

**Introduction**

A man is wrongly convicted of killing his wife and sentenced to death. On the way to prison, however, the bus he is riding in crashes and he escapes. In his freedom he sets out to find the real killer and clear his name. U.S. Marshals are in constant pursuit. He is a fugitive on the run. The fictional story of Dr. Richard Kimble is riveting and exciting as he repeatedly eludes capture. One of the better movies you will see, it was released in 1993 under the title *The Fugitive*. This morning in 1 Samuel 21 we are considering not a work of fiction but the true life-story of God's anointed king, David. He has done no wrong to deserve death, but he is fleeing for his life nonetheless. The present king is in relentless pursuit. The future king is a fugitive, and the desperation of flight puts him to the test.

[Read text and Pray]

Truthfulness and the dependability of one's word is a repeated refrain in the scripture. Truthfulness is central to who God is. It is a hallmark of righteousness. Being a liar is one of the dominant qualities of the devil, who is called a liar and the father of lies. In the New Testament Paul writes the Ephesians with instruction in the gospel and exhortation for how to live in a manner worthy of it. And the very first practical matter he addresses is to put away falsehood and speak the truth. Honesty and accuracy of speech are therefore matters to which we need to return for regular consideration. This morning's text provides us with an opportunity to do so.

David is now on the run. And clearly he is not in the best frame of mind. He reminds me a little of Elijah after the big showdown on Mt Carmel. There Elijah was on the mountain, standing alone and a great revival happened when God sent fire down and consumed the sacrifices. Then Elijah prayed after a three-and-a-half year drought and God sent rain. But immediately thereafter Jezebel threatened his life and he went running in fear. Likewise, David experienced numerous and unprecedented successes on the battlefield against all worldly odds. But now David has experienced deep sorrow at departing from his dear friend Jonathan, and he embarks on life as a fugitive. Clearly he does not manifest the same strength of faith that he had when he stood against the giant Goliath. Yet, as we will take note, the mercy of God and the dependability of his word are as apparent as ever.

Notice first with me . . .

**I. The Deceit of David.**

David appears here some two-and-a-half miles from where Saul had set up the kingdom's capital. He had fled to the prophet and to his friend. Now he comes to the place of the tabernacle and the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech was the great grandson of Eli. Remember Eli was the priest when Hannah brought her son Samuel to serve at the tabernacle. Then a prophecy was given that Eli would be the last priest in his family to live to old age, and his line would be cut off from serving. So here is Ahimelech. David approaches by himself and Ahimelech is alarmed. David was the commander of the army and was probably never seen apart from the company of his soldiers. What could it mean that David now approaches without others?

David proceeds to answer the priest with a tall tale. It seems that he finds it relatively easy to resort to falsehood. He had instructed Jonathan to use the tool of deceit with Saul. Now he comes to Ahimelech with deceit of his own. He says that he is on a secret mission for the king. He is on his way to meet his young men. They will need food and David needs a weapon. The priest indicates

all he has is the holy bread. It is the bread of the Presence. Twelve loaves of bread were set before the Lord in the tabernacle, each loaf representing one of the tribes of Israel. It was replaced every week on the Sabbath and was an offering to the Lord. It represented God's provision for his people.

So the priest inquires whether the young men whom David was going to meet were "clean." You see the bread was actually only to be eaten by the priests and they had to be ceremonially clean in order to do so. But I am really still on David's deceit. He keeps the ball rolling. "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today?" . . . you know, since it is a secret mission and all.

David is spinning quite the yarn. One lie has led to another. He is on a special mission authorized by the king. It is a secret mission. He will be meeting up with his guys directly, and all of them are "clean," having kept themselves from women. But none of this is true. David's deceit is an inescapable aspect of this section of the text. If you think about it we have come across a number of lies in the last number of studies. The text reports these lies but has not made a judgment concerning them because the lies have not been the main point. So then, what are we to think of all these lies? I figure it is time to confront the matter of lying straight on lest we come to take lying less seriously than we ought.

The Bible as a whole asserts that lying is sin. It is a transgression against God. God is particularly and vehemently opposed to untruthfulness. Let's consider a few examples from the scripture which unequivocally demonstrate that lying is wicked. We can start in the beginning. What got humanity into the mess we are in, in terms of sin? Satan came to Eve with a LIE concerning the eating of the forbidden fruit: "You will not surely die." Lying is the m.o. for the chief antagonist of the Lord. He is called the "father of lies." On the other hand, the scripture says that "God is not a man that he should lie." Paul says in his epistle to Titus that "God . . . never lies."

Correspondingly, one of the chief commandments given to Israel has to do with lying. Etched on tablets of stone was this command: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Proverbs 6 lists seven things God hates. Deceit is mentioned twice. God hates a lying tongue and a false witness who breathes out lies. Proverbs 12:22 declares that "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." Proverbs 13:5 asserts that "the righteous hates falsehood." David actually knew better than what he was doing here. His own words are recorded in Psalm 34: "Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit."

The New Testament shows no let up in the condemnation of lying. Ephesians 4:25 instructs us to put away falsehood and speak truth with our neighbor. Colossians 3:9 says, "Do not lie to one another." In Acts 5 we learn that a husband and wife lied about a sum of money they were giving to the early church, and one by one they told their lie and died right on the spot. Peter leveled the charge against them that Satan had filled their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit. At last we cannot ignore the terror of Revelation 21:8. It puts lying in a category of abhorrent crimes: "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, AND ALL LIARS, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

The Bible nowhere says that lying is the right thing to do. However, we must consider two instances in which people who lied and deceived were commended by God. First there were the Hebrew midwives. Pharaoh had commanded them to kill the male children at birth. But they did not obey

the king's command. When the king asked why, they lied. They said that the Hebrew women were unlike Egyptian women and gave birth before the midwife could get there. And the Bible says "So God dealt well with the midwives;" and "Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families." So God, although he despises lying, blessed the midwives who lied because they feared God.

Our next instance is found in Joshua. The Israelites themselves sent two spies, an act that in itself is deceitful, to view the land, especially Jericho. They lodged in the home of Rahab. Word came to the king and he sent to Rahab to hand the men over. But she lied. She hid the men on her roof and told the messengers that she did not know where the men were from and they had left the city just before the closing of the gate. In the New Testament James says the action of Rahab justified her faith. Hebrews says that it was by faith that she gave a friendly welcome to the spies. What are we to make of these examples? Christians differ in their understandings.

One of our favorite pastors, Alistair Begg, says this:

Let's just be clear that we do not believe in situation ethics. We do not believe that the situation transmutes what is bad into something that is good because of the context. A lie is still a lie is still a lie. And although I may lie—for example, if someone comes to the front door of my house and says, "I've come to kill your wife and your children. Are they all in the house?" I may well lie at that point. But it is a lie, and it remains a lie, and I am committed to tell the truth. Therefore, unlike the situational ethicist, who says, "Don't worry about it, that's the only thing you could do and should do," the Christian believer says, "That was the only thing I was prepared to do, but when I knelt by my bed in the evening, I asked forgiveness for having broken the law of God and telling lies."

Sam Storms, meanwhile, considers there is a difference between falsehoods and lies. I have heard Todd Friel exhibit the same kind of reasoning. Storms rightly points out that "one's conduct or actions are vehicles for truth and falsehood, authenticity and deceit, no less so than one's words." Storms then asks, "Is the Christian ever justified in communicating a falsehood?" He then answers, "A lie is an intentional falsehood that violates someone's right to know the truth. But there are cases in which people forfeit their right to know the truth. So the question is not whether it is ever morally permissible to lie, but 'What is a lie?' A lie is the intentional declaration or communication of a falsehood designed to deceive someone who has a moral and legal right to know the truth. A lie is telling an untruth to someone to whom you are morally and legally obligated to speak the truth. There are, however, certain occasions in which you are not under obligation to tell someone the truth (e.g., in times of war, criminal assault, and so on.)."

So Begg says in that situation where the only imaginable thing you can do is be untruthful, admit that a lie nevertheless is sin. Storms says that when you are speaking to someone who has forfeited their right to know the truth, it is not a lie to withhold the truth from them. The concern in the reasoning of Storms becomes that if I ever feel justified in speaking a falsehood, will I come to be lax in telling the truth as the regular course of my life.

If you fall in line with the reasoning of either Begg or Storms, I can't fault you. What you must see is that there probably will never be a time when you are hiding Jews from the Nazis and have to answer their question when a knock comes at the door. "No; no Jews are here in my home. Come in and see."

Let's now apply ourselves to understand the action of David when he came to Achish. One could argue that David is in a situation of war, an unjust fugitive from a maniacal ruler, and his falsehood was justified. I tend to think, however, that David has fallen into a pattern of dishonesty and his

responses to Ahimelech are unjustified. They exhibit a lack of faith. In fact, I believe that he comes to recognize that his dishonesty was connected with disastrous results which took place. Chapter 22:6-22 tell how Saul got wind that Ahimelech had given David aid and killed 85 priests, all but one of the house of Ahimelech. David said to the one who escaped, "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house."

So what should we say about lying? We must not do it. The times when falsehood seems permissible will be few to none. In general let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no." This text communicates to us that as great as David was, he was still a sinner. He was subject to fear and fleshly inclinations. He succumbed to them. He was a sinner like each of us—one who needs salvation from the just wrath of God.

But this text also points us to David's greater son by way of contrast. Peter declares of Jesus that "He committed no sin, [and get this] neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." Jesus never deceived so that he might bear the sin of our deceit upon himself and so that we might stop deceiving and speak the truth.

If you have ever told a lie—and no one has never told a lie except for Christ—if you have ever told a lie, you have sinned against God. That one sin alone makes you a breaker of God's law. And yet how many lies have you told? You merit the condemnation of God a thousand times over, not to mention any other of your sins. You must be punished, for God will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. But again, this is why God sent his Son into the world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the Son of God" (John 3:16-18).

Liars can escape the eternally burning lake of fire! Liars can be forgiven. Liars can be changed by God's grace and for his glory through Jesus Christ. Oh that you would come to trust in Jesus Christ even at this moment.

## **II. The Provision of the Priest.**

Let's turn our attention next to the priest because what he did here is irregular. David walks into the presence of the priest almost like a teenager walks into his mom's kitchen— "Whatcha got to eat?" According to the text, David said, "What do you have on hand?" David asked for five loaves of bread. All that Ahimelech had was the holy bread, the Showbread that was placed before the presence of the Lord. It was reserved to be eaten by the priests alone. However, the priest is willing to allow David to have it if he and his men are ceremonially clean. Upon David's assurance, verse 6 says that the priest gave David the holy bread. It is reiterated that the reason is that there was no other bread available.

Had there been other bread available, he would not have given the bread of the presence to David. But since he was in need of nourishment, the ceremonial stipulations could be compromised. But was the priest right to have operated this way? Well, none other than Jesus says that he was. When Jesus and his disciples were making their way through the fields on the Sabbath, the men were plucking heads of grain and eating them. The Pharisees were aghast. Harvesting was not lawful on the Sabbath. But Jesus asked whether they had not read what David did when he was

hungry. He received bread from the house of God, the bread of the presence. It was contrary to the ceremonial law, but even Jesus points out that man was not made for the ceremony, but the ceremony for man. When well-being is at stake, the ceremony may be compromised. It is the same as the idea that when your ox falls into a ditch on the Sabbath, you get him out. Likewise, if you can do good on the Sabbath, do it. God did not make man to follow ceremonial rules. He did give us rules to follow, and they are good. Indeed, they are for our good. But we must not commit the error of placing the form and ceremony above well-being.

And so the holy bread of the tabernacle became David's daily bread. Jesus teaches us in what we call the Lord's prayer to pray: give us this day our daily bread. In his kindness the Lord provides for us the basic necessities of life. He desires that we seek them from him because he is the ultimate fountain from which they come. That the priest has been the channel through which David's bread came is a reminder to David that God's faithfulness is a constant. Have you had your fill today? Do not miss that it is the Lord who gives what you need to be alive. He supplies our basic needs according to his riches in glory. Gratitude is such a fundamental ingredient for joy in our lives. It expresses our awareness that the One God who needs nothing is the one who supplies our needs. And we who deserve nothing but wrath are in a constant state of receiving the opposite of what we deserve. Contentment in our hearts rests on humility. Humility is simply the attitude that grasps what we actually deserve and stands amazed that day-by-day God overlooks what we deserve to provide for us what we need.

Since we are on the topic of daily bread, we should always bear in mind what Jesus told Satan in his time of testing. While daily bread is necessary for living, the bread of God's word is even more so. Long for the word of God more than you long for bread. Bad as David's hunger was at this time, it was presumably David who said, (Psalm 119) "Give me life according to your word!" And "I hold my life continually in my hand, but I do not forget your law." And "Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart."

### **III. The Sword of Goliath.**

After receiving bread, David expressed his need of a weapon. He asked, "Have you not a spear or a sword at hand?" In the providence of God there was a sword available for David. It was the sword of Goliath whom David had struck down. David received it gladly. This sword was the weapon used to sever the head of Goliath from his body and give testimony to the faithfulness and strength of the Lord over David's enemy. It could be a reminder to David how the Lord protected him when he stood before the giant, how the Lord slew his enemy but also of how one goes in to battle. David had gone to fight Goliath with complete confidence in the delivering power of God. This sword bore witness to the faithfulness of the Lord.

It was not the greatness of David that had won the day. It was not because he believed in himself. The day was won through the power and working of the Lord. And that is how David has to learn to live now as a fugitive on the run—not by the might of the flesh but nor by power of man but by the Spirit and power of the Lord. The same is true for you and me every day. We are told in the New Testament that we are in a battle every day. We are warned of a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. We are warned that the world who hated Jesus will hate his followers as well. We are warned that temptation is common to man. How do we fight these battles? Not with the flesh. Not with schemes and falsehoods.

Paul says we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. So we take up armor but it is an armor

consisting of spiritual realities. We stand in truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And we pray. Like David our victory will not be won by the flesh but by the power of God. All these matters stated in the most simple terms are these. Don't live a day without a conscious mindfulness of the word of God, the righteousness of God, the salvation of God in Christ, the power of God in the Spirit, the sword of the Spirit God's word. Read it; memorize it; meditate upon it; understand it; love it; obey it; and implement it.

#### **IV. The Mercy of God.**

We start off talking about David's deceit and then we observe the faithfulness and merciful provision of the God who is repulsed by deceit. And we may wonder, wait a minute. Why is God blessing David when he seems to be faltering in his faith? Surely David does not deserve such magnanimity. No he does not. Each of us is no different either. God does not provide for us because we are worthy. The Lord does not do for us because we are godly but because the Lord is gracious. Though we are faithless, he remains faithful. He is good!

#### **Conclusion**

In many ways Christ's followers live life on this earth as fugitives. We are not a threat to this world, but the world sees us that way. We don't belong. The world loves to use the term "phobic," but truth be told, it is the world which like Saul is phobic of those who threaten its desires. We may many times feel like fugitives, but let us not resort to deceit. Let us always be those who speak the truth in love. And let us rest in the peace that our God will provide everything we need to be faithful to him.