

4. Our resourceful God

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[0 : 00] And we're going to be reading the whole of 1 Samuel 21 and into chapter 22. This is continuing our series on David, God's flawed but faithful servant.

And David has just had an emotional and heart-rending parting from his dear friend Jonathan because he's recognized that the court of Saul is too hot for him to stay.

This describes now, this is the beginning of the experiences of David as a hunted fugitive, as Saul and others hunt and pursue him. So, 1 Samuel 21, verse 1.

Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, Are you alone? No one with you? And David said to Ahimelech the priest, The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you and with which I have charged you.

I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread or whatever is here.

[1 : 13] And the priest answered David, I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread, if the young men have kept themselves from women. And David answered the priest, Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition.

The vessels of the young men are holy, even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy? So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen.

Then David said to Himalai, Have you not a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste. And the priest said, The sword of Goliath, the Philistine, whom you struck down in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.

If you take that, take it, for there is none but that here. And David said, There is none like that. Give it to me. And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went down to Achish, the king of Gath.

[2 : 33] And the servants of Achish said to him, Is not this David the king of the land? Did he not sing to one another of him in dances? This Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.

And David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard.

Then Achish said to his servants, Behold, you see, the man is mad. What have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen that you brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence?

Shall this fellow come into my house? Then on to chapter 22. David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him.

And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And there were with him about 400 men.

[3 : 42] David went from there to Mizpah of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, Please let my father and mother stay with you till I know what God will do with me, or do for me.

And he left them with the king of Moab. And they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. Then the prophet Gad said to David, Do not remain in the stronghold.

Depart and go into the land of Judah. So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth. Amen. May God bless to us that reading from his word.

Now if we could have our Bibles open please, at page 244, and we'll have a moment of prayer. Father, as we turn to your word, we pray that you will give us, in a little measure, the experience of your disciples on the Emmaus Road, that our hearts may burn within us, that our eyes may be opened, as we receive the food of your holy word, that food that will build us up, and will give us strength for the rest of the journey.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. In my study at home, I have a book which faces me as I sit at my desk.

[5 : 08] The title is Trembling Up the Threshold of a Biblical Text. It's not an especially good book, but the title is very, very challenging to anyone who wants to open the word of God.

And this week, that book title has been My Mind Continually, because this is not the sermon I intended to preach at the beginning of the week. Because the word of God continually challenges us, continually challenges our thinking.

I'd intended to preach on the previous chapter, chapter 20, about the covenant, about the emotional parting of David and Jonathan, both men facing an uncertain future.

Now, I'm not saying for a moment there isn't wonderful truth in that passage, but as I continued to dig into it, I felt I'd simply be repeating much of what I said the previous week.

So, the Spirit drew me irresistibly to this next chapter, chapter 21, and into chapter 22. David is now entering a stage in his life where he's harried, where he's hunted, where he's a fugitive, where he's an outlaw.

[6 : 20] The anointing as king is a distant memory, and its fulfillment remote. And coming back to the point I made at the beginning, we really have to believe this is the Word of God.

Because if we don't, we'll read it and wonder, what on earth are we going to get from this story? Is this really the food of your Holy Word? I want to ask, first of all, the question, how are we going to read this story?

Now, if we read it as many commentators do, we're going to read it as first and foremost David's story. If we do that, what are we going to get? We're going to find that David was what's nowadays called economical with the truth.

When he went to visit the priest, then he was not entirely honest about the reason for his visit. There is a verse 2 of chapter 20.

The king is charred from the matter and said, let no one know anything of the matter. And he's selfish, putting Ahimelech and the other priests in danger. Some of the commentators go on to say shows terrible lack of faith in running away to Gath and then to Adullam.

[7 : 33] Now, if we read it that way, we're simply going to be moralizing. We're going to be sitting smugly thinking, oh, David. Not up to much, is he? And we're going to, our critical, even gossipy spirits are going to be aroused.

See, when we moralize on the Bible, it's virtually the equivalent of gossip. Hear this about David? David's not up to much. And we, it's very easy to sit and criticize David in the heart of the battle. So let's not read the story that way. Because this is not fundamentally the story of David. This is fundamentally the story of David's God. And when we start to read it that way, see, this is God's story.

A very, very different picture emerges. A picture emerges of God who is very powerful behind the scenes. He's not obvious here in these verses we read.

He's not openly on the stage. Haven't you seen that often in the Bible? How he just does not appear. Rather like the, rather like the, I think it's in the voice of the dawn treader where the children, Aslan, where are you when we need you?

[8 : 48] Well, where is God when we need him? And David must have been feeling this. But, what I'm going to look at this chapter, and our title today is Our Resourceful God.

In these circumstances of David's life, God is totally resourceful. Now, it's been said often enough, we are not David. But we have David's God. And David's resourceful God is our God.

In the tangle, in the mess of our lives, in the troubles we get into, I'm not arguing, of course, that everything David did here was admirable. Of course it wasn't. That's not the point.

The point is, and the gospel, what makes this a gospel, rather than a moralizing story, is it's a story of the grace, the consistent goodness, the resourcefulness of God.

We're going to learn in these chapters about David's God. The God of the covenant. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the first thing I want to point out, there's really these three episodes, first of all, 21, 1 to 9, is that God gives bread.

[9 : 54] God gives food. God gives the basic necessity for David to keep on living. Now, the city of Nob, the city of the priests, as it's called in 22:19, was somewhat north of Jerusalem.

And David, as I say, is not altogether honest in his cover story about why he came. Rather reminds us of how the effect that Samuel had in a much earlier story, David was anointed, when he appeared in Bethlehem, they trembled with fear.

And then there's an ominous little verse, verse 7, about this sinister character, Doeg the Edomite. A kind of shuddering fear, as you hear this name.

Next week we'll see why we're absolutely right to have a shuddering fear. Doeg the Edomite, the old enemy, who is in cahoots with Saul. You'll notice that's quite important.

Now, if that's all there is in this story, then we can hurry on. But that's what's on the surface of the story. But this is God's story.

[11 : 04] And since it's God's story, the very heart of it is verses 4 to 6, or verses 3 to 6, where God gives him bread. Now, as the priest says, verse 4, this is no common bread, it is holy bread, the so-called bread of the presence, which you can read about in Leviticus 24.

Every Sabbath, twelve loaves were put on the table on the north side of the holy place, reminding people of God's care for them in the desert, reminding them of the manna, bread of heaven, feed us now and evermore, reminding them that God sustains them, that God feeds them.

And this is a constant thing in the story. In the story of Elijah, much later on, God says to Elijah, go to Zarephath. Zarephath, I have commanded a widow to sustain you. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word.

And you see, if we moralize about David, we miss the point. Give us today our daily bread. Give us today our daily bread because we are upright, wonderful, we keep the commandments, we do everything that's right, we attend all the services, and if there were more, we would attend them as well.

Give us today our daily bread. We're missing the point. We receive our daily bread not because we are godly, but because God is good. It's pure grace, this story.

[12 : 34] And when David receives that bread from that holy bread, it's because Yahweh, the God of the covenant, is gracious. This is the covenant God.

David realizes then that God is with him. The narrator doesn't pause to say that, but as David, David receives the answer to that prayer, give us today our daily bread.

And David receives a further encouragement. Verse 9, the priest said, the sword of Goliath, the Philistine, whom you struck down in the belly of Elah. A reminder that God who was with him then is still with him.

God is not just with us in the great crises, in the great drama. God is with us in the tangle of everyday life, in the mess we often make of our lives. He's with us when we're running away, as well as when we are, as when we are, we are, sorry, I must start that sentence again.

My, my tongue is running ahead of my brain, as it so often does. Not just in the great crisis, but when we are fighting the good fight. God is gracious.

[13 : 43] You see, God gives bread. That's the first thing I want to say from this story. God gives bread and God gives bread to David, even though David perhaps doesn't deserve it.

Isn't it wonderful to have a resourceful God like that? How would you like to start your morning saying, God, I'm praying that you'll give me my daily bread. I'm praying you'll be with me today. And you know why I'm praying? Because I really did all out rather well yesterday. I kept the commandments. I didn't see anything rash. I wasn't cowardly. I wasn't evasive.

We wouldn't get our bread, would we, if that were the case. God gives bread not because we are godly, but because he is gracious. It doesn't mean it's not important to be godly.

Of course that's not the point. The point is that it's grace from start to finish. That's the Bible story. From start to finish when God created the heavens and the earth to the last book of Revelation where the final word in that wonderful book with all its visions, all its symbols, all its mystery is grace.

[14 : 51] And the second thing is God gives odd refuges, odd hiding places. And let's look then at, first of all, at Gath.

David rose, verse 10, and went to Achish, the king of Gath. Not apparently a very sensible place to go because where have we read last about Gath in the story?

There came out a champion from the ranks of the Philistines, Goliath of Gath, running into the lion's den. And again, the point is not to talk about David's apparent craziness, although it does show his resourcefulness.

I mean, David, among other things, an extremely resourceful guy. And, of course, you can't miss the touch of humor in verses 14. The man is mad. Achish says, I've got enough bamfots of my own. I don't want to import bamfots from anywhere else. And that's the point of this story. It's a human story. David behaving like a lunatic and yet God protecting him.

[15:50] David is desperate. Most of the commentators will say he doesn't have, he shows a lack of faith here. I wonder how many of them have been outlaws and fugitives.

And in their no doubt blameless lives, have come across a place where every refuge is barred to them. But, even here, notice the hints under the story.

Verse 11, the servants of Achish said to him, Is not this David the king of the land? Did he not sing to one another of him in dances? Saul has struck down his thousands, David his tens of thousands. You see, this is a reminder of the big picture. He is the king of the land. Now, that's not strictly speaking true when the Philistines say this, and yet, this is a reminder of the truth of this story. He is going to be the king of the land. God has anointed him through the prophet. There is nothing that can prevent this happening. And it's part of the big, the king of the land.

[16:46] The Philistines see what David's future is, and they speak wiser than they know. That impels us forward to John 11, where Caiaphas, the high priest, says, Is it not good that one man should die and that the whole people should not perish?

speaking far, far wiser than he knew. And it points forward, not just to the time when the whole, in 2 Samuel 3, where the whole of the people of Judah and Israel will acclaim David as king.

It points forward to the one whose redemption will bring death to the world, the time when every knee will bow and every tongue confess. And of course, the reason we sang Psalm 56 was to show us what David later made of this experience, an unedifying and profitable experience.

And yet David, as it were, as the hymn says, took it to the Lord in prayer. Psalm 56, verse 11, In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I trust, in God I trust, I shall not be afraid.

What can man do to me? Once again, David, as is said of Moses in Hebrews 11, is seeing him who is invisible. That is the visible enemy, Achish, king of Gath, and his hordes.

[18:06] That is the invisible God. And the result of this later on is praise and faith. So Gath, the unlikely refuge, is a place which brings out praise, brings out faith in David.

Then the second refuge, let's bring us into chapter 22, is Adullam, and looking at verses 1 to 4. David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam.

This is in the Shephelah, the low hills riddled with caves in Judah. David is not necessarily, and his followers, not necessarily in a cave as such because in verse 4, they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.

So probably many of them were actually in the city. There was a city of Adullam as well. We need to notice two things which point to the future. First of all, his brothers and all his family went down to his father's house.

Now that presumably includes the elder brother, Eliab, whom we've met already, who was so dismissive, so critical, so disparaging about his young brother.

[19:19] Now he finds that he has to go to him for help. There's a picture here of the reign of terror by Saul's agents. You can imagine, it's easy enough to imagine, Saul is pursuing David, and therefore Saul is intending to harass and probably eliminate David's family.

You see, he wants David to be destroyed. He wants David's family to be destroyed. And of course, in the big picture, that points forward, is it not, to Herod, and his attempt to destroy the Messiah. Indeed, throughout the whole of the Old Testament, there's these attempts. Perhaps the most notable one is in the book of Esther, where the villain Haman decides to destroy every Jew in every province, including those who return to rebuild Jerusalem.

So his family, and you remember, of course, we know that Jesus' family did not believe in him to begin with. Some of them came to it, but they didn't believe in him. And there is this picture and a reminder of the big picture.

And also, we see David's personal magnetism here. There came to him everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, everyone who was bitter in soul gathered to him.

[20 : 40] Now, admittedly, many of these would be dodgy characters that David surrounded himself with. Is that surprising? Not many mighty, not many noble, says Paul to the Corinthians, were called.

And look at the Lord Jesus Christ and his earthly ministry. Look at the oddballs who surrounded him, the people whom he called. Now, once again, I don't want to exaggerate this, but it is a faint picture.

We begin, we hear, we listen here to a tune that plays throughout Scripture. The God who is the defender of the widow and the orphan.

The God who is the God who raises up the downcast and protector of the poor. Pointing forward for that full harmony, that full tune was to emerge in the earthly life of David's greater son.

And one day, of course, to the day when every tribe, nation, people and language will gather before his throne. And what will be the characteristic of all those people who gather before the throne of God and of the Lamb?

[21 : 46] None of them, none of us, actually will deserve to be there. We'll be there by grace. The old hymn says, the countless multitude on high that tune their songs to Jesus' name, all merit of their own deny and Jesus' worth alone proclaim.

This old story is pointing forward to that. But there's another surprising thing, even more surprising. Verse 3, David went from there to Mizpah of Moab.

And he learned when he was in Gath that that's not the place to go for help. After all, Moab is the old enemy. Israel and Moab continually at war from generation to generation.

Now, one of the amazing things in life is how God goes ahead and prepares the way for his people. Now, astonishingly, here, God had prepared the way for David and his family more than a hundred years before.

It's a reminder of what happens at an earlier stage in the story. Ruth, David's ancestress, where did she come from? She was a Moabite, wasn't she?

[22 : 59] Coming from Moab, coming in and joining the Lord's people. And I'm pretty certain that story would probably be known in Moab as well as it was known in Israel.

That wonderful story where Moab, coming from an enemy, coming from a far country, until Boaz, the kinsman redeemer, claims her as his bride.

We're going to be singing shortly, pointing forward to Jesus, our surety, our kinsman redeemer, round us the robe of his righteousness blings. So you see, the covenant God had already provided a century before.

You read the book of Ruth. What's the last word of the book of Ruth? It's David. We begin in the grotesque chaos of the judges and the kind of thing that tragically is happening in Somalia, other places in the Horn of Africa, warlords and famine.

And we end with that note of hope with David, the descendant of Ruth, who is also of course mentioned in Matthew chapter 1.

[24 : 05] The covenant God provides strange refuges and help from totally unexpected sources. God gives bread, God gives refuge.

One of the Psalms says, can God provide a table in the desert? Well, we know he can. That's the first point. God gives manna. God provides refuges even when we can't see them.

Because David's resourceful God is our resourceful God. He is the God of the covenant. But then thirdly, it's important we don't miss verse 5.

One of those verses, easy to run over, then the prophet Gad said to David, do not remain in the stronghold, depart and go into the land of Judah. So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

And this is showing us that God gives a true and authentic word. Not only does he give bread, not only does he give places to hide refuges, he gives us a true word.

[25 : 10] Now if you read from the beginning of 1 Samuel to the end of 2 Kings, and by the way it's a very good read, a great piece of narrative, you find it's dominated not so much by kings but by prophets.

What did God do at the beginning of Judges? In that terrible chaos, in that terrible crisis, he raised up the prophet Samuel. And all through the history there are prophets speaking.

And here is the prophet Gad, which is mentioned several times later on. We're going to meet the prophet Nathan. And at David's court, they're reminding David of the big picture of the true story. And in the darkest times, there is a prophetic word. 2 Peter says, we have the word of the prophets, to which we do well to give heed, like a light shining in a dark place.

And that's what's happening here. This is a dark place. Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha, and later on the writing prophets, Micah, Isaiah, and the others. David hears directly from God.

[26 : 16] Now, I do not expect, if I'm having to make a decision, a prophet to come and tell me, because we have the scriptures. David did not. David had the word of Moses.

We know that from 2 Kings 2, because he told Solomon, walk in the ways of Moses. David did not have the whole scriptures. That doesn't mean, of course, that, after all, we wouldn't preach at all if the scripture could not be expounded.

It doesn't mean we can't get help and advice from brothers and sisters. What it does mean is we have the prophetic word to guide us in the darkness of this world.

And in the darkest times, there are prophetic words. And the second thing here is the apparent triviality of the verse. It's not trivial for David, because David was a hunted fugitive.

Gad realized, whether by direct revelation from the Lord or not, he realized that this was no longer a safe place. So he said, do not remain in the stronghold, depart, and go into the land of Judah.

[27 : 22] In other sense, that's bringing David nearer and nearer, of course, to the place where he's going to be crowned. But the very triviality is significant.

This is the word of God valuable to us. In a crisis, of course it is. But in every circumstance of life. That's why we need to read, learn, meditate on, believe, and obey the word of God day by day through all the changing scenes of life in trouble and in joy.

A woman, Ruth, who had been dead for a hundred years. A prophet, unknown. I mean, Gad is not one of, if you were to ask people to write down a list of the Old Testament prophets, I wonder how many people, well, everybody here now will know, but I wonder how many people would write down Gad as one of these.

And yet, he's so significant here in David. The word from the unknown prophet. The word that comes at a time in David's life. So, as we've read this story, what we tried to do is see the footprints of God in it.

[28 : 33] Not moralize about David. And I said, not everything David did here was admirable, not everything David did later on was admirable. The point is, this is our resourceful God.

We are not David, but we have our little part in the story. Our part is not David's. We have not been chosen as the Lord's anointed to rule God's people, but because God has called us, not many mighty, not many noble, called us from so many different places and to so many different circumstances, he is our resourceful God.

And our story is part of that story. This is the God of the covenant, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we praise and in whom we trust.

Amen. Let's pray. God, our Father, as you read these old words, we do not believe they are simply old words.

These are living words you have given us today for our learning, for our growing, and for leading us into paths that will make us more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

[29 : 54] So bless that word to us, Lord. Bless it to us, not just in our heads, but make it part of our food for the road. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.