

ZIPH-LOCKED - PSALM 54

LIFE OF DAVID IN THE PSALMS #5

History is filled with examples of God's sovereignty, guiding the affairs of men through small, seemingly insignificant events. One such time occurred in June of 1776, during our Revolutionary War. New York's Colonial Governor, William Tryon, was a loyal supporter of King George 3rd. From a British gunboat in New York's harbor, he was doing his best to sabotage the small, revolutionary army through personal relationships that he had made. Tryon had devised an ingenious plan to ambush the Continental Army from behind their lines with their own weapons. The final blow would be to capture General George Washington and hand him over to the British, dead or alive.

The plan certainly had good potential to work. It was carefully laid out even to the smallest detail. But as the key leaders were going over those details in the Sergeant Arm's Tavern, a waiter overheard enough to understand what was being plotted. He tipped off some loyal revolutionaries that he knew. Within a day, 40 key ringleaders who had been involved in the treacherous plot had been identified and rounded up - among them David Matthews who was then the mayor of New York City and Thomas Hickey who was George Washington's personal bodyguard.

During his interrogation, it was Washington's own trusted bodyguard who revealed the most amazing plot of all. He confessed to having poisoned some peas that were to be a part of General Washington's meal one day. For some mysterious reason, the man who loved this vegetable did not have a taste for them

on that specific day so the peas were thrown out as food for the chickens with some other scraps. Other household servants remembered several chickens that had suddenly died in the night but had not thought to connect their deaths to the poisoned peas.

The court found Thomas Hickey guilty of mutiny, sedition and treachery and he was hanged on June 28, 1776.

It must be a very unsettling feeling to find out that a trusted friend who was given the responsibility to being a personal bodyguard has turned to the other side and betrayed the one who has placed such confidence in him. But these things happen at times in life. And one who is destined to be a leader like George Washington must develop the ability to cope with such disappointments in life and also have the faith to trust in a God who is able to overrule even the best laid plans of men.

We come to an event in David's life where he learned such a lesson. We have already seen several important lessons that God taught David during this accelerated learning time in his life when he was in exile. We have seen these lessons from Psalms that David wrote. These lessons were critical for David to learn if he were to become a great king and leader.

*David learned that he must trust in a sovereign God whose character would never change and not become disillusioned when the foundations seemed to be crumbling all around him - Psalm 11

*David learned that he must beware of opportunistic people who would try to bend situations to their own advantage so that they might climb the ladders of their

own personal careers from dealing with Doeg the Edomite - Psalm 52

*David learned how to endure slander and false accusations that could discredit him - Psalm 57

*Now we come this evening to another invaluable lesson that David had to learn if he were to become the great leader that God intended for him to be. Most political systems work on a give and take type of system. Even a king who supposedly has absolute power must work with and through other people in order to accomplish anything. One leader will do a favor for another, and then expect a reciprocal favor back in return. We have a saying - that if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. And nowhere is this saying realized in a purer form than in the political arena. In the final analysis, this whole system of thinking and acting relies upon careful planning and plotting and a confidence in people to pay back the debts of favors that are owed if they expect to have more favors in due time. But a lifetime operating in such a system can bring great disillusion. For every action is suspect for some ulterior motive. So whether the politics are in Washington, or at the business office, or in any other organization, they can become very destructive and actually undermine integrity and sincerity of good will.

You see, there is a great deal of difference in loving our neighbor because it is the right thing to do and loving our neighbor so that we can get a favor from them in return. The difference isn't necessarily in the benevolent action that is performed, but it is certainly evident in the motive. That is the reason for Jesus giving the parable of the Good Samaritan in response to the question *who is my*

neighbor? The priest and Levite who passed by the wounded man on that road from Jerusalem to Jericho didn't help him because they didn't see much possibility for good in return. These were men who did many good deeds in life. Certainly, society would respect them as being wonderful people. But their good deeds were directed towards those who had the ability to reciprocate. The Samaritan, on the other hand, acted in kindness expecting no kindness in return. So Christ's point is that if we are really loving our neighbors, we should give of ourselves to them not expecting a return for our investment.

*David learned this lesson all too painfully in a situation that developed in the small town of Keilah that was located near the border of where Israel controlled and the Philistine territory. Let's read about this interesting development in 1 Samuel 23:1-29.

1SA 23:1 When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," ² he inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?"

The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

1SA 23:3 But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!"

1SA 23:4 Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand."

⁵ So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. ⁶ (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

1SA 23:7 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, "God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town

with gates and bars." ⁸ And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

1SA 23:9 When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." ¹⁰ David said, "O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. ¹¹ Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant."

And the LORD said, "He will."

1SA 23:12 Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?"

And the LORD said, "They will."

1SA 23:13 So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

1SA 23:14 David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.

1SA 23:15 While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. ¹⁶ And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. ¹⁷ "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." ¹⁸ The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

1SA 23:19 The Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon? ²⁰ Now, O king, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for handing him over to the king."

1SA 23:21 Saul replied, "The LORD bless you for your concern for me. ²² Go and make further preparation. Find out where David usually goes and who

has seen him there. They tell me he is very crafty. ²³ Find out about all the hiding places he uses and come back to me with definite information. Then I will go with you; if he is in the area, I will track him down among all the clans of Judah."

1SA 23:24 So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon. ²⁵ Saul and his men began the search, and when David was told about it, he went down to the rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went into the Desert of Maon in pursuit of David.

1SA 23:26 Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, ²⁷ a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land." ²⁸ Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth. ²⁹ And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi.

*The poor citizens of Keilah were in a situation that could have proved to be economically disastrous for them. They had just finished harvesting their crops and now they were threshing the grain for use. But the Philistines had now attacked the city. They were powerless to oppose the strong Philistine army. So they were in danger of losing all of the fruit of their labors - the Philistines were going to take away all of their harvest leaving them in dire economic straights. How would you like to lose a year's wages? That was what was happening to the citizens of Keilah.

*Now this sad situation reveals the weakness and ineptitude of Saul's leadership at this time. It was King Saul's job to defend the citizens of Israel

against Philistine oppression. But he was so wrapped up in his own emotional problems and his obsession with David that his constituency was suffering greatly.

*But now David comes along. David takes his comparatively few fighting men and courageously attacks the Philistines, saving the city of Keilah from physical and economic disaster. What a debt these citizens owed to David. He had saved their harvest and had undoubtedly saved many of their lives as well. And now David would finally have a decent place to live with his men. No longer would their families have to run from cave to cave. Now they would have houses within the protection of a city wall in which to live - and the citizens of Keilah would have a police force to protect their town. It seemed like a win-win situation.

*But when King Saul heard that David had settled in the city of Keilah and when he gathered together his forces to try to take him, the true colors of the Keilah loyalty came out, didn't it? After all David had done for them, they were still going to hand him over to Saul. So David had to flee again for his life.

*Back to the Negev region; back to the desert area; back to the caves again. And no sooner is David settled in this barren wilderness than he receives another blow. He learned that the Nomadic Ziphites had also turned on him betraying his location to Saul. So Saul was again on his trail - and only a miraculous intervention by God would save David from his hand.

*The irony of the situation is found in the fact that both the citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites were trying to play the political game - and both lost. They both thought if they turned in David to Saul they would gain something in return. But

King Saul wasn't in a position to do any favors for them. And both the citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites lost a very valuable ally and defender in David.

*But the one person who stood by David loyally was Jonathan. To all outward appearances, Jonathan had everything to lose and nothing to gain in his friendship with David. But Jonathan saw the injustice that David was suffering and he stood by David because Jonathan was a man of integrity - it was the right thing to do. Jonathan was sincere in his motives expecting nothing in return for his friendship with David. And it is Jonathan who ends up with the future blessings - for Jonathan's family was honored by David and even ended up dining at the palace when he was king.

*David wrote Psalm 54 in response to this scene which we have just looked at from 1 Samuel 23. It was a Psalm which was written out of a situation that potentially could have been so disillusioning and disheartening for this young leader. But this Psalm reveals some invaluable lessons that David learned from this experience.

READ PSALM 54:1-7

Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might.

² Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth.

³ Strangers are attacking me; ruthless men seek my life -- men without regard for God.

⁴ Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.

⁵ Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them.

⁶ I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you; I will praise your name, O LORD, for it is good.

⁷ For he has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.

*David's prayer to God is summarized in the first verse. It was really a 2 fold prayer - Save Me and Vindicate Me. David was both concerned for his physical safety for this situation where Saul had him cornered on the other side of the mountain was just too close for comfort. But David was also concerned for his reputation. The word *vindicate* is a judicial term. Saul had judged him and pronounced him to be guilty without any evidence or a trial. David called upon God to vindicate him. He called upon God to demonstrate his innocence.

*David goes on to develop these 2 concerns in the next verses. Verse 3 elaborates on his prayer for God to save him. *Strangers are attacking me: ruthless men seek my life - men without regard for God.* Godless men who were only trying to play political games to advance their own careers were using David as a pawn in their chess match. They felt that David's death would enhance their career life. David knew the danger that such men posed, and he prays to God for

deliverance from them.

*Then David goes on to develop his concern for vindication in verse 5. *Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them.* Saul's colleagues might slander his good name and the citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites might believe such lies and turn on David for their own selfish advantages, but God would remain faithful to him. David trusted in the absolute character of God never leaving nor forsaking His own and God's ability to execute his justice in His time.

*These were very real dangers to David and he was concerned for them. But even in the midst of his prayer for help, David continued to place his faith and trust in the Lord. *Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.* vs. 4.

*David's reliance upon a sovereign God who was faithful and just to save and vindicate him helped to deliver him from perhaps the greatest danger of all that he faced - that was the danger of becoming disillusioned and bitter. For the physical danger would pass in time - and he would be able to gain his reputation back again - but if David would have succumbed to the temptations of disillusionment and bitterness, he might have carried these burdens the rest of his life.

*How easy it would have been for David to become disillusioned with human nature. After all, these citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites had turned on him after all that he had done for them - saving their lives and their livelihoods. David could have easily become an untrusting, cynical person. How easy it would have been for David to develop a bitter spirit. These turncoats continued to live in their

fine houses more prosperous now than they had been before thanks to his defeat of the Philistines and he and his family and followers were again inconvenienced in these dirty caves. Life is so unfair. The good guys suffer while the ones who play the political games prosper. The ones who try to do what is right suffer while the treacherous betrayers prosper. But to David's credit, he did not allow a seed of bitterness to take root in his heart. He rather learned lessons from these situations which would stand him in good stead for the rest of his life.

*David concludes this Psalm with song of thanksgiving. *I will sacrifice a free will offering to you.* The freewill offering was just a spontaneous gift to the Lord to express thanksgiving. David presented this offering because he had faith that God was going to deliver him. The verb tenses found in the last verse are most interesting. *For He has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.* vs. 7

*One could easily argue with David that he still remained in danger when he was originally writing these words. Saul was still bent on killing him. It was still unsafe for him to travel wherever he wanted in Palestine. He still could not return to his home. But David was so overwhelmed by the faithfulness of the Lord that he could even speak of his deliverance in past tense - as if it had already occurred.

*As we look at this Psalm in its totality, we find an excellent model for the believer facing an endangering situation with great faith.

*David begins by praying for God to save him and vindicate him.

*He then faces his dangerous situation. He speaks of his fear for his life and his reputation. He doesn't run from his fears but faces them head on and identifies

them.

*But David quickly moves from focussing on his fears to focussing his eyes on the Lord. He expresses confidence in the strength and might of God to be his protector.

*And David concludes by expressing thanksgiving in advance for the deliverance that he knows by faith God is going to give to him. This is certainly a model of great faith - faith that is expressed and thanksgiving that is offered even before the dangerous situation is totally solved.

*Happily, we don't face the same type of stalking that David had to endure. We have laws today to protect us from such harassment. But each of us in our own ways face dangerous situations. A dangerous situation is any circumstance that has the potential to bring great harm or trouble into our lives. Perhaps your dangerous situation involves an interpersonal relationship? Or perhaps your dangerous situation involves a family problem? Or perhaps your dangerous situation is very personal involving some inner struggle that you are having with some temptation? Or perhaps your dangerous situation involves a large business risk that you are presently taking? Perhaps you need to be involved in a dangerous situation - perhaps you are living life too much in your comfort zone and you need to take some risks. Remember: God lead David in His will into these dangerous situations so that David's faith could be strengthened and he could learn some much needed lessons. But whatever your personal situation, there are principles in David's successful response that apply to them all. Realize that the Lord is always there to help you - call upon him for his help. Face your fears - as

painful as that might be. Identify your fears so that you can address them. Put your faith in the Lord. Whatever your dangerous situation, God is greater. He is able to deliver you. And be quick to thank God for his hand of deliverance. It is impossible for a thankful heart to be a bitter heart. God desires for us to be thankful in all things - even in our dangerous situations.

Corrie ten Boom tells a true account of her suffering in a concentration camp during W.W.2 that illustrates the principle that David learned in a more modern day setting. Corrie and her sister, Betsie, had just been moved to a new prison at Ravensbruck during the 2nd week of October. Barracks 28 where they were placed was filthy and over-crowded. It had been designed for 400 people, but 1,400 prisoners had been jammed into the barracks. The room was very poorly lit with just 1 bare lightbulb, but the women instinctively knew of the unsanitary conditions by the smell of filth and sweat and human waste that permeated the place. But among the worst of all the inconveniences was the fact that Barracks 28 was infested with fleas. Corrie and Betsie found this out immediately as they began to feel the bites around their ankles and legs.

After they had been in their new home for just a little while, Betsie said to Corrie, *This gives us a chance to put our morning devotions into practice. Remember, this morning we read from 1 Thessalonians: Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. . . Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.*

Are you trying to say that we should give thanks for these circumstances, Betsie? Corrie asked in amazement.

That's exactly what I am saying, Betsie replied.

What is there to give thanks for?

Well, there's the fact that we got placed in these barracks together. And there's the fact that they didn't find our Bible and take it away for we can continue to have our devotional times. And there's the fact that there are so many people in this barracks so we will have more people to hear the word of God. And then there are the filthy conditions and the fleas.

Hold on, Corrie interrupted Betsie. I can see thanking God for those other things. But how can we thank God for the filthy conditions and the fleas.

But the Bible tells us to give thanks in all circumstances. This is a good opportunity to put this passage into practice in our lives, Betsie stood firm.

So Betsie and Corrie ten Boom prayed and thanked God for Barracks 28 - even for the filthy conditions and the fleas. And then they continued their lives of hard work 11 hours every day as prisoners.

Every day, they had a devotional service in which they read the Bible and sang a song or two and prayed. In a short time, the service attracted so many of their fellow prisoners who wanted to hear the Word of God that they had to go to 2 services a day to accommodate everyone.

It was only some time later when Betsie was in the sick bay that she overheard some guards commenting about Barracks 28. The guards said that they did not want to go near that place because it was so filthy and infested with fleas.

Betsie could hardly wait to share this new insight with her sister Corrie. Because of the fleas, these ladies had been spared the harassment that most of the other women in the prison camp had suffered, and they had been free to have 2 services of worship daily without any fear of being found out.

Betsie and Corrie ten Boom had been placed in a most difficult situation. They had trusted in a Sovereign God and even thanked God for his deliverance before they knew why or how He was going to do it. And God had honored their faith by giving to them more freedom than any of the other prisoners would know.

Betsie didn't make it through the war - she went home to be with the Lord. But Corrie ten Boom not only survived but was used by God to testify of his goodness and be a model of forgiveness for millions of people in the decades following WW2.

David had to learn the lesson that he couldn't trust in other people for his protection and well being, but he had to place his life into the hands of a Sovereign God if he were to know true security. So even in the midst of a difficult situation, David chose to trust in the Lord - and he even came to the place where he could thank God for his deliverance in advance because he knew a God who would not let him down.

What is your dangerous situation today? Are you willing to give that situation to the Lord and trust in Him alone? If you do, you will know a peace and security that you can never realize in any other way.