

THE OPPORTUNIST - PSALM 52

THE LIFE OF DAVID IN THE PSALMS #3

On this 4th of July weekend, we treasure our freedom and remember the many who have served to pass that liberty down to us. Woodrow Wilson was one such man. As our country's 28th President, Wilson served in our nation's highest office at a most difficult time in history. During his first term, he was trying to lead our country in walking the tightrope of neutrality while war was raging in Europe. Finally, when our ships were attacked by German submarines and neutrality was no longer possible, Wilson lead our nation to victory in World War 1 in his second term. Then after the war ended, he helped to draft the peace Treaty of Versailles. And in addition to all that was happening on the international front, President Wilson administrated our country when we were moving into the modern era. When he assumed the presidency, there were less than 500,000 cars on the streets. By the time he finished office, there were over 8 million cars on the road. Yes, Woodrow Wilson is remembered today as a champion of world peace and democracy and societal change. Historians still consider him one of the top 5 most successful presidents in our country's illustrious history.

One of the characteristics that made Wilson such a good leader was his ability to spot those around him who were trying to secure and use political office for personal gain in an opportunistic way. Unlike some other Presidents in our history who have been constantly used by people for personal gain, Woodrow Wilson had the wisdom to spot the insincere motives of opportunists.

Wilson often told of the time when he first confronted this problem as

Governor of New Jersey. One of the Senators of his state had suddenly and tragically died. The passing of this Senator was a shock to then Governor Wilson and the whole state. But within just a couple of hours of the Senator's death, even before any viewing or funeral arrangements had been announced, Wilson received a phone call from an aspiring politician. After a brief word of greeting, the caller said, *Let me just get right to the point of my call. I'd like to take the Senator's place.* Well, Woodrow Wilson was so taken back by the blatant insensitivity and opportunism of the caller that he didn't even know how to respond at first. But then after a few moments of uncomfortable silence, the thought came to him. *Well, he finally answered, I guess that it's all right with me - if the funeral director doesn't mind.*

One of the skills that any leader has to hone is the ability to spot the insincere motives of opportunism. If a person is aspiring to a position with purely selfish motives without a heart to serve others, that person doesn't have a chance to be successful in that position. Especially as the leader of a nation, with many people trying to climb the ladder to personal power all around, it is critically important for the chief executive to be able to spot opportunism.

Recognizing the necessity of this skill in a good leader, it should not surprise us at all that this is one of the first lessons that God chose to teach David as He was beginning his training to be King of Israel.

We have begun a study looking at the life of David through the Psalms that he wrote. We have already seen some of the lessons that he learned as a shepherd tending the family flocks while he was a young boy last Sunday morning. Then

Sunday evening, we looked at some lessons that he learned after his quick ascendancy to prominence after his defeat of Goliath and instillation as the court musician before Saul completely turned on him forcing him to flee for his life.

Now this week we want to begin perhaps the most important time in David's life in preparing him for the throne. For David obviously needed to have a great deal of preparation in order to be the kind of King that God desired for him to be.

You can learn something about discipline and character and work habits as a shepherd - but you don't learn what you need to know about administration or government protocol or international policies as a shepherd. So David, having graduated from the school of shepherding with his B.A. degree (we might call this the Baaa degree) was now ready to enroll in the school of being a fugitive where he would learn some valuable lessons enabling him to become a great king.

The stresses and pressures in the palace finally became so great for David that he had to flee for his life. Saul several times had tried to thrust his spear into David while he was playing his musical instrument. The benefit of having delivered the Israelites from the Philistines for a short time by killing Goliath had now seemed to turn into a liability - for Saul had become insanely jealous of David's popularity with the people. David had even become fearful of personally returning to the palace. So he arranged with his close friend, Jonathan, to feel out the atmosphere and tell him if it was safe to return or not. As Saul's son, Jonathan would have access into the thought patterns of Saul that nobody else would have. When Jonathan realized that it really was unsafe for David to return and warned him to flee quickly for his life, all of the realities of being a fugitive, running for

his life, immediately consumed the mind of David. Now we must remember, David was a teenager at this time. But he suddenly had all of the pressures of a life and death struggle placed upon his shoulders.

It should not surprise us that David made some very rash and unwise decisions at this time in his life. After all, his head was spinning. He didn't know what to do or where to turn. But God even used some of these poor decisions to teach David some very valuable lessons - and we want to look at some of these beginning this week.

An executive of a very large company was once asked for the single key to being a successful CEO. *I can give you that answer in just 2 words - good decisions. But how does one know how to make good decisions?* the interviewer added. *I can give you that answer in just 1 word,* the CEO replied - *experience.* Well, the interviewer was still not satisfied so he continued to ask, *But what is the key to getting experience?* *I can also give you that answer in just 2 words,* the executive replied - *bad decisions.*

Most people look at poor decisions that are made in life as horrible failures. And it is certainly true that none of us purposefully want to make a bad decision. But if we learn from poor decisions that we have made, we can grow in wisdom and experience and be better qualified to make better decisions in the future.

The first decision that David made as a fugitive was a horrible one. It was one that could have resulted in untold grief and guilt for the rest of his life. David was completely on his own for the first time in his life, accompanied only by a few friends, perhaps a servant or two. He desperately felt the need for some support.

So he ran to Levitical city called Nob in order to obtain support from the priests there. David did not stop long enough to think through the dangerous position into which he was putting these priests. David as a scared young man was just thinking of himself and how to save his own life.

Let me read the Biblical accounts of this first decision that David made and the consequences of it - it is important for this gives to us the setting of Psalm 52 that we want to study this morning.

READ 1 SAMUEL 21:1-10A

1SA 21:1 David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"

1SA 21:2 David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. ³ Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."

1SA 21:4 But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here--provided the men have kept themselves from women."

1SA 21:5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" ⁶ So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

1SA 21:7 Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd.

1SA 21:8 David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent."

1SA 21:9 The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one."

David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

1SA 21:10 That day David fled from Saul

READ 1 SAMUEL 22:6-23

1SA 22:6 Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul, spear in hand, was seated under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing around him. ⁷ Saul said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? ⁸ Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today."

1SA 22:9 But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. ¹⁰ Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

1SA 22:11 Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. ¹² Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

"Yes, my lord," he answered.

1SA 22:13 Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

1SA 22:14 Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? ¹⁵ Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."

1SA 22:16 But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family."

1SA 22:17 Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me."

But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.

1SA 22:18 The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. ¹⁹ He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

1SA 22:20 But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David. ²¹ He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD.

²² Then David said to Abiathar: "That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family. ²³ Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me."

Now what a tragic story we have here. And David recognizes that part of the responsibility for this horrible slaughter was his. No, he didn't wield the sword that killed these priests and their families. But David had not recognized that if Saul were so emotionally unstable that he was irrationally trying to take the life of the only bright light in Israel militarily, then he also might have some other enemies that he was trying to get rid of. You see, Saul was obsessed with jealousy and paranoia. He not only was bent on killing young David, but he also was looking at the priests as a challenge to his power. The priests were a strong force in Israel - as they should have been. The priests represented the people to God.

The priests taught God's laws and commandments to the people. The priests were respected and honored. And Saul was jealous of that. Instead of allying himself with the priests so that God's blessing and power could be with him on the throne, Saul opposed the priests and had even cut himself off from Samuel, the leader of the priests. David, too late, realized that he had given Saul an opportunity to avenge himself on those innocent priests. David, too late, realized the opportunism of this wicked Edomite named Doeg.

This event alone could have crushed most young people. But instead of being crushed, David grew from it. While recognizing his own lack of wisdom, he also realized that he had not made the decision to kill those priests and their families. That was Saul's decision. And David chose to learn an invaluable lesson concerning those who would use opportunistic situations to their own wicked ends as Doeg had.

Psalm 52 was written just after this tragic event occurred. Psalm 52 was David's response to Doeg and his despicable actions. Turn with me to this passage and let's look at it briefly seeing the invaluable lessons that David learned from this tragic experience. And we quickly note that this Psalm divides itself into 3 major sections. First, David exposes the wicked character of Doeg in verses 1-4. Then David speaks of the brevity of Doeg's apparent success - that God will certainly thwart his ill-conceived plan in verses 5-7. And finally, David renews his own faith and trust in the Lord in verses 8-9.

1. David begins this Psalm with a question that is filled with satire and irony. *Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man?* Oh, you are just a courageous

warrior, Doeg. After all, you killed all of those priests who didn't even have one weapon between them. And then you slaughtered their families. And then you brag about your heroic conquests. You are such a mighty man. But while Doeg might have tried to convince himself that he was being loyal to Saul, in reality, he was a disgrace in the eyes of God. *Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? vs. 1*

*David then goes on to expose Doeg's actions as being deceitful. *Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. vs. 2* And I'm sure that you caught the nuances of difference when we read the historical accounts from Samuel. When David first came to Ahimelech, the priest was very suspicious and reticent to offer any help. But it was David who convinced the priest of his need and the needs of the men who were with him. But when Doeg gives his testimony as an eyewitness to Saul, he makes it seem like Ahimelech was part of a conspiracy against the King. Ahimelech inquired of God for David and then he offered to him food and a weapon. It is clear that Doeg misrepresents the whole situation. He does so probably because he knew that he was telling Saul what the king wanted to hear. But he also does so because he knew it is to his political advantage. Saul had just offered great rewards to anyone who would step forth with help. Doeg had just been Saul's chief shepherd to this point. He sees this as a golden opportunity for advancement - perhaps even to a prominent place in the palace.

*But David moves beyond the inhumanity of the actions to the evilness of Doeg's heart. *You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the*

truth. You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue. David correctly identified the wickedness that festered within Doeg's depraved heart. He was just a cruel and evil man. Anyone who would be a party to killing 85 innocent families had to just revel in wickedness. I mean, this was such a despicable act that none of the other loyal members of Saul's household would even touch it. They all refused even the king's command because it was so immoral. But not Doeg. He jumped at the chance for advancement, even though it meant the loss of innocent lives.

2. But Doeg's plan was doomed to fail. God would certainly not allow this wicked plot of his to succeed. So David, in faith, speaks of the brief nature of his apparent success. *Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin; He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living.* vs. 5

*there is an increasing intensity in the verbs that David uses to describe Doeg's fate. *Bring you down - snatch you up - tear you from your tent - uproot you.* Just as Doeg had been the weapon in Saul's hand to bring about the annihilation of innocent people who were serving the Lord, so he would suffer the same fate. What he had sown, he would also reap. God would never let this travesty of justice go unpunished. Doeg would spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder, waiting for God's hand of justice and judgment to fall upon him.

*And when Doeg became the recipient of God's justice, he would become an object lesson for everyone in the whole nation. *The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others.*

vs. 7

Again, the progression is most interesting and instructive.

*they will **see** - they will observe what God is doing and recognize that it is the just recompense for his wicked actions.

*they will **fear** - they will acknowledge that God is powerful and mighty and able to execute his justice even upon the most powerful leaders on this earth

*they will **laugh** - they will ridicule and make fun of Doeg. Here was a man who only wanted to climb the political ladder. He wanted power and acceptance and fame and adulation. But in the end, he would just receive ridicule, a most humbling experience.

3. David concludes this Psalm with a reaffirmation of his trust and faith in the Lord.

⁸ But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. ⁹ I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.

*the olive tree symbolized many things to the Jewish mind - and all of them were good.

-it pictured prosperity for the olive tree produced the best yield for the amount of work of any plant in Israel.

-it pictured beauty for the rugged appearance of the olive tree was a beautiful sight to the Jewish eye. It was the custom for Jewish women to adorn themselves with olive branches at festivals to make themselves look more attractive.

-it pictured strength for the olive tree was able to stand firm and tall even amidst the most violent storms. It is interesting that some centuries later when the Greeks would initiate the Olympic Games that olive wreaths were chosen to honor those who were victorious in the contests.

-it pictured endurance for the olive tree is a plant which can live a long, long life. Even to this day, when one visits the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus sweat great drops of blood on the night of his betrayal, one can see Olive trees that are over 2,000 years old. Gethsemane means the olive press. It was the place where olives were harvested and processed. And there remain there trees that witnessed the very arrest of Jesus Christ himself.

-it pictured holiness for the olive provided oil for the lamps in the temple of God itself.

*If a vote were to be taken amongst the people when David wrote this Psalm - Doeg probably would have been voted more likely to succeed than David. After all, Doeg was now in Saul's inner circle. Doeg was on his way to the top. David was the fugitive. David was a man with little hope for the future. But David was a man of integrity. And he trusted in the righteous character of God. So in faith, he spoke of Doeg's demise and his own success in God's timing.

*I wish we have an historic account of what happened to Doeg the Edomite. We know nothing about him other than what we have studied here this morning. He is not referred to in the Bible again after the Samuel account. But perhaps that fact says volumes. For in the continuing account of Saul - Doeg is not mentioned among his advisers or counselors or cabinet. It is likely that Doeg was quickly

seen for the evil opportunist that he was and discarded - even by King Saul. One day, we will know the end of Doeg's story in glory.

*But we do know that David continued to grow and learn lessons that would enable him to be a most successful leader. And one lesson that David learned very clearly from this event in his life was never to trust a person who appeared to be an opportunist. For when David finally would become king of Israel, there would be many who would try to take advantage of his position and power. But David would remain a person of integrity and establish a throne based upon honesty and righteousness.

*Saul, on the other hand, would end up taking his own life on the battlefield in conflict with the Philistines. The Bible records that Saul was severely wounded. He chose to take his own life, falling on his sword, rather than be taken alive into the Philistine camp.

*But do you remember the story about the Amalekite who witnessed Saul's death? This man saw an immediate opportunity for advancement in the next regime. So this Amalekite grabbed Saul's crown and armband and brought them to David, using them as evidence that he had killed Saul. He was an opportunist. He expected David to welcome the news and reward him handsomely. But do you remember what David said and did? Let me read you his own words as recorded in 2 Samuel 1:14,15: *David asked him, Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? Then David called one of his men and said, Go, strike him down. So he struck him down, and he died. For David had said to him, Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you*

said, I killed the Lord's anointed..

*I believe that when David saw that opportunistic Amalekite coming with Saul's crown in his hand, he saw Doeg the Edomite. David had learned the lesson of dealing with those who would be opportunistic - and that lesson would help his kingdom to be built upon a strong foundation of integrity and trust.

*We live in a world where opportunism so often appears to be rewarded. But we must never forget to see deceit and hypocrisy and dishonesty through the eyes of God. And we must always remember that what appears to work in the short run cannot stand up to what God has decreed to be successful in the long run.

*God's character remains the same. He is righteous and just; he is a God of absolute integrity and honesty; and He is a God who rewards those who diligently seek Him. And today, God's words remain - Be holy for I your God am holy. God is still today looking for people after His own heart.