

Lament in Hope: David's Example Through Trial — Dr. Joshua Brownfield

Well, thank you, Dean Gordon, for the kind introduction. As he said, I am the pastor and one of the elders at First Baptist Church of Wycombe, Pennsylvania. If you don't know where Wycombe is, that's okay. Before I went there, I didn't know either. It's about 25 minutes north of here, and it's a little bit like the village of Anatevka in Fiddler on the Roof. Some people have been there, and they did not even realize that they were there.

But obscurity of where I live notwithstanding, it is a great privilege to be here today. We've already heard the Scripture read, so let's pray one more time and ask God to help us as we give attention to His Word, and then we'll dive in and see what He has to say to us.

Let's pray. Oh, Lord, our God and Heavenly Father, we marvel that You would stop and stoop and speak to those who were sinners, and yet You have done so. You sent Your Spirit to inspire writers of old, and You did so to testify to the work of Your Son. We pray that we would give due attention to that, and we pray that by Your Spirit, you would illuminate our understanding so that we would see rightly all that is contained therein.

Do not let us be like those who look into the Word as they look into a mirror and then forget what they see. But please help us to be changed by what we find here. We ask this, Lord Jesus Christ, in Your name, amen.

In Psalm 34, 8 to 10, David writes, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him have no lack. The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing."

Based on lyrics like this, we might be inclined to think that this psalm was written in a time of peace and tranquility, when everything was going as it should have. But the reality is, it was written in the wake of one of the worst times in the entirety of the nation of Israel, and that is the time of the judges.

First Samuel, our text this morning, begins at the end of the judges' period, in which there is no king and everyone does what is right in their own eyes. By the time the book opens, even the sanctuary of the Lord itself has turned Canaanite. But God sends Samuel as the last of the judges to not only deliver Israel for a time, but also to anoint their first king, Saul.

Saul is given every gift necessary to perform his work as king, but he refuses to follow. God's commands. He becomes a law to himself, and so the kingdom, first the dynasty, and then his kingdom are taken from him. When the Spirit no longer fills him, he is tormented by demons, and Israel is left with a mad king on the throne.

In God's kindness, he sends another, one who is better than Saul, a man after his own heart, David. And even after David crushes the head of the very serpent-like Goliath, Saul turns on his famous warrior, attempting to kill him with his own hands before commissioning his own

servants to apprehend and kill the giant killer.

This forces David to go on the run. Banished from the house of Saul, he runs to the sanctuary of Nob. There, if you're at all familiar with the narrative, there he is, at best, evasive with the high priest Ahimelech about his reason for running alone on the Sabbath with no one around him, no food or weapons. Ahimelech, in response to David's request, gives him the bread of the presence. And when David asks for a weapon (I'm not sure why one would think to ask a priest for a weapon) but David does ask Ahimelech, "Do you have anything that I can use?" he provides him with the sword of Goliath. So with his weapon and provisions, David runs west to the only place that he thinks that he can run, and that is Philistia.

So here's where we're going to go today. If you're attempting to find mental hangers on which to hang everything that we're going to talk about, here's what we're going to do. So we're going to ask three big questions. The first one is, what happened to David? And in answering that, we're going to go through the events of the text. We're then going to ask the question, what did he think about that? And then we're going to spend some time looking in the Psalms to see his response, one of which we've already said, heard read today by Jarred, Psalm 56. And then we're going to ask the question, what does it matter? Presumably you're here to not get a little bit better at Bible trivia, you're looking for something that will have some impact on your life, and we'll talk about that in just a moment.

The structure of the text is pretty easy to take apart and to put back together. It's organized around three locations, and the first location is that of Gath. And David, I'll go back to verse 10 in chapter 21: "And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish, the king of Gath." If this is where you have to run, you are in dire straits. David can't go home, Saul has already sent soldiers there, he can't hide with Samuel. Though he was thwarted, Saul is not afraid to send soldiers to Ramah to try to apprehend David there. He definitely can't hide with Jonathan because Jonathan probably lives on the family plot with his father. And so David, the killer of Goliath, not only goes to Philistia, but goes to Gath, Goliath's hometown, with Goliath's sword slung over his shoulder.

Now why would he be so daft as to go there? It is because he is counting on Saul not being willing to risk an invasion to find him. And it turns out that he is correct, but his efforts to stay hidden do not work. When he gets there, it says, "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 and dance as Saul struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands?"

The Philistines clock him immediately. They know the song! They've heard about it. The song that so enraged Saul about Saul is slain his thousands and David his ten thousands—they know that song. And so when David arrives, they look at him and they say, we know exactly who this person is. And what's amusing is that these doggone serving pagans know who the true king of Israel is supposed to be, and Saul, who ostensibly serves Yahweh, does not.

Somehow David ascertains that he has found out and so he resorts to acting to put his foes off his scent. "And David took those words to heart and was 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 a spittle run down his beard. Then Achish said to his servants, behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall his fellow come into my house?"

There is a certain kind of humility that comes with public drooling. And David experiences this. This is his lowest point, perhaps. And when he realizes that he has been discovered, he knows he can't run back to Israel. And so his solution is to feign madness and he probably does so, so the Philistines will not think of him as a threat. So when the Philistines apprehend him and bring the seemingly incoherent David to Achish, the king of Gath tells his servants, I already have enough madmen I don't really feel like I need another one. So we have a surplus of this already. You can go ahead and set him free. And with that, David is able to go.

We don't know how long he keeps up this charade, but he knows that he can't do it forever. So he risks returning to his homeland by running to a place of refuge. And here we see the second location: We have Gath and now Adulam in verse 1 of chapter 22:

"David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adulam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. 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 400 men."

So David runs to the border town of Adulam, hoping to find some kind of refuge there. And he does, though it is not the kind of refuge that you might think of in terms of a cozy ski chalet on a winter's day. The cave near the hill of Adulam has all of the charm of a fallout shelter. Though he's able to bring his family, he is very much alone. And he's definitely not helped by the band of men who begin to gather around him. I don't know that David would have counted their presence as a blessing. But when news travels that David, the slayer of Goliath and Israel's military hero, has been exiled by Saul, everyone who has a problem with Saul rallies to David. Why do they do this? Well, as it turns out, everything Samuel said about the negatives of having a king, they've all come true. And so everyone who has a problem with Saul runs to David.

So as he gathers this army of brigands, David recognizes that the family cannot stay with him forever. So he journeys across the Jordan to find shelter among some of his distant cousins. This brings us to the third destination, Moab. "And David went from there to Mitzpah of Moab, and he said to the king of Moab, please let my father and my mother stay with you till I know what God will 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."

So remember, David's great-grandfather was Boaz, who married Ruth, a Moabitess. He is related to the Moabites, and he calls on that now in seeking shelter for his parents. And after this, David, after he leaves his family in Moab, something completely unexpected happens for David. We see this in verse 5: "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. So Gad appears, not for the first time in 1 Samuel, but he appears out of the blue with a message from God. And the message is simple enough, Don't go here, go here, but this incident alone should tell us a lot about what is happening to David.

First, God sends a message of deliverance. He gives to David, he saves David with his word. And though the message is only 14 words in an English translation, it still demonstrates that God is honoring his promise. The message doesn't give David a play-by-play for what's going to happen in the next few years. He doesn't know what's going to happen to Saul, he doesn't know what's going to happen with Jonathan. But what he does know is the next step, which I would say, parenthetically, is probably about as much as any of us can take when it comes to how God's plan unfolds for our lives. We'll come back to this in a moment when we consider what David thought about his experiences.

Second, this is the second thing that we need to know about this God sends a messenger to David. He's not speaking to Saul. Saul is enduring a judgment from God, a famine of the word. But even in the wilderness, David is receiving, as it were, manna from God. He is receiving special revelation from him.

Finally, God sends a messenger. Prophets were part of the royal court, or at least they were supposed to be, until Saul got at odds with Samuel. For Gad to be a part of David's retinue shows how kingly David is beginning to look, even though he is in exile.

But for him—Oh, there's a train—For him—I assume this is typical for you, for me, this is not—For him to reach the throne, however, David will have to spend more time in the wilderness. And if you want to know what happens with that, just go back to your room or wherever it is that you're going to go after this and keep reading, though not in class, not in the middle of the lecture, I imagine faculty would not appreciate that, for all of its sanctified purposes.

So that's what happens. That's what happens in the text. What does David think about this? One of the distinct features of Hebrew narrative is just how sparse they tend to be. The various authors of the Old Testament, they generally don't tell us very much about the internal life of the figures that they describe. But David is an exception. Because of the Psalms, we have access into what is happening in the mind of the man who would be king. And there are at least four Psalms that come from this period. Two come from his time in Gath, Psalm 34 and Psalm 57, and two come from his time in the cave, Psalm 56 and Psalm 142.

And again, we might think that's strange. We tend to think of writing hymns and music as the sort of thing that one does when life is peaceful, when your accounts are all full, when you don't

have anyone from the bursar's office pestering you about that. But as it turns out, times of affliction and suffering are actually excellent ones in which to produce praise to God.

So what were David's reflections on his time in Gath and in the cave outside of Adullam? Well, we don't get the sense that David ever minimized his experience. Psalm 56, which is subtitled, "of David when the Philistines seized him in Gath," in it David cries out, as we heard a few minutes ago, "Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me all day long, an attacker oppresses me, my enemies trample on me all day long for many attack me proudly. All day long they injure my cause, all their thoughts are against me for evil, they stir up strife, they lurk, they watch my steps as they have waited for my life."

In Psalm 57, David writes, "My soul is in the midst of lions, I lie down amid fiery beasts, the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords." David also describes how they have set a net for his steps and are digging a pit in his way, they are watching him to see how they can apprehend him and how they can thwart his plans.

In Psalm 142, he writes, "When my spirit faints within me, you know my way. In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me. Look to the right and see, there is none who takes notice of me, no refuge remains to me. No one cares for my soul."

So David is not looking on the bright side of life by minimizing the pain that he is experiencing. Through no fault of his own, David has lost everything. The man who took him in as a kind of adopted son, Saul, is not only out to kill him but has attempted to do so three times. He's lost command of his army, he's lost his wife, Michal, he's lost his access to Samuel, and now he must dwell in the presence of his enemies.

The threats to David's life are very real from a human point of view. But David doesn't despair. He cries out to God to deliver him, but he does so with the expectation that God is going to do what is right.

Psalm 56, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God whose word I praise, in God I trust, I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?"

Psalm 57, "My heart is steadfast, oh God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody for your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds."

Psalm 142, "I cry out to the Lord and I say, you are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low. 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. The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me."

And then Psalm 34, "Affliction will slay the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the life of his servants, none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."

So is David delusional? Or does he have confidence for a reason? And the answer is, he has confidence and he actually has confidence for two reasons. One, David knows who God is. He's not the tribal deity for Israel whose domain is contiguous with the territorial boundaries of his people. He's also not like the Canaanite pantheon who had to be cajoled and coerced into doing what his human worshipers wanted him to do. He is the one to whom David cries in Psalm 56, be exalted, O God, above the heavens and let your glory be over all the earth. The Lord of hosts is the creator of all and everything that he has made bends the knee to him. This is why, though flesh threatens him, David knows that he does not have to be afraid. After all, what can they do to him that does not come from the hand of the God of Israel?

Second, David also knows that the Most High God is the one whose purposes cannot be thwarted and so his promises are true. In Psalm 57, he says, "I cry out to God, Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me." David doesn't know how it's going to happen, but he knows that the promise that was made through Samuel to him is going to come to pass. And even more than this, as he says in Psalm 34, "he knows God is for me."

Can we have this kind of confidence for ourselves? As it turns out, we can, though on the basis of better promises. So we've talked about what happened to David, we talked about how he felt about it, how he reacted to it, and now we're going to talk about what does it matter? What difference does it make for us?

The source of this confidence is not something that we find in ourselves, but actually it's in the one whose outline you may have perceived already in the life of David, because he is the one who truly crushed the head of the serpent. He suffered unjustly at the hands of his countrymen and he endured such hostility from sinners. His whole life was one long Gethsemane, knowing that not only crucifixion was in his future but the wrath of God was going to be poured out on his head. He is the one of whom David speaks through the Spirit's inspiration. He is the one of whom David speaks in Psalm 34: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken."

We know that Jesus is the one he's talking about because we see it fulfilled in John 19. It is through Christ, the Son of God, David's descendant according to the flesh, that we find the confidence to know that God is for us. The ultimate questions about death and our reconciliation with our Creator are answered in and by him. Because when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Through him we have received reconciliation with our Creator. And as Paul asks in Romans 8, "He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Now that sounds good. Hope of eternal life, reconciliation with our Creator, forgiveness of sin, justification, adoption, his coherence with Christ, ongoing work of sanctification, the promise of glorification to come, that's all good. But what about the pain and the difficulty that we experience now in between?

If I had to guess, my experience in college was probably quite different from yours. I'm in my 40s and so it's probably never occurred to you to ask yourself, "do I listen to Scott too much?" Both of you got that. However, one of the truths that I learned personally when I was in undergrad was this: that your time in school does not insulate you from pain and suffering.

Some of you, I have little doubt, can identify with David when he speaks of God bottling his tears and keeping a record of his sufferings in a book. You may feel as though every day is but a new page that God adds to his annals of suffering that you have endured. What do you do? How do you cry out to God in the midst of such pain and anguish? Well, the good thing that we have is we have the Psalter. We have the Psalms to give us the language to express our lament to God in our hours of despair. But it is not simply lament, it is also lament in hope, not optimism. Jesus came to deliver us from optimism and instead gave us hope. That is different. Though we do not know what lies ahead, we can trust the sovereign God whose purposes cannot be thwarted.

And how do we know that? How is it that we can know that God's promises for us are sure and true, and how do we know that he will bring all of the right things to pass? It is because he is for us in Christ. If you doubt the love of God and if you doubt his goodness for you, all you need to do is find the cross. Look long on that and then contemplate the fact that in Christ, the Son of God, we have such a high priest who is sympathetic with us in our weaknesses, according to his humanity, that he understands in his state of humiliation, he understands the pain and the difficulty and the isolation.

But he did not come to simply suffer alongside us. He came to deliver us and he came to save us. And so if you doubt, if you despair, then this day I urge you, look to the cross. If you need the language to cry out to God, use the Psalms. They are the hymn book for those whose hearts are broken, but who still wish to find hope and life in the God who has saved them.

Let's pray. O Lord, our God and Heavenly Father, we are humbled that though we were sinners, rebels and traitors, to our good and loving Creator, you sent your Son to die for us. We pray not only that that message would go to the ends of the earth, but that we would find lodging here. We ask for those who do not know you savingly, that they would be drawn to you, that you would open their eyes and give them hearts of flesh where there once had been hearts of stone. For those who are despairing and suffering, we ask that in the Psalter they would find the language that they need to cry out to you, and we pray that they would find hope in the work of your Son. We ask all of these things knowing that you are gracious to give them, and we are completely undeserving. Lord Christ, our High Priest, who sympathizes with us in our weaknesses, we ask this in your name. Amen.

You are dismissed.