

July 17, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: *The Life of David*
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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DIVINELY ARRANGED CIRCUMSTANCES – AGAIN

1 Samuel 29:1-11

In our last study in David's life, we learned how he chose not to wait for God to deliver him but resorted to the ungodly Achish of the Philistines (27:1-12). Achish graciously gave David the city of Ziklag where he and his 600 men and their families settled down for about a year and a half. During that time, David and his men regularly went out to plunder and kill the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. David led Achish to believe that they were attacking the people of Judah. This led the king to errantly believe that David had made himself a stench to the people of his homeland, which was far from true.

So thorough was David's deceit that, according to the beginning of chapter twenty-eight, Achish asked David to be his bodyguard, to which David probably had no choice but to concede. Now he was in over his head. Apparently, David never stopped to consider what would happen if the Philistines went to war against Israel, which was a common occurrence. That is exactly the scenario at the opening of chapter twenty-eight. The Philistines were gathering to do battle with Israel and David was expected to act as the king's bodyguard, and his men were expected to fight for the Philistines, the enemies of God's people. What a mess he was in! How was David going to lie his way out of this one?

David's problems began when he decided to take matters of his survival into his own hands instead of waiting on God. He chose to seek rescue from Saul through the Philistines, and now he needed to be rescued from the Philistines.

This is not an unusual situation for Christians. Sometimes it takes many years to discover that a decision we made in conflict with

God's will results in stressful ramifications. I think I am the classic do-it-yourselfer. I love to tackle problems or projects, feeling quite sure I can figure things out for myself. Too many times I have learned that once I was in the middle of a mess, I was going to need help getting out.

That is generally not a serious matter when we are working with electronics, or wood, or concrete and other material things. But when people are involved, finding ourselves in the middle of a mess can be frightening. Where do we turn? Who do we ask for help? For the Christian there is always our Lord's invitation, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). Or the invitation to "*Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you*" (1 Peter 5:7).

That is where the shepherd psalmist found himself. He had worked himself into a situation where an ungodly king fully expected him to attack his own people and help kill King Saul who David had refused to harm on two earlier occasions. David was in that quagmire because he had not been honest. How would he get out of this one?

David's Deception Was Convincing (vv.1-3).

It seemed like everything was working out just fine for David and his subtle plan of deception. But in a time of crisis questions were raised (vv.1-3a). The perennial enemy in those days, the Philistines, gathered to do battle with God's people. *Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel (v.1).*

The Philistine army marched from Gath to Aphek, a distance of about 30 miles north or about a two or three day journey. Aphek was still about 40 miles from where they would set up camp and arrange for battle in Shunam. Saul and the Israelites gathered a few miles away from Shunam at the Spring of Harod at the foot of Mt. Gilboa, where the battle would take place.

Picture these ungodly pagans, these enemies of Israel deeply inserted in the land that God had given to the tribe of Issachar. The people of God should have removed the Philistines from their five chief cities 600 years earlier under Joshua's leadership. But they didn't. Therefore, God permitted His people to fail in their task so

that He could use the Philistines to test the people's loyalty. The areas of disobedience to God in our lives will be the points that come to cause us the most trouble. If the people of God had obeyed God, these Philistine enemies would not even be alive, much less penetrating into the heart of Israel to do battle.

Now the sad news is that David and his men were among the enemies. *As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish (v.2).* The rear guard was the safest place in an advancing army. Not only was David with the Philistines, but he was in the most privileged position with them. David and company were in the rear with Achish because the king had made David his bodyguard. We learned that truth in the beginning of chapter twenty-eight. *In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life" (1 Samuel 28:1-2).*

Though it appeared David was in a favored position, the truth is that his deception had placed David in a difficult situation. He had been pretending to attack the enemies of Achish for the past year and a half. He had regularly brought some of the booty from battle to Achish. He succeeded in pulling the wool over the king's eyes. Now he was in a real pickle. Surely David and his men did not have a clear conscience about going into battle against their relatives.

We are all familiar with the saying, "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." That seems to apply in this situation. It also seems to apply in the modern context of politics and intrigue in our nation. There is little doubt in the minds of most Americans that the Clinton family lies quite regularly. It is possible that Bill and Hillary have shaded the truth, bent the truth, or demolished the truth for so long that they are not even aware when they do it. They illustrate the problem that sinners who are enslaved by such sins become so accustomed to the condition that it not only does not bother them, but ultimately they believe it is acceptable behavior. Such is the deplorable condition of alcoholics, drug addicts,

and sex addicts. And more deplorable still is the fact that these kinds of behaviors are acceptable to many if not most of our fellow citizens.

Surely a man after God's own heart did not have a clear conscience about marching off to war to fight against his relatives who were part of God's chosen people. How did he and his men get into such a fix? David illustrated the principle that flirting with sin too often results in marriage to sin, which is a marriage made in hell! Last week I recommended that everyone read the article that Ed Stetzer wrote in Christianity today on Sunday, July 10. One thing that impacted me from that article was Stetzer's reference to a previous interview with a Southern Baptist pastor. The pastor had confessed to Stetzer, "Alcohol became more of a need than a want. As success and stress increased, the need to "relax" became more of a habit than an occasional thing. I started to hide it from family. I made promises to never drink during "work time," which of course, began to shrink. My family and a couple of my staff expressed concern in a loving way, but I said I could "handle it" (major flag!)."

"I can handle it" is a lie as pernicious as "You will not surely die." How does one extract himself from such a quandary? He could tell the blunt truth, but that would have resulted in horrible consequences in which even innocent people would have been hurt. He can't really tell more lies because that is like a drug addict taking more drugs to get over drug addiction. Consider Richard Phillip's conclusion on the matter. "David is now a typically wayward servant of God. He has made a classic mistake to which we are also prone: attempting to lead a double life with respect to Christ and the world. David had sought a temporal salvation from the Philistines while he sought his eternal salvation with God. David was like a person today who wants to go to heaven and so professes faith in Jesus. But he also wants financial security, so he hoards his money and follows the stock market with religious devotion. He wants a satisfying career, so he compromises his integrity in the workplace. He wants pleasure and approval, so he drinks from the trough of sensual worldly entertainment. And desiring an eternity in heaven, on Sundays he goes back and pays his respects to Jesus Christ at Church." (Richard Phillips, *Reformed Expository Commentary*, "1 Samuel," Puritan and Reformed Publishing, Phillipsburg: NJ, 2012, p.486).

I wonder if David might have called out to God in prayer. His psalms indicate that David often sought God for help. A good prayer would have been: “Oh Lord God in heaven. I have been a foolish man to try to deceive Achish. I acted to preserve myself, and my family, and friends, but not to honor You. Forgive me, and show me how to get out of this mess.”

The commanders had good reason to question the presence of David and his 600 men. We read, *the commanders of the Philistines said, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”* (v.3). The commanders were probably the “lords” over the five Philistine cities, of which Achish was one. They were shocked to see Hebrews among the soldiers gathering for the attack. They expressed their question in a way that implied disdain. People often used the term, “Hebrews” to describe migrants, or bedouin types of people who overran other people groups. The term was rooted in the race of that massive people group that left Egypt in about 1440 BC and proceeded to engulf other people groups along the way to Palestine. The Israelites preferred to be called by that name because it was rooted in Father Jacob whose name God changed to *Israel*, the Prince who prevails.

The foolish and the wise (v.3b-5). It is sad when deception is successful (v.3b). David fooled Achish completely. *And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, “Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day.”* Achish saw no evidence at all that David was duplicitous. David had fully convinced him. Thinking back over the last year and a half, Achish sincerely had to conclude that he did not find one fault in David’s loyalty to him. The world of sinners would consider this to be a smashing success. God whose law requires, “Thou shalt not lie,” considered this to be utter failure on the part of the man He had already chosen to be king over His people.

Not everyone bought the lie (vv.4-5). Not everyone in life is as gullible as Achish was. The old saying goes: “You can fool some of the people all the time. You can fool all the people some of the time. But you can’t fool all the people all the time.” That is not Scripture but it does seem to be true. Sooner or later someone is going to see or hear something that makes them suspicious. Sooner or later another of God’s laws will come to bear. When Israel conquered the promised

land, the tribes on the east side of the Jordan River drove out the enemies first. Then they had to agree to help their brothers drive out the enemies on the west side of the Jordan. In that context, God said through Moses: “*But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out*” (Numbers 32:23). That is one of God’s laws of life and it does work.

While Achish was fully deceived, Godly wisdom prevailed even among ungodly men. (4) *But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, “Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? (5) Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands’?”* The fellow lords found proof for their concern in **that** song. These other kings or commanders brought up the song the women sang after David killed Goliath who was from Gath, the city of Achish. That same song had evoked jealousy in Saul. Now it evoked fear from these lords.

They also found proof for their concern in past experience. Some years earlier, there were Israelites who had filtered into the Philistine society. All was fine until it appeared that Israel was going to be victorious in battle against the Philistines. *Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine’s sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:20-21).* The commanders were not interested in learning again that in the heat of the battle 600 soldiers switched sides.

Furthermore, the commanders found proof for their concern in a basic principle of incompatibility. There is a principle that says that the pagan world, which is under the influence of Satan, has been at odds with God’s people since the Garden of Eden. The Philistine lords understood this. Maybe they remembered a few years back when they had captured the Ark of the Covenant and their pagan gods

fell down before it and were wrecked. At the very least, they knew that there was something different about those Israelites. That there were opposing sides was obvious. Which side do you think David is going to take? The Philistine lords questioned, *For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here?* Good point.

We easily forget that there are “sides” in life. If we are truly born again, God has taken us away from the world’s side and put us on His side. The world understands that we are expected to be different. The world fully expects a child of God to side with God against the ungodly ways of the world. Too often it appears that the people of the world understand Jesus’ teaching better than His people do. He taught, *“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”* (John 15:19). So why do Christians try to act like there are no sides?

All the clamor about unity today demands that God’s people abandon their siding with the truth of God’s Word and take up the error and sin of the world. Much pressure is on us to stop being divisive. We who love God and stand with His truth are perceived as hateful troublemakers. But what else can we do? We must stand firmly, graciously, with both feet on God’s side and let the world say what they will say about us and do what they choose to do to us. But pretending to be on the world’s side is not an option.

God Intervened to Protect His Foolish Servant (vv.6-11).

How thoroughly God’s servant deceived the unrighteous man (vv.6-9). Poor Achish was convinced that David was honest. He was clueless about what David had been doing. *Then Achish called David and said to him, “As the LORD lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day”* (v.6).

What do we make of the oath Achish made in the name of the Lord? Some would conclude that Achish had become a believer in Yahweh. If he had, would he be attacking Yahweh’s people? It is more likely that he took the oath in Yahweh’s name out of deference

to David. Swearing in the names of his gods would have been an offense. Apparently Achish understood better than David did how he should have been living.

He thought David was a saint. *And Achish answered David and said, “I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God”* (v.9a). One might wonder how he could have been so deceived. Or part of this gushy compliment might have been an effort on the part of Achish to save face because he is dismissing the man he appointed as his bodyguard. The irony is that Achish called David an angel of God. The word translated *angel* speaks of a messenger. David truly was a “messenger” of God. He was a prophet who would write down a sizeable number of messages from God which are recorded in the Psalms – which makes his sin all the more reprehensible.

At the same time, Achish does illustrate the principle that praise for a servant of God from the ungodly can be good. If they see our good works and praise God for it, that is the will of God (Mat. 5:16). But in this case, David’s actions were not worthy of the world’s praise because they were not pure or sincere. If our works of ministry are not in keeping with the truths of the Bible, the world might praise us for being something God never intends for us to be.

In response to Achish’s invitation to leave, David insisted that he was innocent. *And David said to Achish, “But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”* (v.8). Even this weak protest was pretentious. Who did David refer to by the phrase, *the enemies of my lord the king?* Was the “lord the king” a reference to Achish, meaning that David would fight against Israelites? Was “the lord the king” a reference to Saul, meaning the real enemy was the Philistines? Was “the lord the king” a reference to God, meaning that the enemy was both Saul and Achish? David chose his words wisely so that it would have been hard to pin him down.

If you or I were God in this situation, what would we do? Do we judge Achish and the pagan Philistines? Do we pour out judgment against Saul as God had promised He would do? Do we chasten David for wandering off into deep sin? Or do we move the hearts of the ungodly, pagan Philistine lords to open a door of deliverance for

our wayward servant David? What an amazingly gracious God we have!

God was working in the hearts of the pagans to protect His servant. “*Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you*” (v.6b). “*So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines*” (v.7). “*Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle’*” (v.9b). Achish’s fellow commanders were adamant about David and his men not going into battle. Did David breath a sigh of relief when he heard this? Did God have anything to do with the commanders’ determination?

Thankfully God’s will was accomplished (vv.10-11). Achish invited David to leave. *Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light*” (v.10). This was an honorable discharge. This was the only out David had that would keep him from blemishing his reputation with the Israelites.

David did God’s will and so did the Philistines. *So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel* (v.11). Often there is great irony in the outworking of God’s will. Here, as God worked out His will, He delivered David from questionable circumstances. Now no one could blame David for helping to kill Saul. No one could say that David took the throne of Israel by force. In fact, on the very day Saul was killed, David was almost a hundred miles away killing Amalakites, which Saul had refused to do, which was the final straw regarding his kingship.

Do you know if God has ever arranged circumstances to keep you out of situations that would ruin you and your testimony? It is possible that when we are glorified and with God in heaven, we will be able to see how God worked out the details of our lives. If that is the case, we will no doubt be shocked to learn how many times we were on the cusp of spiritual or even physical disaster, but God changed circumstances to deliver us. We must praise God for His grace and mercy.