

Session 13 David: The Beauty of Shame-Free Living

INTRODUCTION

We're going to call this, "David: The Beauty of Shame-Free Living." 1 Samuel 21:1. I'll tell you the story and then we're going to look at the discovery that David had at the end of this very, very dramatic story. This is one of the great tragedies in David's life. By the way, the whole of this course will be confined to 1 Samuel. We won't actually get into the other parts of David's life, because it would take many, many sessions to do that. 1 Samuel 16-31 is actually the part that depicts David's struggle. 2 Samuel really shows what David does in prosperity. Most of us are still in the struggle stage. It seems appropriate to focus our energy, since we only have twenty sessions, upon the beauty of the Lord as it's revealed through Psalms and the episodes of the first part of David's life during his early anointing and being trained in the wilderness. It ends with him being crowned as king at age 30. That's as far as we're going to be able to get in this course. Maybe we'll do a Part 2 in a year or two, and go on to discuss the second part of David's life.

THE FIRST GREAT TRAGEDY IN DAVID'S LIFE

1 Samuel 21:1 is one of the great tragedies in David's life. "Now David came to [the city of] Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, 'Why are you alone, and no one is with you?'" (1 Sam. 21:1).

First, the city of Nob was the place where the tabernacle of Moses was established. Shiloh was the original place and it was destroyed. The Ark of the Covenant was stolen by the Philistines and it was recovered, but it was left in disrepair, out of the way. It wasn't even returned to the tabernacle of Moses. The Ark no longer rested in the most holy place. So one of David's most important missions when he became king was to get the Ark of the Covenant back into the holy place. Here in the city of Nob the tabernacle was set up until David had it moved to Jerusalem, and then he put the Ark in it and all kinds of things. Ahimelech was one of the descendants of the household of Eli the priest; that was his family line. Eli's priesthood is a very dramatic story, because they fell into grievous sin before the Lord. The Lord spoke a word of judgment in 1 Samuel 2-3 over the priesthood of Eli and over his family; in two different places this judgment is proclaimed. And what happens is that this judgment will actually be worked out in this episode of David's life. We'll look at it in a little more detail in a few moments.

AHIMELECH WAS AFRAID WHEN HE WENT OUT TO MEET DAVID

Ahimelech, the high priest, actually would have been the second in command in the nation of Israel. First there's the king, and the office of king was a brand-new position. Up until that time, the high priest and the judge, or the main prophet, would have been the main two people in authority. Ahimelech was the high priest operating in the priesthood in the city of Nob. He was afraid when he went out to meet David. Why? Number one: he had heard rumors that things with Saul and David weren't exactly right and that David had lost some of Saul's favor. The rumors had been traveling around quite a bit that the king was angry with his new son-in-law. Saul's anger was well-known around the nation. People had heard the horror stories of what he was doing. Ahimelech came, and the first thing he said was, "I'm not really settled about your being here by yourself." David wasn't by himself in the technical sense. He did have some young men traveling with him who were like helpers. Ahimelech meant "by himself" in terms of there being no other military leadership with him. That was unusual in a time like this in Israel when there were so many raiding, marauding bands of enemies, for one or two men to travel with a few of their assistants. They would typically travel in groups with military leadership

involved because it was very dangerous. It was alarming to Ahimelech, and rightfully so. He said, “You’re all by yourself.” But there are a few times when David references the young men that are with him, just so you don’t think it’s a contradiction. As a matter of fact, in Matthew 12 Jesus uses this very passage of David going to the city of Nob with the young men, and He mentions the young men who were with David at this point in time and how David took the consecrated bread. He ate it and broke the rules, so to speak. Jesus was using this very passage of Scripture to validate the necessity of saving human life, even if you break the ritual ceremonies of the law of Moses. The law of Moses was made to bring life and not to take it away. This is the passage He talks about when He references healing on the Sabbath.

THE FIRST GREAT LIE RECORDED IN THE LIFE OF DAVID

In 1 Samuel 21:2 David tells the first out-and-out blatant lie recorded in the life of David. The problem with this, however, is that the lies continue. They don’t stop here; they get more grievous as time goes on. I don’t know if they get more grievous in a certain sense, because the whole city ends up getting wiped out, but certainly David gets more familiar with telling lies. He gets more comfortable with it. In 1 Samuel 27 he really develops it. David said to Ahimelech, “The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, ‘Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.’ And I have directed my young men to such and such a place” (1 Sam. 21:2).

Ahimelech says, “Alright...” But that doesn’t sound right to him, because it’s very dangerous traveling with all these Philistines and all the other neighboring nations. Remember, the nations were about the size of a city in our day. Actually, some of them didn’t even have that many people. David was just blatantly lying.

“LORD, HIDE NOT YOUR FACE FAR FROM ME”: THE SEASONS OF DISCERNIBLE GRACE

Remember the statement that David makes so regularly in the book of Psalms: “Lord, hide not Your face from me”—don’t hide Your face. He’s talking about His manifest presence. What’s happening here is that the grace of the Lord, the manifest presence of the Lord, isn’t resting on David. This is my theory, and of course many would have the same theory, but the face of the Lord, the manifest presence that’s quickening and energizing David’s life isn’t present in its usual degree of manifestation. That doesn’t mean it’s the Lord’s fault. That’s not what’s going on. In some seasons of our life the grace of God is manifest in a discernible way upon us, and then in other seasons it’s not as discernible upon us. When he was standing before Goliath some years earlier, he felt this divine boldness laying hold of him. Now he’s standing before a priest that loves God and he can’t be truthful because he’s trembling in fear. Fear is dominating his life right now. This is a new experience for David. He was so used to being bolstered up by the grace of God in his heart. I think one of the key verses here is 2 Chronicles 32:31. It says in essence that the Lord hid His face from King Hezekiah to test and see what was in his heart. There are seasons in our lives where the Lord withdraws the manifest grace upon our hearts to test what’s in our hearts. It’s one of the principles I underline so regularly when I teach the Song of Solomon. One of the great twofold tests in Song of Solomon 5:6 is when the Lord withholds His presence from the bride in order to test her heart and establish her in what God has put into her life up to that point. When the Lord withholds that manifest presence, all kinds of strange dynamics take place: we see our true weakness. Humility is established. We can even see the measure of foundation that has been established in our life up to then.

URIM AND THUMMIM: WHAT THEY WERE, WHAT THEY DID

Right now boldness wasn’t operating in David’s life. He began a season here where he became more and more comfortable telling lies (1 Sam. 21:3-6), and I don’t want to go into the details of that, but basically David asked for three things: Weapons, number one; food, number two; and he needed Ahimelech to seek the Lord. “I need

you to inquire of the Lord for me,” in other words, “to receive direction from the Lord, so that my path will be blessed.” The high priest had this garment called the linen ephod. It’s a strange concept, but within the linen ephod were these pockets which contained two stones called the Urim and the Thummim. It was an Old Testament version of casting lots. No one really knows exactly how it works, but there are all kinds of theories about how those two stones, the Urim and Thummim, operated. But we know they were in the pockets of the ephod. Most people agree that it was a means by which the Lord answered yes-and-no questions. When they desired to inquire of the Lord, they would go to the high priest, because the high priest had possession of it. They would cast these two stones, and some say that one of them would have a brightness on it. I don’t know, and no one really knows, but in some way the yes-and-no questions were answered when the king or the anointed of the Lord would ask the question. They would get the yes-and-no answer right on the spot.

DAVID ASKS THE PRIEST FOR THE CONSECRATED BREAD

David went and asked that favor, for them to inquire of the Lord. It says in 1 Samuel 22:10 that he went and asked them for this blessing, because to help in this manner was to give their full support. To give food, weapons and to inquire of the Lord for them so that God’s prosperity would be on his life was full cooperation. In 1 Samuel 21:3-6 he’s asking for food. Again, it’s the principle of the consecrated bread, because David and his men had not kept all the rules necessary in order to partake of it. It’s like someone being hungry and breaking into the church and going back in the closet and taking all the communion wafers or something. For real! You think, “Well, that’s funny sounding.” You’re thinking, “Well, what do you think about that one?” Anyway, it was that kind of thing. It wasn’t a common thing. It’s amazing that Jesus actually endorses that practice, because it saved David’s life. That’s a separate point, though; it’s not the point I want to get into. I just wanted you to be aware of that. He asked for those three things, to inquire of the Lord, for food, and for weapons.

DOEG THE EDMITE, CHIEF OF THE HERDSMEN OF SAUL

“Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul” (1 Sam. 21:7). Doeg is the key personality here. He is the key villain. He was one of Saul’s chief men. He was over all Saul’s flock. He probably had a very, very large staff under him. He was a man of influence. He was a man of wealth and power, to have this kind of position over all the king’s herds. They would have been very vast, because the king had established a taxation system by which at this point he had become very wealthy. Doeg the Edomite was a powerful man in the king’s court. David knew Doeg, and Doeg knew David, because they were in the court together for some years in the top administration of Saul’s government. Doeg was an Edomite. For those of you who follow the symbolism of the Bible, there were Edomites and Amalekites and Agagites. It sounds like a strange name, but there really were a group of people with that name! They were all related. Symbolically, they spoke of the principle of flesh that was at enmity against God’s purpose. God made a vow to Israel back in Exodus 17 that He would destroy and cut off all the Edomites; that He would wipe them out entirely. As a matter of fact, one of Saul’s big problems when he was first rejected from being king was that God told him to go and kill all the Amalekites, which were akin to the Edomites. They were really all of the same family. Saul refused to do it; Saul refused to enact the fulfillment of a covenant that God made that the Edomites would be exterminated, and for good reason. Saul’s allegiance to the Edomites is what caused him to be rejected from being king. It was a very serious thing. He was causing the oath of the Lord not to be established. You don’t want to get between the Lord and His promises after He has anointed you graciously in a place of leadership, and then defy him after the prophet of God so clearly laid it out.

Anyway, Saul wasn't in a good way. An Edomite was over all his herds. It's like, "Saul, you're still not getting it. What's an Edomite doing over all your wealth?"

"Well, he's good with money. He's good with numbers."

"Saul, think about it. You were rejected from being king because of your allegiance to these people."

"Well, I don't know, things seem to be OK..." It's this kind of mind set that Saul had.

"IS THERE NOT HERE ON HAND A SPEAR OR A SWORD?"

These are all very minor sub plots; I need to get to the key points here. David said to Ahimelech, "Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword?" (1 Sam. 21:8). In other words, "Give me some weapons; give me food; give me prayer." When he said *prayer*, he meant, "Give me some prophetic ministry here." Then he says, "For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." That's lie number two, or point B under the same lie. A was spoken earlier, and now this is point B.

The priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, then take it. For there is no other except that one here."

And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me" (1 Sam. 21:9). He said, "Yes, I like this sword." It was in the tabernacle because it was like a trophy. It was like a statement of remembrance of God's victory for Israel.

THE SELF-PITYING, MURDEROUS INSANITY OF SAUL

We already looked in the last session at David going to Gath and all that. We're going to go on down to 1 Samuel 22:6 and pick up the story. David's lies will be very, very costly to the nation. In 1 Samuel 22:6-8 Saul gets into some really serious self-pity. Here he is, the most powerful man in the kingdom and he's really hurting because 3,000 paid assassins can't defeat David. He says, "Everyone is on David's side." David wouldn't have agreed with that at all.

"Saul heard that David and the three men that were with him had been discovered" (1 Sam. 22:6). Saul was staying in Gibeah, which was where the king's main house was. He was under this tree with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. If I was his servant and he had that spear in his hand, I would say, "Saul, why don't you just go ahead and lay that spear down? Take a nap. We'll get the spear if you need it."

Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin; remember that. He's appealing to tribal loyalty here. "Then Saul said to his servants who stood about him, 'Hear now, you Benjamites!' Or, 'all you men who share my blood.'" He says, "Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?" (1 Sam. 22:7). The son of Jesse is, of course, David. He's essentially saying, "Will David make you all rich and famous?"

All these sons of Benjamin, of the same tribe as Saul, are looking at him and saying, "What are you getting at?"

Saul says, "All of you have conspired against me" (v. 8). He says, "All of you are traitors!"

They're looking at Saul thinking, "You've gone mad."

"There is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse" (v. 8). He says, "I found out the other day that my own son is in covenant relationship with my enemy, and none of you men would even tell me."

"THERE IS NOT ONE OF YOU WHO IS SORRY FOR ME!"

Look at this next one: "There is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait" (1 Sam. 22:8). In other words he's saying, "Jonathan has stirred David up to lie in wait to kill me one day." Saul's imagination is out of control. He imagines that David is going to lie in wait and seize the opportunity and assassinate him, because that's what he would do to David. He says, "My son is going to tell him where I'm headed, and when I'm on my way there, David is going to jump out of the bushes and kill me. None of you will help me. You think David is going to make you rich and famous, but he's not. He's not from the tribe of Benjamin; he's from the tribe of Judah. He'll just forget you guys completely."

That's how he's appealing to the men around him. I imagine they're looking at each other and at Saul saying, "Just don't say anything. Just keep quiet..."

"I SAW THE SON OF JESSE GOING TO NOB, TO AHIMELECH THE PRIEST"

"Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul" (1 Sam. 22:9)—not only is he over Saul's herds, now he's over all his support team. He's over the whole bit of it. He says, "I saw the son of Jesse..." They won't even call him David; they call him "the son of Jesse." When they call him by his name, it bothers them because they actually love this man. They really do. They've had to make him an enemy in order to continue in their hostility against him. I don't doubt that Saul made a rule saying, "No one can call him David!" *David* means "beloved of the Lord." "He's the son of Jesse; that's who he is." But the prophecy said that out of the root of Jesse would come the Messiah. He's going to get in trouble on that one too.

"Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul... said, 'I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub'" (1 Sam. 22:9). He says, "I saw Ahimelech the high priest." Then he says, "And he inquired of the Lord for him" (v. 10)—he sought the Lord and received the word of the Lord to help David.

Saul says, "No?"

Doeg says, "Yes, yes, he did. He gave him provisions. He gave him food and extra clothing. He gave him the sword of Goliath. David is going to come after you. He has a sword now."

Saul says, "He has a sword now?"

"Yes."

Of course Saul didn't know that David was as delirious as he was. David, as we know, went with the sword of Goliath to Goliath's hometown. Everyone in this whole story is messed up right now. Everyone is confused. Everyone has foginess in their thinking.

THE INTERROGATION AND MURDER OF AHIMELECH AND THE FAMILY OF PRIESTS

“Then the king sent to Ahimelech... and all his father’s house, the priests who were in Nob” (1 Sam. 22:11). He said, “All of you come to Gibeah. Come on. I need all of you right now.”

Ahimelech is undoubtedly thinking, “Did David lie to us, or are we going to be rewarded for helping him?” Ahimelech is nervous, you can be sure of that, but he doesn’t know for sure what’s going to happen.

So in 1 Samuel 22:12 they’re all in Gibeah. They’re all before the king. Saul says, “Hear now.”

The high priest says, “Here I am.”

Saul says, “Why have you conspired against me?”

I can see his staff, the Benjamites, murmuring among themselves, “He’s using that old ‘conspiring against me’ theory again.” Except that now he’s using it on all the priests of the Lord, the main priests of the nation. Saul had this demon, this jealous demon. Everything was a conspiracy to him. He truly was paranoid, for real. He had demonic energy on him. This is his same strategy: “You have all conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse. You gave him bread. You gave him a sword. You received a prophetic word for him. I know why you did it: so that he would rise up against me. So that he would hide in the bushes one of these days with the sword and jump out and kill me.” That’s the idea: that he would lie in wait. Saul was absolutely gripped with the idea that David wanted to take something from him. He believed everyone was in conspiracy against him and that David was really trying to assassinate him. He really basically attributed to David what he was, because that’s what he would have done in the opposite circumstance.

Ahimelech in 1 Samuel 22:14 answers, “Who among all your servants is as faithful as David?” He says the forbidden word there, *David*.

“Don’t say that name!”

“He’s your own son-in-law. He does your bidding. He’s honorable. He loves you. He brags on you everywhere he goes. He wins battles for you and you get the credit for them. What are you talking about, Saul?” Look at what he says in 1 Samuel 22:15: “Did I just begin to pray to God for David?” (paraphrased). In other words, “Do you think I just started asking the Lord to bless David? Far be it! I’ve been praying for David for years,” is what he’s saying. He says, “What do you mean? This is what I’m supposed to do.” Then he says, “Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much” (1 Sam. 22:15). “Little or much, I didn’t have a whisper that there was something going on between you and David. I didn’t even have a hint of it.” That’s probably not entirely true, because he was afraid in 1 Samuel 21:1. He thought, “Something is going on, but who knows for sure?”

The king said, “You shall surely die you, Ahimelech, you and all your house!” (1 Sam. 22:16). What a statement. “Then the king said to the guards who stood about him, ‘Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David, and they knew when he fled and did not tell it to me’” (v. 17). The servants of the king said, “No way. No way; we refuse to kill them. You kill us. We’re not killing God’s priests. We’re not doing it.” There’s a lot of tension going on.

But then in 1 Samuel 22:18, the good old Edomite, Doeg the Edomite, says, “I will kill them.” So he killed the eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod, or the eighty-five priests of the Lord. He killed them all. Here are these defenseless priests. They have no experience in battle; they have no weapons. They’re standing there with no defense. He takes his sword and slaughters every one of them. But that wasn’t enough. In 1 Samuel 22:19 he goes down to the city of Nob, to the city of the priests. He takes that sword and kills all the men, all the women, all the children, all the infants, all the oxen, all the donkeys, all the sheep. He slaughters them all. Incidentally, what’s so interesting is that the Edomite does to Israel what Saul was supposed to do to the Edomites back in 1 Samuel 15. This is exactly the description of what Samuel the prophet said: “When you come against the Amalekites, slay the children, the oxen, the sheep, everything; do it because the Lord has made a covenant to exterminate them,” and again, it’s a long story, but the Lord’s reasons were good. The enemies of the Lord were willing to do this to the priests of the Lord, but the king wouldn’t do it to the enemies of the Lord. So the Edomite did the very thing the Lord had commanded Saul to do to the Edomite: He slaughtered the whole city.

FOURFOLD RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF PRIESTS

You have to know that David has significant responsibility in this. One of the sons of Ahimelech, Abiathar, was the only one who escaped, and he fled after David. I imagine he ran up to David, his eyes swollen by tears, and told David the tragedy of tragedies. “All the priests have been slaughtered!” It was the worse massacre in the history of the priesthood. “Saul had them all killed.”

David said, “I knew it. I knew when I saw Doeg there that he would go and tell Saul. I know that man. He would do anything for money, anything. Why was I not more careful? I’ve caused the death of all the persons of your entire house”—which was partially true. It’s not fully true, because Saul was responsible, Doeg was responsible, and David was responsible. That’s three who were responsible and the fourth—again, it’s really a very, very interesting thing. You can read it on your own in 1 Samuel 2:31-36. You’ll want to get those verses down: 1 Samuel 2:31-36; 1 Samuel 3:12-14. Back when Samuel was just a little boy, when Eli was sinning against Israel and the Ark of the Covenant was stolen, an unnamed prophet came in and spoke and said, “Not too long from now, all the priests in your family line will be cut off in the flower of their life. They will all be exterminated in one day. When Israel hears it, their ears will tingle.” They were prophesying of this day. The reason that’s true is because of the very, very extreme acts of rebellion that Eli’s family committed against the covenant of the Lord, the Ark of the Covenant, and the tabernacle.

VISITING THE SINS OF THE FATHERS ON THE CHILDREN TO FOUR GENERATIONS

The prophet of the Lord said, “This judgment will come on your whole family line,” and people think, “Well, that’s not fair.” Well, you don’t want to say that just yet. What typically happens in the Bible when judgment comes on a succeeding generation, a principle we don’t always understand, is that the sins which caused the judgment three generations ago have been increasing as the family line goes on. Typically people’s sins are magnified, the Scripture says, for two, three and four generations, unless there’s the breaking of that curse, and the curse isn’t like a demon getting hold of a family and the family has no more control. It’s not exactly like that. Demons have inroads to families. But when people are raised in certain sin patterns, the children pick them up. It’s a sociologically-discerned thing, and not just a spiritual. Angry, evil parents typically beget angry, evil children. Slandering parents beget slandering children. Immoral parents typically beget immoral children. The whole value system for years and years and years is passed on in a negative way.

When the Lord says the sins visit three and four generations, it means the pattern typically has strength in it two, three and four generations later. It can be broken in our case through the blood of Jesus. There are

consequences, and typically the consequences are related to the fact that the sin crescendos and grows on that third and fourth generation. It's not like the Lord loses His sense of justice and mercy. You might read it casually and say, "Well, that doesn't seem very fair."

The Lord answers, "Well, there are a lot more details that I didn't say." Sin typically magnifies. Perversions of one generation typically increase in the next generation. They don't have to increase, though, because of Jesus. It's the curse of walking in a lifestyle of sin; it's not just a demon taking hold of you without you having any choice in your will. It's just that we get to a place where we become a part of the atmosphere in which we live. You go to immoral parts where people are all clustered together, and they don't think anything about some of the things they do. You go to a God-fearing home and they would be horrified to think of the things that seem very commonplace. It's passed along in those ways as well.

THE NUMEROUS, INTERWEAVING THREADS OF A SINGLE TRAGEDY

In 1 Samuel 2 and 3 the prophet of God said, "The judgment will come and it will cause all Israel's ears to tingle on the day that it happens."

We have four contributions to this tragedy. We have the sin of the family line. We have the lie of David. We have the evil heart of Doeg. We have the demonized heart of Saul. All of them are contributing to a national tragedy. That's typically what happens when a tragedy happens in a massive way: There are so many contributions to it. That's why when a man or a woman casually says, "How could the Lord let that happen?" the Lord says, "There are many, many story lines involved in this one tragedy that you can't know anything about." Without the revelation of Scripture we wouldn't even have any ideas about that.

"DO NOT FEAR, FOR HE WHO SEEKS MY LIFE SEEKS YOURS"

In 1 Samuel 22:23, David tells Abiathar the priest, "Stay with me. Do not fear, for he who seeks my life seeks your life." He says, "Saul is after me. He's really after you too right now, because he wants to get rid of you too." Abiathar is now the new high priest by default. David says, "Stay with me," and Abiathar stayed with David right through the end of his reign. Actually, Abiathar betrayed David at the very end. They were in their youth together all through those years, and at the very end he betrayed David. A few of his men betrayed him at the very end, and a few of them didn't, but Abiathar was one of them. It's likely that in his heart he was always mad because of the fact that his whole family was slain by David's sin. I don't know, but I know that he betrayed David at the very end when David chose Solomon to be king instead of one of his other sons. Abiathar went with the rebellion that rose up to seize the kingdom and take it away from Solomon against David's will.

THE GUILT OF THE BLOOD OF AN ENTIRE CITY RESTS ON DAVID'S HEAD

Let's go to Psalm 52. Psalm 52 tells us a little of what David is thinking at this moment, and then we're going to come back here to 1 Samuel 23. This psalm is talking about shame. David knows he's guilty. Can you imagine the horror of causing eighty-five priests and all their families to be exterminated because you told lies and enraged a jealous king? You knew that king had rage in him. David endangered the entire city. One reason Saul wanted to make an example out of them is because he wanted the news to go around: "Anyone that helps David will be completely exterminated."

As a matter of fact, in the next chapter we'll review in a moment, 1 Samuel 23—because Psalm 52 is very brief—David went to Keilah and the wilderness of Ziph. There the people said, "Saul, Saul, we found him." So

it worked. All Israel was absolutely filled with fear to help David. What Saul did in terms of his plan was effective: It created fear everywhere.

THE FIFTY-SECOND PSALM: A PSALM PENNED IN SHAME AND TRAGEDY

Now look at the title of Psalm 52. It tells us that this is the psalm David wrote “when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, ‘David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.’” This is what’s going on. David writes this directly in the midst of the shame and the tragedy. This is one of the greatest tragedies in David’s life. He had several of this magnitude, and actually a few of them were worse. This was his first sin-produced tragedy in the nation of Israel. Again, David had several of them. One was with Bathsheba. Then he had his family tragedy, which was the fruit of the sin with Uriah and Bathsheba. Then he counted all Israel at the end of his life out of pride, and 70,000 people of Israel were cut off by a plague from the Lord. They were killed by judgment as a consequence of David’s sin. David had some tragedies take place related to his sin.

People say, “I want to be like David.”

The question is, “What part of David do you want to be like?”

“Well, I want to be like the good part of David.”

DAVID’S GREATEST QUALITY: HIS ABILITY TO RECEIVE MERCY AND TRULY REPENT

“Oh, the non-human David, that’s what you want.” David was as human as they come. This session is all about the fact that David’s power lay in his ability to face shame and get through it and get his feet firmly grounded again, solid in God. I’ve maintained this for twenty years: The number one feature of David’s life was his ability to receive the mercy of God and to repent in a genuine way. Not just a fake repentance to put on a show; it was real, and through it he would get reestablished. He would regain his balance, if you will, in the grace of God. He did it like no other. He was the best repenter and re-starter with power and confidence of any man in the Bible. He stumbled grievously and had confidence as though he had done nothing the next day, more than any man in the whole history of the Bible. I’m serious! No one could do what David did and come back into the love of God in confidence like David could. That’s the number one message of David’s life: He knew how to walk shame free. He knew how to find God in truth. He had this unique spirit of revelation upon him that we talked about in the earlier sessions. The Lord was with him. The word of the Lord was with him. The spirit of might and revelation was on him. He understood the passion of God’s heart, the pleasure of that river of God’s personality.

PERPETUALLY LIVING IN THE TAILSPIN OF AVOIDABLE TRAGEDY

Let’s give a brief outline. In Psalm 52:1-4, Doeg’s sin is described by David. Psalm 52:5-7 is God’s judgment on Doeg. Then, in Psalm 52:8-9, David contrasts his life with that of Doeg. It’s a very, very important contrast. On the surface this is a simple little psalm, and you say, “Huh, this is a nice little psalm...” But if you understand that this is the first national tragedy that David’s deliberate sin caused because of his lie and his fear, then you understand the significance of this. This is the crisis; this is the turning point in David’s life. David has known fear. He feigned madness in front of Achish, king of Gath, but he had not sinned. His sin was fear. He drew back and lost his confidence, but here is a tragedy in the nation. It’s the person who breaks the law, goes out drunk, and kills five people in a head-on car wreck. That’s the kind of feeling David has, but far worse, because an entire city is wiped out because of his sin. I don’t know if you’ve ever done anything that caused even mild pain to other people, but people live in the tailspin of that for years and years and years. And David

would be the first one to say that he didn't take it lightly, but he found his balance quickly in the grace of God. I'm not saying he took the tragedy lightly, but somewhere between him and God, he knew that God liked him. However, he knew he had responsibility before men.

“WHY DO YOU BOAST IN EVIL, O MIGHTY MAN?”

David starts off with a question: “Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually” (Ps. 52:1). The reason this is such a vital psalm is because both of them lied; both of them lied and caused the downfall of the city. Doeg actually told lies to Saul and colored it to make Ahimelech look bad. Ahimelech really didn't know. Doeg lied. Why? According to this, because he was an evil man. David, by the spirit of revelation, tells us that he loved evil (Ps. 52:3-4). He loved deceitful, devouring words. He was an evil man. In essence, two men had committed the same sin: They both lied to bring the wrath of a king on a city. Obviously Doeg did more, because he executed that wrath, but it was the command of Saul that empowered that execution. That command was given because two men lied: Doeg and David. David contrasts the two of them here. First he calls him a “mighty man” because he was the head of Saul's support staff, if you will. Doeg was over all his herdsmen and servants (1 Sam. 21:7 and 22:9).

DOEG STOOD BEFORE THE LORD, RESOLUTE WITH A BRAZEN HEART

David asks a question: “Why are you boasting in evil instead of repenting? Why are you standing boldly before God, saying, ‘Give me what's coming, I'm not afraid of the evil I've committed’?” He says, “You're boasting in your evil because you don't repent.” It's not just that Doeg took money for it, which he undoubtedly did. It's not just that Doeg told other people and bragged about it, which he undoubtedly did. He boasted in the fact that he had the confidence to stand before God not being broken by his evil. He stood resolute with a brazen heart. That's what I think David is talking about more than anything. He says, “How could you in evil stand with such a calloused heart before the God of heaven, when He has so much goodness to pour out if you would only bow down before Him?” He says, “I'm getting on the ground. I know what's in His heart. I'm going to receive goodness from the heart of God. What I did is tragic, but I'm going to get reestablished. Doeg, bow down and quit your strutting, brazen arrogance before God.”

RELIGIOUS CONDEMNATION IS THE INVERTED SIDE OF RELIGIOUS PRIDE

When a sinner commits sin and won't bow for the sake of goodness, he says in his heart, “My goodness is sufficient.” Or, this isn't like Doeg, but we have religious pride in a different way. On the one hand, Doeg's religious pride says, “My goodness is sufficient. I'll take my chances on the day of judgment. I'm a good enough man. I'm strong enough. I'm not worried.” That's one kind of religious arrogance. But there's another kind of religious arrogance that says, “My sin is more powerful than God's power to forgive.” We stand there. The unrepentant man is boasting by thinking he can stand in God's judgment on the last day and somehow it's OK to ignore it or bring his own track record with him. There is such arrogance in that. But the religious arrogance has another downside to it: “I can create something more powerful than God. I can create a darkness more powerful than the light of the sun.” Religious condemnation literally is the inverted side of religious pride. It really is. “I can do something that even God in His power can't forgive, because God has power, but not that much power.”

God says, “You don't have any comprehension of what pounds in My being in terms of loving-kindness.”

David says, "I'm not going in either direction. The goodness of God is the only banner worth standing for. God, I've sinned. A city has been wiped out, but I know one thing: Your goodness endures. It's stronger than my sin. It's stronger than the tragedy. It's stronger than the defilement of my soul. It's stronger than everything."

THE GOODNESS OF GOD: THE INITIAL CONFESSION OF SHAME-FREE LIVING

David begins his shame-free living by the confession that God's goodness endures over everything, including his own sin. It would actually endure in Doeg's behalf as well if he didn't have the overt arrogance versus the covert arrogance. I tell you, when we stand and don't repent, we say, "I'll take my chances." Oh, boastful, proud man, don't take your chances before a holy, holy, holy God. You had better bow down. "Oh, it's too late. I've done too badly." That sounds so sweet, but it literally is religious pride on the back end, that says you can produce something stronger than God; that the darkness within you is stronger than the power of the Son. Boy, you must really be something special.

So David begins with the initial confession of shame-free living. "The goodness of God endures continually" (Ps. 52:1). Of course, that's the theme of the whole Psalm. The difference between Doeg and David is that Doeg loved what he was doing (1 Sam. 22:3-4). David did it but hated that he did it. David did it in immaturity; Doeg did it in rebellion. That's the difference. David goes on to say, "God shall pluck you out of your place. He will uproot you, Doeg" (Ps. 52:5, paraphrased). "Your arrogance will be uprooted. You may live to be eighty years old, but you'll be uprooted one day forever." He says, "The righteous will see you uprooted" (v. 6, paraphrased). Actually, he was probably prophesying Doeg's early demise.

David says, "And they shall laugh." That laugh doesn't indicate hilarity. It means, "They will mock you, because you have mocked God in your arrogance. They'll mock you for it in the end." That's a difficult concept for all of us to understand. Here's what they'll say: "Here is the man who did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness" (Ps. 52:7).

"I WANT YOU TO TRUST IN MY DEDICATION TO YOU, NOT YOUR DEDICATION TO ME"

The bottom line of David's struggle and the bottom line of your struggle is that God wants you to make God your strength. He doesn't want the last three months or your track record to be your strength. That's why He wrestled with Jacob and touched his hip. The point of the struggle is so that I don't look at myself as my strength. I remember over the years as I've discovered the weakness of my flesh, and I've said this for years like a broken record, but when I discovered the weakness of my flesh I assumed that God had just found about it.

"Oh God, can You believe it?"

"Yes, I can believe it."

"No, I just did this grievous thing. Can You believe it?"

"Yes, yes. I have no problem believing it. There's a lot more where that came from." Part of spiritual maturity is the journey of self-discovery, and it's exactly the truth about the strength of our heart. In my early days when I was shocked, it was only an expression of pride. I didn't understand that. The Lord says, "As long as you're shocked, you're always trusting in your dedication to Me. I want you to trust in My dedication to you. I want to be the strength of your heart and not you to be the strength of your heart. I want your dedication to Me to flow out of the understanding of My dedication to you." That's when God is your strength: When your commitments

flow out of gratitude that He likes you more than you could ever like Him and you go to the table with no bargaining chips. We go to the table before the pure, raw love of God with nothing to contribute. That's when your resolution flows in gratitude and doesn't get in the way between you and God. Religious dedication, religious resolve that comes before the understanding of mercy typically ends up getting us into difficulty with God. The Lord understands it all; He's not troubled by it. He says, "OK, well, you die hard but you'll die. I assure you of that. You die hard but you'll die. This will be a long wrestling match but I'll win. At the end of the day you won't trust in your dedication to Me; you'll trust in My dedication to you." When you're absolutely cut in two by that unrelenting ache of gratitude, you realize, "I have nothing to bring to the table and You like me." That's the sheer, raw mercy of God, and in that place we say, "In that case, I am Yours."

The Lord says, "Now your dedication fits."

GRATITUDE IS THE POWER OF HUMILITY AND ABANDONMENT

My message isn't, "Go out and be undedicated to find out how much God loves you." That's not what I'm saying. You seek the Lord with all your heart and you seek to make God your strength. That was the opposite of what Doeg did, which means we trust in the fact that His commitment is greater to us than ours to Him. It's the source of our commitment to Him. The source of it is not just the Spirit in a mystical way. Of course, the Spirit does touch us in an invisible way, but it's the knowledge of what He has done that creates gratitude that creates power. Gratitude is the power of humility. It truly is. David had gratitude. That's why he had abandonment and humility at the same time. It's a journey. "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?" (Song 8:6). It's the bride at the end of history. That's one application. There are several applications. The Lord could say, "Well, she didn't start leaning on Me and she didn't like the wilderness, but I got her in the wilderness and she is leaning and it's really a love affair. It's the real thing. She isn't boasting in herself at all. She is completely falling freely into the fire of the love of God; the goodness of God endures forever."

WHEN WE TRUST IN OUR RELIGIOUS RESOLVE, WE SET OURSELVES UP FOR FAILURE

David says, "This is what the mock will be: Who is that man who made not God his strength? He thought he would take his own chances"—his own religious dedication, if it's in our own context, or his refusal to repent, in the context of Doeg. "He trusted in the abundance of his own riches." Doeg thought, "If I have enough money, I can bail myself out of trouble, and I'm not worried about eternity. I'll take my chances." In the spiritual sense we trust in the richness of our dedication. We trust in the richness of our perfect record.

Doeg "strengthened himself in his wickedness" (Ps. 52:7). What that means is that he came up with ways in his conscience where sin would just get worse and worse and worse and he didn't care, but in a strange way, not that David means this but the principle is just sort of staring at us to apply it: When we end up trusting in ourselves and in our own religious resolve, we actually strengthen ourselves in a way that keeps us failing more and more and more and more. We're actually empowering and enabling ourselves to stay soulish. When the day comes and the revelation of the cross touches us just a little and the river of God's pleasure, "As high as the heavens are above the earth so is His mercy towards us," it rends our heart in two. We don't try to take any bargaining chips. We just take it freely. I take it; I just take it. Then, all of a sudden, it breaks some of the power of our soulishness. Our soulishness, our natural strength, is empowered by the fact that we can pull this thing off. When we come to the fact that the only way we're going to make it is in a free embrace, and then walking in the gratitude of that free embrace, then the whole bargaining dynamic and the whole image-keeping dynamic is minimized.

HAVING CONFIDENCE IN AN EMBRACE THAT IS OUTRAGEOUS IN ITS KINDNESS

Look at what David says about himself in Psalm 52:8-9. This is really something. He says “I am like a green olive tree in the house of God” (Ps. 52:8). “That’s who I am in the house of God because I trust in His mercy.” He says, “This goodness of God doctrine, I go all the way in it. I’m not trusting in what I did in the city of Nob. I’m not trusting in what I did when I prayed all night. I’m not trusting in what I did. I trust in mercy. That’s all I trust in.” David had an unusual insight into that at a very young age. It’s really amazing. I’m not telling people to get sloppy with sin, because there’s a kind of person who gets really heavy on the mercy of God, but is really, really light on the Word of God. They just run out in their things and it bolsters their confidence. I’m not talking about having confidence to sin; that’s not what I’m talking about. I’m not trying to bolster our resolve in defying the Word of God. I’m talking about having confidence in an embrace that’s outrageous in its kindness because it brings us to repent and to call sin, sin. David says, “I am a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. I will praise You forever” (Ps. 52:8-9).

Here is the tragedy: You just went out and broke all the rules. You got filled with drugs and alcohol and had a head-on car wreck. Five people got killed, your best friends. You’re singing praise: “I praise His mercy.” I tell you, that’s a difficult thing to do. There are two points here. I’m not talking about the gloating in the fact that “I didn’t do wrong.” I’m talking about someone who has caused the slaughter of an entire city, but he found a way to enter into praise again with God. The guilt was just gone between him and God. He had no illusions about who he was in his sinful flesh. I think it’s really, really something that David likens himself to a green olive tree. The green olive tree is established. In Psalm 52:5, Doeg was plucked up and uprooted. In Psalm 52:8, David is established as a green olive tree. And of course, an olive tree was one of the principle trees of Israel. A flourishing olive tree is the idea. This imagery of an olive tree is used a number of times in Scripture to depict the beauty and the fruitfulness of the Lord. The anointing oil used to anoint the prophets, the anointing oil in the lamps in the temple, were all olive oil. The garden of Gethsemane means “the olive garden.” It’s where all the olive trees were. That’s what it boils down to. I don’t know the exact Hebrew word. It’s where all the olive trees and the oil press were located. That’s actually what *Gethsemane* means, “the oil press.” The olive trees were all there, and that’s where Jesus went. The symbolism of oil and olive trees is fantastic. David says, “I stand shame-free. I’m the anointed of the Lord. I am that which God flourishes and God shines through.”

THE FOOLISHNESS OF ATTEMPTING RELIGIOUSLY TO ATONE FOR OUR SINS

Everything in our being would be crying out, “I am the scum of the earth. Give me twelve months in probation to do bad things and at least suffer in spiritual barrenness. Then let me come back after a year of miserable worship services and say, ‘Now, God, is the record even? I’ve suffered for a year. I couldn’t feel You for a year. Are You happy?’”

David says, “That’s foolishness. That’s religious pride.” He says, “I am a flourishing olive tree right now.” The olive tree was the anointing oil, the picture of the anointing oil, the source of light. It’s the oil and the lamps. What a statement! “I trust in mercy. I know who I am. I know who He is. I’m committed to praising God. I’m not getting into that downward spiral of rehearsing how evil I am.”

God says, “Settle it. You’re wicked to the core. Settle it. Quit rediscovering it with such fascination. Come to Me. Throw the bargaining away. You’re utterly sinful, but I want you because of who I am. Now settle it. Don’t bring it up and rehearse it every time.”

David says, “I love You. I love You. I love You.” He says, “OK, come on. I’m not bargaining. I’m Yours. I’m Yours.” That doesn’t mean he was trivial about the consequence of his sin to other people. Look at what he says: “Why will I praise You? For one reason: because You have done it, O God” (Ps. 52:9, paraphrased). “You did it. I just caused an entire city to be wiped out, but You did it,” which means, “You’ve redeemed me. You’ve forgiven me.” That’s what it means. “It is finished.” David is reaching into the finished work of the cross. “You’ve done it, and now I can come to You every day. I don’t have to run from You; I can run to You every time.”

He says, “Here is what I’m going to do: in the presence of all Your saints I’m going to wait on You. I’m not going to go on spiritual probation. I’m going to reestablish my devotional life. I’m going to stand for it. Everyone knows that I’m the Creep of Israel. Everyone knows that me, Doeg, and Saul made this happen. Everyone does. But I’m not going to walk around with a scarlet letter on me. I’m going right into the presence of God. I’m God’s. His goodness endures forever. God did it. I trust His mercy. I’ll be a bright and shining oil lamp energized by this oil.” He says, “Why will I wait on Your name? Why will I do this? Why will I have the courage to reestablish my devotional life after I lied and caused tragedy? Why will I let people look at me and say, ‘Oh, he’s in the prayer room again? Isn’t it a little early to be in the prayer room?’ No, it’s not. It’s been seventeen minutes since I did it. I don’t have to bear it longer than that. I’ve repented. I can go in the prayer room now.

“Don’t you think you ought to wait a month or two at least?”

“No, I shouldn’t.”

It doesn’t mean you walk around in arrogance if you’ve committed scandalous sin, flaunting your liberty, but you have your liberty nonetheless. David ends it like he begins it. Why? “Because God is good, that’s why. I know who You are.” He starts off in Psalm 52:1 saying, “Your goodness is continual.” He ends in Psalm 52:9, “I will reestablish my devotional life today because You are good, because You’ve done it. I don’t trust in my own riches. I don’t make myself my strength.”

Amen and amen. Let’s stand.

MINISTRY TIME

We’re talking about the beauty of shame-free living. Lord, we come before You. O God, we thank You for Psalm 52, the first tragedy of David’s life related to his own sin. He found You as a young man in his twenties. He found You. Lord, how did he know this so clearly? He had no one around him to hold him up. Lord, I ask You in the name of Jesus, show us these things. Make us extravagant worshippers like David. Lord, if You’ll let us see what David saw, we will worship like David worshipped. If You would let us see what he saw, we would worship like he worshipped. You are good. Lord, I’m not going to bargain with You. I’m settling it. I’m rotten to the core apart from the grace of God. I’m not going to bargain with You. I’m not going to be surprised and shocked. I’m not going to go on probation. I’m not going to pretend my sin is more powerful than Your heart. I stand there in Your raw, naked love and I say, “Yes, yes, yes, You’ve done it. I’ll wait before You because You are good, in the name of Jesus.” Amen and amen.