

September 18, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: The Life of David
Community Baptist Church
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LISTEN FOR THE LORD 2 Samuel 5:17-25

You probably remember the story of God communicating with Elijah when he was down in the dumps. That is an old phrase I heard a lot when I was a youngster. Being down in the dumps is to be discouraged or disheartened. But the dump was also the place where we once took our garbage. The phrase can be confusing. For example, there was a lady many years ago who wore an odd looking hat. Her sister commented on it to which the woman replied, “Yesterday I was down in the dumps so I picked up this new hat.” “Oh,” her sister said, “I wondered where you got it.”

Back to Elijah. There was a day when he wasn’t doing so well. He had witnessed God working in so many amazing ways as God used him to raise a dead boy to life, to destroy much of Baal worship in Israel, and to pray for rain that ended a three-year drought. But when wicked Queen Jezebel put Elijah in her sights, he crumbled, ran for the hills and ended up in a lonely cave despairing of life. God came to the discouraged prophet and told him to listen. God sent a mighty wind but did not speak in or through the wind. God sent a massive earthquake but did not speak in or through the earthquake. Then God spoke to the discouraged prophet in a quiet whisper.

How does God speak to you and me? Many Americans think that when catastrophe strikes, it is God trying to tell us something. But many other Christians act as though God never actually speaks. In their opinion, we are just kind of out here on our own, trying to make the best of our circumstances until the Lord comes to rapture us. Surely, God is more communicative than the average husband. Surely, He desires to fellowship with His people. And surely, God wants us to know His desires for us. But are we listening? Or is it possible we do hear God speak, but His desire for us really doesn’t make sense?

Multiple times the Bible record reveals that David inquired of the LORD. David wanted to know God’s will, especially in times of battle when he was laying his life and the lives of other men on the line. We can understand why knowing God’s plan at such times of crisis was important to David. In this part of David’s story, we read how God revealed His plan on two occasions that were very similar. And yet, God’s plan was different for the two situations.

We need to learn to inquire of God and then listen as He answers from His Word, through His Spirit, and through the way He arranges circumstances. Sometimes in our circumstances God does send the sound of marching in the balsam trees. It might not be that miraculous, but God does lead His people. Are we listening?

The LORD Said, “Go Up” (vv.17-21).

In a difficult circumstance, the LORD was faithful to reveal His plan to His servant (vv.17-19). The difficult circumstance was that the enemy advanced against the new king. *When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. But David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim(vv.17-18).*

According to these verses, the Philistine leaders heard that David was now the king of Israel. This was the David they had known in the past who had once marched in their army. He had been the body guard of Achish. By all evidence, it appeared that David was their friend. Even while he was king of Judah he was fighting against Israel and, therefore, was Philistia’s ally, right? So was he still a friend of Achish?

Now David was the king of the people who the Philistines had defeated seven years earlier. They were the enemy. Things had become confusing. Maybe they could ignore David as he ruled in Judah for seven years. But now things had changed. And while it was obvious that outward circumstances had changed, had anything really changed in David’s heart? Was he really ever a friend and ally of Philistia? Deep down he was always the enemy of Philistia. This is the danger of sending conflicting messages. If David had been forthright and authentic all those years, there would have been no doubt.

In the end, the Philistine leaders decided they needed to respond. They deployed their army within striking distance of Jerusalem. It

appears that the plan was to divide the nation again between Judah and the northern tribes. The valley of Rephaim began only about one mile southwest of David's city, old Jerusalem. It seems likely then that the "stronghold" to which David went when he heard the Philistines had arrived was the stronghold of Jerusalem. He was about to face a serious test.

It would be difficult for us to overemphasize the importance of this battle and the one that followed. David was just settling in to the capital city that Israel had not been able to hold in the past. Regrettably, Joshua had to record in his day, *But the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive out, so the Jebusites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day (Joshua 15:63)*. Now the city was in David's hands. Would he be able to retain it? If the Philistines could have defeated David and split the kingdom again, it is unlikely that David ever would have been able to form a coalition strong enough to establish the kingdom of God.

David and his army had to win this battle. The future of Israel depended on it. This was like a "D-Day," or the Beaches of Normandy thing, or an Iwo Jima in American and British history. The battle was so important that two centuries later Isaiah made a passing reference to it with the expectation that everyone would know what he was talking about. *For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim; as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused; to do his deed – strange is his deed! and to work his work – alien is his work! (Isaiah 28:21)*.

What do you and I do when we face critical decisions, yea, crises in our lives? Typically we try to find someone we consider to be wise to give us advice. That is not a bad idea. In fact, God commends this practice. He said through Solomon, *Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14)*. However, if our only source of wisdom or advice is fellow humans, we might have limited resources. Our fellow humans are plagued by the same limitations we all have. Conversely, if we are in fellowship with God, it makes most sense for us to ask Him what we should do. Will He tell us? Will He answer? How?

We find answers to those questions as we discover that David sought the LORD's help. The enemy was knocking on the door, *And David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand" (v.19)*.

David made it a practice to check with God. Seven times in his story we read specifically that he inquired of the LORD (1 Sam. 22:10,15; 23:2,4; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19,23). In so doing, David pictured for us again, a common practice of the perfect king Jesus Christ who taught and illustrated full dependence on the Heavenly Father. He said, *"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30)*.

People who are sincerely intent on doing God's will regularly talk to Him about that will. Desiring to follow God's will in obedience, David sought the LORD. He requested direction by asking the LORD, "Shall I go up?" He requested a promise, "Will You give them in to my hand?" It is so much easier to obey God's command when we are fully assured of God's promise. God's Word contains so many promises. Many of them apply specifically to the nation of Israel or to particular individuals. For example, promises that God gave to Jacob were for Jacob. However, we can claim similar promises principally. Here is an example. To Jacob God promised, *"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Genesis 28:15)*. You and I are not Jacob, but it certainly would be encouraging if we could claim God's promise. Actually, we can because God said through the writer to Hebrew Christians that we who trust Christ have the same promise. *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5)*.

David asked God for help and God answered him. Obviously David's method of inquiring was through the work of the priest Abiathar. Some elements of that kind of intercession are a mystery to us. We don't ask God like that. We ask God through prayer as we claim the promises He gives in His Word, the Bible. God answers us by leading us to clear instruction or statements in the Bible. He answers through God the Holy Spirit giving us understanding of Bible truths and peace of heart. God often answers by arranging circumstances in our lives, and sending people who He uses to enlighten us. How good it is to hear from God. David stands in vivid contrast to Saul who inquired of God but heard nothing because he had given himself to sin and rebellion against God (1 Sam 14:37; 28:6).

David inquired of the LORD. The LORD answered. David obeyed, and the LORD burst forth (vv.20-21). The LORD simply kept His word to David. *And David came to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. And he said, "The LORD has burst through my enemies before me like a bursting flood." Therefore the name of that place is called Baal-perazim (v.20).*

We learn from this verse that David led his army to attack the Philistines head-on at Mt. Perazim probably about four miles southwest of Jerusalem. David named the place "Baal-perazim." That name literally means *Lord of the breaks*. At that battle David saw God's power break out against the enemy to deliver the Philistines into David's hand. Every time David rode past that place he remembered what God had done there.

It is good for us to remember what God has done for us, the lessons He has taught us. We should have a place where we write down or record the promises God has kept, the lessons He has taught, the prayers by which we have begged Him. Set up your memorials, your Ebenezers. That strange word comes from the situation when God caused the Philistines to return the Ark of the Covenant which they had captured in battle. In response to God's work, Samuel led the nation of Israel in corporate repentance and thanksgiving to God. *Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12).* Has the Lord helped you, has He broken out in mercy and grace to secure you? Set up a marker.

And while we are careful to note God's work in our behalf, we also need to be like David and remove lesser gods. *And the Philistines left their idols there, and David and his men carried them away (v.21).* Let's go back to the captured ark picture from Samuel's day. The Philistines captured the ark because they assumed it represented God and His power. They were right. When they placed this symbol of God's presence in the presence of their gods, God knocked over their gods and broke them (1 Samuel 5:1-7). In the case with David's battle, the Philistines took their gods with them into battle like so many good luck charms. But their gods didn't help them. In defeat, they ran away and left their useless idols behind.

David illustrated for us that the only right response when God breaks out in power against the false gods, the sins, the habits of this fallen world is for us to destroy them. David carried away the

expressions of false religion, Satan's lies, and presumably destroyed them. In 1 Chronicles 14:12, we learn that David and his men burned them as God commanded such destruction in His law (Numbers 33:52). When God gives victory over sin and Satan's lies, destroy every vestige of that false god in your life. Do not carry the idol over to a dark corner of your heart and cover it up just in case you might need it again. If it is sin and rebellion against God, you won't ever need it again. Period! Destroy it. Not only as we argue for God's truth with others, but in our own lives first, we must, *destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).*

The Lord Said, "You Shall Not Go Up" (vv.22-25).

The LORD revealed a different plan (vv.22-24a). David quickly found himself in a situation that required him to check with the LORD again. A trial came up again. *And the Philistines came up yet again and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim (v.22).* What were they doing back in the valley? We are reminded that a resounding victory over sin and the enemy does not mean that we will never see the enemy again. Some people fight with the same enemy their entire lives. So, too, it appears that it was only a short time later that the Philistines showed up again in the same place where God had defeated them for David. How did David respond? He didn't wonder why God allowed this same test again. He didn't criticize God. He didn't assume that he had made a mistake the first time and conclude that God really had not given victory as he thought. He did not tell God that repeating the same test was unfair.

David inquired of the LORD and learned something new. *And when David inquired of the LORD, he said, "You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees. And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees (vv.23-24a).* You and I are prone to conclude that if David had already faced this same test a few weeks earlier, why inquire of the Lord again? If what you did last time worked, just do the same thing. Especially David the warrior would be able to employ the same strategy. But David inquired of the LORD in order to know the LORD's plan.

Human wisdom is so limited and that often makes us creatures of habit. It is so easy for us to become overly confident and self-assured in the work of the Lord. That is why it is critical for us to always know that we are relying on the Lord for today! Inquiring of the LORD daily, in every circumstance, even in repeated circumstances is what “the righteous **live** by faith” looks like.

Sure enough, David learned that God had a new lesson to teach in familiar-looking circumstances. This time God desired for David to attack from the rear and listen for His signal before attacking. God’s signal would be the sound of marching in the tops of the Balsam trees. Think about it. Here were several thousand soldiers putting their lives on the line. They were going to attack several thousand enemy soldiers whose only focus was to kill them. And their success or failure, their lives or death, was going to hinge on the sound of marching in the balsam trees? What does the sound of marching balsam trees even sound like? How would David sell this idea to his army?

David was confident that the Spirit of the LORD would lead them into battle. The sound David was to wait for was the sound of the Spirit of God marching into the front lines before God’s people. Sound weird? God is not relegated to human experience. God can do His work any way He chooses. The LORD keeps His promises even if they seem as strange to us as *strange is his deed! and to work his work – alien is his work!* (Isaiah 28:21b) God’s way might sound odd or even unacceptable to us, but if we love and trust Him we will follow Him.

David obeyed and the LORD struck down the enemy army (vv.24b-25). Can we trust God to keep His word? Immediately on the heels of God telling David to listen for the marching sound in the trees, He said, “*Then rouse yourself, for then the LORD has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines*” (v.24b). The LORD told David that as soon as they were aware that God was doing His promised part, they needed to get up and charge into the battle. Their duty was to respond quickly (*rouse yourself*). Our nature is to wait a bit to see if God is really going to do what He promised. It is easy for us to put the LORD to the test regarding His promises. Better for us to direct our thinking and our trust according to what the Bible says.

A universal truth from God’s Word says that obedience proves trust. *And David did as the LORD commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba to Gezer* (v.25). David and the army rooted

out the Philistines and drove them out of the country. Our text says they were removed from Geba to Gezer. 1 Chronicles 14:16 stated that it was Gibeon to Gezer. As far as we can tell, the towns of Geba and Gibeon are within the same area and sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where those ancient cities were.

At any rate, it is obvious that the Philistines had to flee to the north and then west because David had cut off their retreat route by attacking from the rear. Also, and more important, this move allowed David to root out all the Philistines who had been living between Gibeon and Gezer since the battle of Saul’s death on Mt. Gilboa. Huh? Imagine that? God had a good reason for His odd sounding plan of the sneak attack from the south. God working through David moved out Philistines who had been in the area since their victory at Aphek (1 Samuel 4). In fact, God did just what He had promised earlier. Abner had related God’s promise when he told the Israelites, “*For the LORD has promised David, saying, ‘By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies’*” (2 Samuel 3:18).

David inquired of the LORD, waited on the LORD, then moved by following the LORD. It was a new method for the nation. The people in Samuel’s day wanted a human king to judge them and go out before them to fight their battles (1 Samuel 8:19-20). The king God gave them chose not to wait on the LORD but forged ahead and offered sacrifice he was not permitted to do (1 Samuel 13:8-9). David on the other hand proved that there is always a time to wait on God and learn His will. There is always a time to move out for God and do His will.

Sometimes we fail to obey God by continuing to wait after God has already issued the order to go. Sometimes we fail by continuing to go all the time and never take time to inquire of the Lord and wait on Him. We easily forget the balance that they who “wait upon the LORD” shall renew their strength, so that we run, walk, and fly (Isaiah 40.31). If we are afraid of God, we will always be uncertain about what we should do. If we love God with all our hearts, we will desire to know His will and desire to do His will for His glory. I find it easy to fear God and even sometimes to be afraid of God. But I find it challenging to love Him supremely who loves me incomprehensibly. Supreme love for God inquires of Him, listens to Him, follows Him.