesus warned his disciples that if people hated him, they will hate his followers. We will experience hostility from God's enemies during this time on earth. When it is the nature humankind that every intention of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually, there will be hostility. There will be anti-christs. They will hate the truth. They will despise the gospel. They will abhor Christ's people. And Christ's people will be subject to the flames of that animosity. Christ's people need to be prepared. We need to be ready to hold on, ready to be despised. But also ready not to be deceived by the appearance of their strength.

It is at this point we need to look away from the reality of slaughter to the hope of safety.

## **II. Safety.**

Looking down in 1 Samuel 22 to verse 20, we are told that one of the sons of Ahimelech escaped the sword. This item also is according to the word of the Lord, which spoke of one who would not be cut off from the altar but would be spared. This priest's name was Abiathar. Wisely, he fled after David and related to him the massacre that Saul and Doeg the Edomite had inflicted upon the priests of the Lord. David now sees the consequences of his deceit when he went to Ahimelech. He owns his part in precipitating the deaths of Abiathar's family. David then takes Abiathar under his wing. We need to mark well the words David spoke to this one who came to him for help. He said, "Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping."

Horrifying and gut-wrenching were the words and actions of the anti-Christ and his henchman. But sweet and assuring are the that flow from the mouth and heart of David.

A. These are words of welcome and comfort. "Stay with me; do not be afraid." Here comes a grieving and fearful priest. He is not a warrior, not a soldier. Every one in his family tree is now dead. Where can he turn? He flees after David. David has plenty of concerns of his own. But he does not turn the priest away. "Stay with me," he says. "Do not be afraid."

You all seem to appreciate my grandkid stories. I haven't talked near as much about my little Rebekah. She is adventurous and independent, but the last time she was here at church with us, her fear was evident. It was a new place and quite a few more people than she is used to at church. She clung to Melissa. Clinging was her comfort. And of course when your grandchildren cling, you squeeze them tight and comfort them. You want them to know they are safe. You have got them in your arms and there is nothing for them to fear.

It takes my mind to Jesus as he welcomed the little children into his arms to bless them. So he takes to his heart all who will flee to him. He would have us be assured that we are welcome in his care, and we have no need for fear. We need to keep our minds fixed on him because he will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is stayed in him because he trusts in him. Listen, there is reason to fear if you have not come to Christ. The devil and our own sin cries out for our destruction. But there is one to whom we can flee for peace, for rest, for reconciliation with God, for protection. It is Jesus Christ.

B. David's words are also words of communion or sharing—it is the sharing of a common enemy. He says, the one who is seeking my life is the one who is seeking yours. And I will take care of you. With me you will be in safekeeping. David is assuring that he will protect Abiathar from their common enemy. He will be safe if he will seek his safety in David.

What a powerful depiction of the gospel this is! David depicts for us the Lord Jesus Christ. His enemy is the hostility of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The enemy to fulfilling his purpose is our sin. Our enemy is his enemy. These are enemies we can never defeat. On our own our sin demands the justice of eternal punishment. But if we will come to Christ and stay with Christ we will be safe. We will be safe from the judgment of God. But we will also be safe from the world that has set itself against God and against his Christ.

## **Conclusion**

The prophecy against the house of Eli came as God's expression of rejection of the wicked sons of Eli and Eli's failure to deal with them appropriately. The fulfillment here in this text is a testimony that the word of the Lord will certainly come to pass. Right before the eyes of Saul and David and even before our very own eyes, we observe God declaring that just as his rejection of the priestly house of

Eli was indomitable, so would be his rejection of Saul as king. God's fulfillment of his word against the house of Eli declares that his word concerning Saul and David would also come to pass. In the darkest of days, God is working to fulfill his word. And you can trust his word just as absolutely today, no matter how dark the days become. That is a much needed dose of comfort and assurance for the believer. Let us say with Luther, "My conscience is held captive to the word of God."

Meanwhile, this text is the occasion for serious warning of grave danger for those who reject and disbelieve what God has said. Those who flee to Christ enjoy the assurance of being eternally safe with him. But those who refuse to come to him need to receive the warning that God's threats of eternal punishment for the wicked are not idle attempts at manipulation. They are genuine warnings to be meted out in accord with the holy justice of God.

With Martin Luther, those who make Christ our refuge can sing:  
The Prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him.  
His rage we can endure For lo his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he.  
Lord Sabaoth his name From age to age the same  
And he will win the battle.