

1 Samuel 27 - Faithfulness in Exile

What I want to do this morning is to read a fair amount more than what we'll cover in order to set the stage for this week and next week because I think chapter 27 and chapter 28 go together. I think they paint a major contrast between Saul and David. We've seen that before, but I want to highlight that difference by reading chapter 27 and most of 28 all at once.

And the difference I want to focus on revolves around the question: what do you do when God seems quiet? When God seems absent from your life; when there is very little direction and clarity for what you should be doing?

Now, we believe in what is called the sufficiency of the Bible, that the Bible gives us all that we need for salvation and sanctification. That we don't need to seek other elements or means or psychologies to figure out how to enter the Kingdom of God or thrive as believers.

At the same time I think we've all experience times where we feel distant from God, in need of direction. Where, for lack of better description, God seems silent. You've probably heard people say "when God closes one door, he always opens another." That works great when you're in the window and door section at Home Depot, but what if you're lost in the plumbing section? There's no doors there. I think that's how we feel often times - God seems silent to us.

And while we do believe in the sufficiency of God's Word, we have to realize it's not a Magic 8 ball, where we gets simple answers for what college to go to, or what person to date, or what job to take, or house to buy, or what to do with the entire rest of our life. Or just those times when you're not really looking for a big answer to anything, but it just seems like you're plodding along in life but not sure where or if there's something else you should be doing.

I've had many of those times in my life. Just sort of going through the motions of life wondering if there's anything more. Wondering if I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

That's a pretty common thing for God's people. Abraham spent a lot of time watching grass grow from the time God first appeared to him. There was a lot of time between God's initial promises and when he saw his promised son, Isaac. Joseph spent a lot of time as a slave and prisoner before being used by God. Moses thought he could rescue God's people, then spent 40 years tending sheep before God used him for anything else. Just because we follow Jesus doesn't somehow make us immune from those same situations.

What's interesting about these next couple of chapters is that God is missing from the storyline. God is not mentioned at all in chapter 27 as we look at David's life. And in chapter 28 - where Saul's life is highlighted - when God is mentioned, Saul says God's not talking to him. So in both chapters God appears to be silent. Obviously he's there and doing things, but from a human perspective he's silent.

Now chapter 28 is the witch of Endor episode. We're just going to read through that today, we'll dive into that situation next week. But what I want you to consider is the differences in how David and Saul respond when God seems quiet. **Read 27:1-28:15**

So hopefully you noticed the similarities. In both chapters God is strikingly quiet and seemingly absent. Both kings are faced with the same enemy: the Philistines. Both kings are also in despair and fearful. **Read 27:1, 28:5**

And actually, except for Samuel rebuking Saul for summoning him - we'll get to that whole thing next week - the Lord is only mentioned a couple times in passing until chapter 30 where David asks about rescuing his captured wives. God is unusually quiet in these chapters.

So the question is: What do you do when God seems quiet? What do we see in David's life?

1) Remember that despair is a normal feeling **Read 1-4**

So the reason that David even flees to the Philistines is because he is afraid of Saul. He seems certain that one day Saul is going to kill him. But right now, the Philistines are a military powerhouse in the region and so if David can take some cover from the Philistines, Saul will leave him alone.

Now, if you remember, we've seen David do this same kind of thing before. if you remember back in Chapter 21, there was a time when David tried going to Achish to escape Saul. You remember that? He went alone, with Goliath's sword, and all the people around Achish were afraid because David was a mighty warrior so David acted like a crazy man and they let him go. Remember that? "Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence?" (**1 Sam. 21:15**) So he's tried this before.

So what has changed? Well, time has passed and Achish likely knows of the problems between Saul and David. Although there was no social media, Israel just isn't a really big area. News travels fast. And Saul's attempts to kill David would likely have been known by many people. You can't just go traipsing around Israel with 3,000 soldiers in pursuit of 600 other soldiers and no one notice.

So he comes to Achish again, this time with his military - which includes his 30 mighty men. He's got an elite fighting force that needs a home. And Achish probably accepts David knowing that Saul is against David. As one person pointed out "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" (Baldwin, Joyce. *1 and 2 Samuel*).

But what I want to point out here is that the reason that David comes to Achish - really, he comes to his enemy - is because he's in despair. He's tired of running from Saul who tries to murder him over and over. And this is sort of his last-ditch effort to breathe.

And I think it's helpful for us to remember that despair is a pretty normal feeling for God's people. This is not foreign in the Bible. We see it all throughout the Bible.

Psa. 69:20: Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.

Actually, I think that's a good definition of despair. You've been beat up in life, you desire pity and comfort and you're not getting any. We use the phrase "broken heart" loosely, but really when your heart feels crushed - that sort of heart attack/heart ache feeling.

Usually in the Bible, when you read about someone's heart in anguish, the actual word in both Greek and Hebrew is your guts - your intestines. Or sometimes it's your kidneys. It's the organ that gives you that sick feeling when you're in despair. They translate it "heart" many times because for us we talk of the heart. It doesn't make sense to us to translate it "my kidneys are in despair" or "my intestines are down cast." Maybe you should try paleo. When we speak of despair we speak of the heart.

Psa. 42:11: Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me?

I actually find that verse very interesting. It's almost as if the psalmist is having an out of body experience, standing outside himself, and asking himself "Why are you so sad? Why are you so down cast?" You ever have those seasons where you're just sad and you're not even really sure why? You have every reason to have hope and confidence? All our sins have been atoned for by Christ. His death has satisfied the wrath of God, his resurrection gives us eternal hope, one day day we will rise to unimaginable joy eternal joy. As much as we understand those truths we're still sad.

And its not just the OT saints who had despair. Jesus weeps over Lazarus, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, Jesus is in utter despair in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Doesn't he know resurrection is coming? Doesn't he know about the glories of heaven better than anyone else? Why are you so sad Jesus? Because even though we have God's promises, in our sin—stained world there's still tragedy.

2 Cor. 1:8: For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

Think about that. Paul had seen the risen Christ, had done who knows how many miracles, planted dozens of churches. And he struggled with despair. And think of this: there's actually a sense of despair in heaven even now.

Rev. 6:10: They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

We have brothers and sisters in glory right now who have suffered persecution who are in anguish because their persecutors are still on the loose. You'd think in heaven they'd be good to go. Hasn't God wiped away every tear from their eyes? Not yet. That doesn't happen until the NHNE when all things are made right.

Just like David had the promise of God that he would reign as king over Israel and yet he despaired, so too we have the promise of that we will reign with Christ for all eternity and yet we struggle with despair.

To make matters worse, our world worships happiness. Every advertisement you see is designed to promote a product that will make you feel happier or avoid pain. Most of social media is montage of happy looking pictures that have no semblance of someone's real life. Maybe we should snap some selfies when someone cuts us off, or when we're arguing with our spouse, or when we're yelling at our sister - you know, just to mix it up.

But the world tells us that happiness and bliss is out there for the taking. Even the church often tells us that. And so our expectations are at a 10, life is running at a 3, maybe 4, and we're wondering why everyone is depressed. "Why am I at a 3 and everyone else is at a 9?" When in reality, the pictures are 10, the average is 5, and no one wants to tell you when they're at a 2 or 3.

"But maybe if you worked out more, you'd be happier." There's some truth to that. "Maybe if you eat better, you'd be happier." There's some truth to that. "Maybe you should see a doctor and get some medication." Maybe you should see a doctor.

But there's no happiness nirvana this side of the heaven. In fact, it seems that although heaven right now is amazing and filled with joy, the true bliss we look forward to doesn't happen until the New Heavens and the New Earth. That's when all the tears are wiped away and sorrow is gone.

You ever wonder why there's all these admonitions in the NT to not give up hope?

Gal. 6:9: And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

1 Cor. 15:58: Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Why do we need encouragements like that? Because it's easy to give up. Just like David, we can be more than conquerors, have all the promises of God, have the Kingdom, and still be downcast.

We have to fight for joy, fight to persevere, fight to have faith in the promises of God.

2) Despair is just a season. Read 5-7

So David and his men stayed in Ziklag for 1 year and 4 months. We don't know much about Ziklag. It was probably not a city proper, like what we'd think of a city. It was probably just an area of land that was sparsely inhabited. The nice thing about the location was that it was relatively far away from Achish. It was 25 miles south of the king which meant that David was safe from Saul on the one hand, because he was in Philistine territory. But he also enjoyed freedom from Achish because he was so far away from the king. So he had the best of both worlds. And he used that, as we'll see, to his advantage.

But again, the reason that David is in Philistine territory is because he despairs for his life. The best I can tell, David lives down there until Saul is killed in battle. Now, one of the convenient things about reading history is that we know how a situation ended before we even get to the end of the story.

My wife and I watched the Tom Hanks movie Apollo 13 the other night. It's the the story of the 3 astronauts who were going to the moon, but a malfunction caused disaster after disaster that almost killed all of them. And the engineering feat that got them back home was just miracle after miracle. But the trick of a movie like that is that we already know the ending. Spoiler alert: they made it back alive! But the reason the movie is so good is that helps you feel the tension that they felt with every obstacle. And it was just obstacle after obstacle.

David's life in Ziklag was obstacle after obstacle of despair. We could call it depression or the blues or whatever. But it seemed to be nonstop. He's there because if he leaves Philistia Saul will kill him. Then, in **28:1-2**, he's summoned to go to battle against Israel. Think about that. Israel's most legendary warrior is now being employed against God's covenant people. By God's grace he dodges that, but as he's coming home from the battle lines to fight Israel there's another problem. **Read 30:1-6**

While he was away, the Amalekites took everyone who was in Ziklag. David ends up rescuing them all. But in the mean time the Philistines and Israel are battling and David doesn't know what's going on. **Look** over at **2 Sam. 1:1-12**. This is probably not very long after he rescued his wives and all the family of his soldiers. **Read 1-12**

David's life is despair and disaster after despair and disaster. And to add insult to injury, remember the times David could have killed Saul and he didn't? Here's this Amalekite punk who thinks he's doing David a favor by telling him that Saul died. "Yeah, I even killed him because he asked me to." Are you kidding me? **Read 13-16**

If you want a theology of why we reject euthanasia, this is as good of a verse as any. Putting our hand against anyone to hasten their death is not noble, it is evil. And David knows that. It might have been archers that shot Saul, Saul even tried to take his own life by falling on his sword, but it was this proud punk who killed him.

Now that we have a little perspective, **look** back at **27:7**. **Read**

So David is out here for 16 months. That was 16 long, excruciating months of trial after trial. And, he didn't have the luxury of knowing that it would only be 16 months. We know that, but he didn't.

One of the hard parts about despair or depression is that you don't know how long it's going to be around for.

I used to listen to a song based on **Psalms 30:5**: our sorrows may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning. And it's a great song, except I've had weeks and months where there was no joy in the morning. What's that about? What that's about is not that a good night's sleep makes everything happy the next morning - although don't underestimate the value of a good night's sleep. If you look at the psalm as a whole, the idea is that our suffering and sorrow in this life is brief compared to the eternal joy God gives to us.

David's season in Ziklag was 16 months, our season might be 16 months. Or 16 years. But listen, the hope we have in Christ ensures that no matter how long the season is, in light of eternity it is temporal. That's something that is hard for us to imagine in difficult times, but it's crucial: our sadness and suffering will not last forever.

I have this little though experiment sometimes when things are bad: I cannot recall even a single day of 2nd grade. Or 4th grade. I have vague memories, but no memory of crisis, or classmates. One day, our current trials and sadness will be so far distant that we will barely be able to remember them and all we'll know is God's grace.

I want to point one other thing here before we move on. And that's that not only is despair a season, but God often does really good things during difficult seasons. And we see this in David's life right here.

So check this out: when Israel came out of Egypt, they went to Sinai, then were to go into the Promised Land right away but were rejected because 10 of the 12 spies said they couldn't take the land. So they wandered

around the wilderness for 40 years while that whole generation died off. Then the next generation was allowed to go in and fight for the Promised Land. That's what the book of Joshua is all about - they came into the land, now they are conquering the land. And although God gave them all the land, they hadn't actually acquired it from their enemies. And as time went on, God often refused to give them the land because his own people were sinful and rebellious. So a lot of the Promised Land was still occupied by foreigners.

One of the most difficult places for the Israelites to get land was in the southern area of Israel that belonged to Judah and Simeon. The town of Ziklag that David is given here had never been captured by the Israelites even though it sits in the middle of the Promised Land. That's why Achish gives it to David - it belonged to the Philistines even though it was in Israel's territory. And there's this note in **Vs. 6** that's amazing. **Read**

So we're going to read in a minute about how David is making raids capturing land back for Israel. But the very first thing God does is to bless David by giving him Ziklag, which was part of the Promised Land. And David doesn't even have to lift a sword to get it. He doesn't have to kill anyone or create siege works. He simply asks Achish for the land and Achish gives it to him. And from that time on it is always claimed by the Israelite kings.

By the way, Achish giving out land was a common practice of kings. Kings owned massive portions of land, and they would give out land to people as long as they pledged allegiance to the throne. So the expectation, as we'll see, is that David is to be loyal to Achish.

3) When in despair, be faithful to do what you know to do. Read 8-12

So David is 25 miles away from Achish and he's making raids in the wilderness. We don't know who all these guys are, but it's clear they were enemies of the Israelites who lived in the southern region of the Promised Land. And his tactic is total annihilation. It's sort of an ancient blitzkrieg where he overwhelms a town by awesome force and speed so that they can't even escape to tell anyone what has happened.

David does this against Israel's enemies, but when Achish asks him about it David says he's making raids against Israelite towns. And there's no way that Achish would know any different because David kills them all. The only way Achish knows that David is successful is that he keeps acquiring more and more livestock. He's amassing a small fortune in dessert and he's probably bringing Achish some of the spoils. And Achish is loving this because David is doing his work for him.

Now, in order to be honest with the text, I have to mention the obvious: that we are again confronted in 1 Samuel with a situation where lying is going on by God's people seemingly to accomplish God's purposes. I don't want to rehash all of that - if you want the bigger discussion, you can look up the sermon from chapter 16. What I will say is this situation is essentially the same dilemma as we've seen all throughout. David is lying to an adversary in order to protect the life of the people of God.

If we were in David's shoes, our options are death or death. If he tells Achish the truth about what he's doing, Achish is going to kill him or send him back to Israel. If he goes back to Israel Saul is going to kill him. So he lies to Achish hoping his plan will work. And he has to be flawless in order for it to work and he appears to be flawless. So much so that Achish thinks David will always be on his side.

What I want to point out here is that in the midst of his 16 month long seasons of despair, David is actually faithful to do what Israel was called by God to do: namely, to destroy the God's enemies from out of the land of Israel. I mentioned that when the the Jews entered into the Promised Land they were supposed to wipe out all of the inhabitants. Those inhabitants were wicked, sinful people who did some of the most disgusting things and the Jews were commissioned by God to be God's means of judgment.

And David doesn't forget that. David is soldier of the Lord. His primary job is to secure Israel. And even in the midst of his exile and despair and tragedy after tragedy he never forgets that. He never loses focus or uses his situation as an excuse for not fulfilling the mission. That would have been an easy excuse.

Here's what happens when we go through despair. We start making excuses for not being faithful to God. God I'm sad, I don't need to do this. I don't have the strength or the willpower.

As though we are primarily emotional beings. We're not. We have emotions, but emotions don't control our

lives any more than a caboose controls a train. It's amazing, when we're depressed, we still somehow manage to go to work, to eat, to shower, to do laundry, do all these other things even though we might not want to. But we also make these excuses for not

David didn't do that. He didn't want to be where he was, didn't want to live where he did, didn't want to be at odds, but that didn't stop him from obeying the Lord.

Turn over to **Psalm 42:6-12**. When we're in despair, we need truth to anchor us. And I think the wrestling of David in this Psalm is an anchor for our weary souls. **Read**

The psalmist says it seems as though God is crashing breakers - waves - over him, his enemies gloat over him. But his soul is comforted by 2 things: the reminder that God commands his steadfast love over him; and second, that there will again be a day of praise.

We have the same hope through Jesus. We know God commands his steadfast love over us. How? We simply look to the cross. If God did not spare his own son, how will he not freely give us all things? For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. God commanded love. And there will come a day when we shall again praise God. It might a long season, but the day will come where our hearts and voices are filled with the praises of our God.

Pray