

The Original Robin Hood

The Singer, Part 5

1 Samuel 21-22

In his commentary on First Samuel, William Bellshaw repeated the old legend of a young man who'd been hired by a wise and well known violin maker. One morning, the old man took his young assistant into the forest to search for just the right wood from which his violins would be crafted. On and on they hiked, until they cleared the valley where the trees were straight and tall. Resting on his walking stick, he pointed, 'You need to climb up that mountainside there . . . you see growing from the craggy rocks that gnarled tree? Cut that down and we'll bring it home to carve.

When they returned, the young man asked his mentor, "Why didn't you choose the straight, smooth trunks of trees in the forest – why all the trouble and danger to get a smaller, bent and twisted tree? "Ah", the old craftsman said, "The wood which grows quickly and easily in the shelter of the forest breaks too easily under the pressure we use to shape the violin; but not the wood from the mountainside. Those trees, lashed and bent by the wind and rain are tested and strong – they will produce the sweetest music of all."¹

When we last observed David, he was just beginning to lose the comfort of a sheltered forest.

But the winds were beginning to pick up . . . and the storm clouds gather.

In one disaster after another, David has lost, virtually everything.

He'd lost his job and his place in the palace. The one who'd been sung of by the women of Israel – the one who'd risen to legendary status by his defeat of Goliath, and then every time he faced the Philistine armies he won.

For a few years, he was literally undefeated.

But the King's jealousy puts an end to David's status and security.

He loses his best friend, Jonathan, who must remain loyal to his father and the kingdom.

He loses his wife as she helps him escape from her father, King Saul, and then accuses David of threatening to kill her.

Then David loses his spiritual mentor, the aging prophet Samuel.

David has no security, no food, no companion, no weapons, no confidant, no career path, no financial assets, no promise of a better tomorrow.ⁱⁱ

He is now enemy number 1; he is Israel's most wanted fugitive.

His heart is broken and his head is spinning.

Unfortunately, as David spends the next few days on the run, he loses his grip on that courageous faith he had demonstrated time and time again in his early years.

And since God isn't interested in painting a halo around David's head, we're given some of the raw details in First Samuel chapter 21.

Let's pick our study back up at that point.

As I read and reread chapter 21 as well as chapter 22, it struck me that these scenes are nothing less than a horrific nightmare for David.

If we wrote what takes place into a play – and it is dramatic – we could divide what we read into 3 scenes.

The opening scene could be entitled,

1. Scene One: Telling lies on Nob's Hill

David will deceive the High Priest with several different lies, told in quick succession and with tragic consequences.

Notice verse 1 of 1 Samuel 21. Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, “Why are you alone, and no one with you?”² 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 (those with him) for such and such a place.”

In other words, dear priest, the King has sent me on a secret mission! So I can't tell you anything . . . all my papers are classified.

By the way, I'm hungry . . . do you have any food around here.

The priest informs David in *verse 6* that they've just replaced the bread presented before the Lord with fresh bread. So the priest gives David the old loaves.

By the way, the priest didn't act out of order – Jesus will actually use this as an example of how human need can take priority over the ceremonies of the Sabbath.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ahimelech is no doubt suspicious – how is it that David is on a secret mission and didn't even pack his lunch box?

And to add to that suspicion, David asks a really strange question to a priest. **Look at verse 8. “Then have you not here 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.”**

More lies.

Notice this irony of ironies – *verse 9. “The sword of Goliath the Philistines, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here.”*

You see how far David is falling. There was a day a few years back when Goliath's sword meant nothing to him . . . he ran against Goliath with a slingshot.

And before he swung that sling he shouted to Goliath and to the armies on either side – You come against me with sword, shield and spear, but I come to you in the name of the Lord.”

But now . . . I'm between a rock and a hard place . . . I'm on the run . . . and God doesn't seem to be around . . . maybe a sword isn't such a bad idea.

Notice the blunt demand of David at the end of verse 9. “There is none like that; give it to me.”

Past victories by faith do not automatically guarantee future victories by faith.

Faith in the past doesn't mean you'll always act in faith in the future.

I've lived long enough to see the Lord do marvelous things in and through this church and in this ministry – but what keeps me up at night is that our victories of faith will all be in the past tense.

We'll just sit around and talk about those good old days back then.

No, no, no . . . I long for these days to be good old days.

These days. What are we attempting for God today – what are expecting from God today? William Carey would say.

Hudson Taylor wrote to his staff of the China Inland Mission on one occasion to prod them on; and he said, “If our mission is to be fruitful, and continue amid the perils that must be faced, it can only be as each one of us contributes his [daily] quota of faith in the living God.”^{iv}

What a great thought . . . a daily quota of faith that God is alive and we are His servants. Listen, your greatest step of faith will be whatever the next one is. Whatever it is.

Well I had faith in God's protection and provision and providence 5 years ago . . . I'll just reapply that.

No, God wants us to pray for daily bread – to trust Him daily.

I was thinking this week that one of the great deterrents to daily faith is the invention of the refrigerator. We're stocked up for a week or more.

Unlike so many believers I've seen as I've traveled into 3rd world contexts and countries where they get water for that day; then they're going to walk 2 miles tomorrow to get water for that day.

I've stood in line with a believer that stretched down the block, waiting to get up to the window of a baker who would sell us one loaf of bread.

We most often depend on the Lord monthly, not daily.

So God will develop faith in us – in this culture – in different ways. But He's after the same thing – for us to demonstrate fresh trust in Him.

For you and me *today* to lean not on our own understanding but in all our ways acknowledge Him – that is, give Him priority – trust Him to direct our path.

Listen, what's David doing trusting in the sword of Goliath? The dried blood on that sword was Goliath's . . . it didn't do him any more good than a wet noodle against someone charging him in faith.

And that's the problem . . . David's faith is slipping into yesterday . . . today, he is sliding into fear.

It only gets worse.

Scene one could be called, "Telling lies on Nob's Hill.

2. Scene Two could be called: Acting Insane at Gath's Gate.

You'll see what I mean at *verse 10. And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath.* ¹¹*And the servants of Achish said to him "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.* ¹²*And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.* ¹³*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.*

This is bizarre isn't it?

David is actually going to Gath?

One author said that Gath was the Washington, D.C. of the Philistines.^v

David has killed thousands of them in battle – including their hometown champion. Gath was the hometown of Goliath.

Frankly, commentators and Old Testament scholars are still confused over David's thinking process here . . . why in the world would David go to Gath?

Some suggest that Saul would never look for David in Gath.^{vi}

Duh. That's an ancient Hebrew word.

No doubt Saul would never think David would do something this whacky.

Some suggest that David thought Achish would love having Saul's prize lieutenant on his side.^{vii}

Others suggest that since David had grown and matured – now older and made rugged by his

military expeditions – that they wouldn't recognize him.^{viii}

Well if that's the case, why would he come into town wearing Goliath's super-sized sword.

You just want to say to David, "Hello . . . anybody home up there?"

We still don't know why . . . nobody can quite figure out the utter stupidity – the reckless naivety swirling around in David's mind – and let me tell you, whatever it was that seemed to make sense to him that would bring him to Gath, disappeared the minute he was recognized.

Before he knew it, he was recognized and *verse 13* says he was *in their hands*.

He was captured!

His instincts kicked in and his brain engaged . . . and he began to act in this scene as a madman . . . out of his mind . . . scratching and clawing at the city gates . . . drooling on his beard.

Wow . . . this is David, the King.

He's evidently a good actor because Achish says in verse 15, "Do I lack madmen?" In other words, I've already got enough crazy people around me, I don't want one more . . . so let him go."

But why not kill David?

One Jewish tradition alleges that both the wife and daughter of King Achish were mentally insane . . . he had seen them suffer . . . he had enough to deal with already, and enough pity in this one area to actually let David live.

Ultimately, it was by the providence of God.

3. The next scene opens as we'll call it, "Hiding Away in Adullam's Cave".

Notice verse 1 of chapter 22. David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam.

Stop here for a moment and climb into that dark cave.

David is alone . . . having narrowly escaped with his life. He's run about two miles away to a Canaanite village of Adullam where the hills are honey-combed with caves.^{ix}

He finds a large one . . . a deep one and he hides himself deep inside and begins to cry.

He's terrified . . . he's guilty of lying to God's high priest . . . he was humiliated in Gath . . . embarrassed . . . faithless . . . defeated . . . alone.

In the early biography of David's life, this is where David reaches the bottom of the pit.

There's a Psalm David begins to write out as he huddles in this cave – and it's a classic. ***Look with me*** briefly at ***Psalm 142 as David just falls apart; "With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord."***

David's confessing his sin . . . his faithlessness.

I cry with my voice – notice – not my heart or my mind – but my voice – his sobbing and crying is echoing around the walls of that cave.

Then he says ***verse 2, "I pour out my complaint before Him . . ."***

Hahaha . . . I love that – I've confessed my sins and now I've got a list of complaints and troubles!

200 years ago, one church leader said as he lay on his deathbed, "Isn't it a great blessing to know that there is someone in heaven to whom [we] can complain."^x

This was John Bunyan's poem of choice while serving out his prison sentences – the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

David goes on in ***verse 4 to say, "Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me."***

The right side signifies the place where one's witness or legal council would stand . . . David is effectively saying, "I have no legal representation – or recourse – or defense."^{xi}

He's saying, "I've been declared guilty and none of it is true!"

Back in – ***verse 2, he says, "I tell all my trouble before Him."***

The word for ***trouble*** back in ***verse 2*** refers to a narrow, cramped, restricted place – we would say it this way, "I'm between a rock and a hard place." I'm in trouble.

I've got nowhere left to run . . . I'm stuck.

Notice verse 5. I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." [Aren't You?] Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low!

God, I'm sure You've noticed . . . I can't go any lower . . . I am at the bottom of the pit.

Can you imagine David's despair in that dark cave? There's no escape. There is nothing left.^{xii}

There's no one else.

All he hears is his sobbing echoes bouncing back at him in the cave of Adullam.

Lord – ***verse 6b. Deliver me from my persecutors for they are too strong for me! Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!***

In other words, rescue me and I promise I'll never stop telling people how wonderful you are. Give me something good to hold on to.

Give me a reason to keep living.

I read recently of a man in England who had an interesting windfall come his way. When he was 90 years old, he made the U.S. equivalent of a \$100 dollar bet that he would live to 100 years of age. A betting company placed his odds at 250 to 1. On his 100th birthday he collected \$25,000 dollars. I'm not sure if he lived long enough to spend it, and I'm not recommending betting. He was asked by one reporter how he felt while he waited for this day to arrive; he said, "I was very careful . . . I kept to a steady diet of porridge . . . and I frequently reminded myself to keep breathing."

Just keep breathing.

Have you ever been at a place where the greatest challenge was simply putting one step in front of the other . . . to just keep breathing?

David is reminding himself to just keep breathing.

Notice, ***The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.***

This is David grasping, stretching, reaching, once again in faith and trust in the Providence and grace of God.

We're not sure how long it was . . . maybe a day or two . . . suddenly David hears muffled footsteps and talking . . . someone is calling, 'David . . . where are you?'

Back in ***1 Samuel 22, I don't think David could have ever imagined this would happen – verse 1. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him.***

Up until this point, they've been uninvolved. We have every reason to assume his brothers are uninterested, perhaps jealous – his father had shown little interest. David hasn't seen his mother and his father and his brothers for some time.

And there they are . . . they'd heard about all about it . . . maybe some shepherd boy or some traveler had seen him go in or maybe heard crying coming from deep inside that cave . . . an the word spread.

And there they are . . . his family. What an incredible reunion. The text implies sympathy and unity and fellowship.

He hugs his mother and his father and his brothers – even Eliab has evidently taken pity on his little brother . . . finally.

So, here in this cave, God brings about a wonderful reconciliation with David's family.

Then more footsteps . . . look at *verse 2*. ***And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.***

I mean, this scene is beginning to look like a Robin Hood movie, isn't it?

Actually it is.

David, in many ways, really does become the original Robin Hood.

One author suggested the same – he wrote that the Judean wilderness, with its mountains, caves and riverbeds would become his Sherwood Forest.^{xiii}

And just look at his band of brothers.

Samuel describes them in *verse 2*:

- Those men who were *in distress*: that Hebrew words means “under pressure, under stress”;
- Everyone who was *in debt*: more than likely a reference to unfair taxation under King Saul;
- And everyone *who was bitter in soul* – they had given up.

Samuel had warned the people. You choose a king and he will tax you and take your children and demand your produce and the best of your cattle.

You see, you need to understand that these men aren't running for a bad credit rating; a credit card bill at JC Penney they can't pay off; they're not bitter about bad neighbors who steal their apples.

These are men who more than likely had been singled out by King Saul with demands for money or land or loyalty . . . and they had reached their own point of desperation . . . they were finished with this madman.

And by the way, these 400 men – soon to be 600 men – will become David's mighty men – chronicled later as David's heroic warriors – they will become members of his cabinet in his soon coming kingdom.^{xiv}

David had been alone in that cave . . . and part of God's solution to bring him out of despair was to show him the desperate lives of other people – to take his eyes off himself and focus on someone else that he could embrace and encourage and eventually lead to walk with God.

If there's one phrase to underscore and maybe even underline in your text that summarizes David's rediscovered trust it's in *verse 3*.

David takes his parents to the King of Moab for protection – remember, David has Moabite blood flowing in his veins – his great-grandmother Ruth, was a converted Moabitess – and David gives a wonderful testimony to this King when he says, ***“Please let my father and my mother stay with you – underscore this – til I know what God will do for me.”***

David is back on his feet . . . his life, his path, once again entrusted to into the hand of God. What's changed? He's surrounded by other men without any prospects; he's reunited with his parents and brothers, but they have no security or long range plan; he doesn't know what God has in mind for tomorrow; he's still hunted and hated by Saul.

But he's willing to wait for whatever God chooses to do.

My life is in the hands of God and I'm trusting Him today.

On June 22, 2007, a hit-and-run incident left Daniel McConchie paralyzed from the waist down. Daniel says that since that traumatic day, he's learned to pray the prayers of David.

And he's written one of his own – about a year after his accident – just a few years ago.

*Oh Lord, my God! Why do you wait to show up?
I cried out to you when trouble struck.
I asked for your restoration.
I know that you heard me. I know that you answered.*

*Yet nothing—nothing of meaning happens again
today.*

*Infinitesimal changes dog my days.
I am hounded by the prayers of the fickle
Looking to me to prove their faith.
Wearily I drag on
Tiring of the waste, hating the horror,
The pain, the suffering, the never-ending trial.*

*The endless story drags on, and on, and on.
When will the clouds break?
When will the night cease?
When will the tunnel end?
When will you smile again?*

*What a two-edged sword your voice is!
You speak. And then wait?*

*You give hope. And then vanish into the mist?
Have you forgotten me?
Have more important things arrested your
attention?*

*Hope turns black. This evil I have seen.
Nightly my dreams show me restored,
And in the morning I am broken again
Cursed to relive the horror of suffering's first day.*

*Please slay me! Blot my name from the ranks of the
living!
For in the grave can I finally rest.
My wife can have her dreams again;
My children a father who can provide as I should.*

*I wasted my youth.
I dismissed the joys I should have embraced.
Now I am a mere spectator;
Pretending to be consequential while others take my
place.*

*A position I threw away one fateful day.

How long? How long must I wait here in the
middle?
Between healing and hell,
Between heaven and horror,
I am unable to move ... unable to see ... lost in
eternal confusion.*

*My demons torment me
Batting me about like a toy, I spin and crash in
endless cycle.
I no longer know which way is up,

Which way is right, which way to go.*

*Which way is the path to life?
Is it up an unclimbable mountain?
Or on a path tread by all but me*

*Who am I that God should remember me?
My only salvation is that he should not forget his
image,
Or let his word be broken.
He is faithful to us because he is faithful to himself.*

*There is nothing I can do,
In no way can I help.
I sit in the ruins and wait,
And take comfort in those who lie in the ashes with
me.*

***But one day**, by his promise, I will stand;
Restored as his message of hope is fulfilled.
The Lord will turn this horror into a fading dream,
And I will honor his name forever.^{xv}*

Sounds like someone who knows what the deep cave of Abdullam is like . . . but someone, like David who is now willing to wait for whatever God chooses to do.

Can we do any less today, than say the same; my life is in the hands of God and I trust Him with fresh faith, today.

Sing:

*Christ is all I need
Christ is all I need
All, all I need
Christ is all I need
Christ is all I need
Jesus is all I need.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/2/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i William G. Bellshaw, The Book of 1 Samuel: Better Than Sacrifice (Regular Baptist Press, 1976), p. 80

ii Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, David: A Man of Passion & Destiny (Word Publishing, 1997), p.

iii Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Zondervan, 1992), p.728

iv Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission (OMF, 1996), p. 41

v Swindoll, p. 65

vi Bellshaw, p. 86

vii Dale Ralph Davis, Expositions of the Book of 1 Samuel: Volume 2 (Baker Books, 1994), p. 76

viii F.B. Meyer, David: Shepherd, Psalmist, King (Christian Literature Crusade, 1973), p. 65

ix Meyer, p. 70

x G.A.F. Knight, Psalms: Volume 2 (Westminster Press, 1983), p. 334

xi Expositor's, p. 850

xii Swindoll, p. 72

xiii Swindoll, p. 75

xiv Adapted from C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume II (Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), p. 223

xv "Partially Paralyzed Man offers a Modern-day Lament" @ <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/july/1071210.html>