



## **"At the Crossroads of our Faith..." - 1 Samuel Chapter 23**

by Pastor Tim Dodson, at JF Believers Church,

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David's life had become crazy. The world as he had known it was gone now. No more was he the star of the show. No more was he the "killer of ten thousands." The songs and the praises of men were gone, and he was desperately clinging to life in survival mode.

It is at this point in our own lives...*and it seems we are all there at some juncture*, that we are truly at the crossroads of our faith. What we do there in that place will mean everything to both our future as well as the meaning of our past. Will I have a spiritual tomorrow or will it all affectively come to an end here and now? Will the life I have led and the road that I have traveled for the past years of my life have any meaning, or will it all be flushed away like a dream ...just bitter memories of days gone by?

I have many times witnessed this event in people's lives. Epic moments that transformed 'rising stars' to 'bygone memories'...into spiritual has-beens who are now just passing minor mentions in someone else's story. At one time they were the player. Once they were the lead. But now they are all but forgotten...just a name that comes up around the campfire when old stories are told.

If a person is so determined, I have found it nearly impossible to head off this inevitable collapse...this hell-bent intention. In fact, I cannot remember ever successfully stepping in to "*bring back a sinner from his wandering*" ...to "*save his soul from death*" ...to "*cover a multitude of sins.*" (James 5:20). I cannot recall ever effectively intervening in such a speeding, careening, out of control trip that threatened a future of spiritual oblivion for a person.

The author Gayle Forman was once famously quoted saying "*Sometimes you make choices in life and sometimes choices make you.*" David...like us today, was at that crossroads. The choices he would make in this chapter and the next few that follow it would either establish him in history and as a "man after the very heart of God." (Acts 13:22), or they would relegate him to a byline in history. Just another failure. Just another washout.

Again, David was *on the run*. Just trying to survive...trying to keep his 'head above water.' Not the best time to be 'back-against-the-wall'...not the most convenient time to be pressured to make decisions. He would now make a couple of critical resolutions that would ultimately redeem his standing, and forever place him in the "Hall of Faith" of Hebrews 11: the "gold medal winners"...the champions...the *survivors!* Just a *couple of decisions* that would be the thin line between legend and oblivion.

The first decision was whether he would become consumed and controlled by the fight for his life. Would he be so overwhelmed in the battle for self survival that he would lose all sense of a bigger world...loose grasp of others and simply sink into the worldview of "me first"... a small small world where I am front and center? At the crossroads there was a path of survival where he could have washed his hands of everyone else and found a little cabin in the woods...a hut on a beach somewhere where he could rid himself of all the struggle and the strife.

Then there was the road where he would step up to fight for others. Not for glory or fame, but for justice and right. David would actually pour himself out for these who would in truth eventually throw him under the bus for *their* survival! There would be no payback...no thanks...no reward...no *pat on the back* from those he rescued!

Even his own men didn't want to fight...they wanted to 'hole up' because, by their own admission, they were *afraid*. "*Things were bad enough! Why tempt fate? Why stir up the bees?*" They just wanted to hunker down and survive. But survival was not enough for David...*because he wasn't that man*. So He prayed again and moved against all conventional wisdom. Despite everyone and even himself, he would act according to *God's* direction. David...the quintessential "man of action" stopped to ask God what to do. He stopped moving forward and prayed. Once he received his direction, he moved...He kept working...kept serving, kept helping, kept obeying, even in the midst of the storm...even in the middle of the trial and testing. That's notable because we generally shut down everything until life is restored as we want it to be. We don't do anything but try to survive the battle we are in! And it's funny that it never occurs to us that maybe that's exactly what Satan wants!

This was Daniel in the 'lions den'...Shadrack Meshack and Abednego in the fiery furnace, Paul in Rome, or Joshua in Jericho. These men were built by God, and when the rain came in torrents and the floodwaters rose and the winds beat against the house, it didn't collapse because it was a life literally *built* on a rock.(Mathew 7:25)

The people of Keilah would fail to reciprocate upon David's service. They, like much of the world both then and now were only concerned with their own survival and comfort. It mattered little what David would do for them. When the day came, they would kick him to the curb to save their own skin. Why would David choose "door number 2?" Would anyone have blamed him if he had chose the easy road? Would anyone not have forgiven this guy who certainly had 'had enough?'

But David didn't choose the easy road. Not just because he was strong or faithful or stubborn, but because he simply and factually was *not that man!* His decisions did not define him, but rather his decisions reflected who and what he already was. He made decisions of integrity because *he was a man of integrity*.

Correct decisions at the crossroads of faith do not come if they are ***made*** at the crossroads...in the 'heat of the battle'...in passions of the moment! Correct decisions of this sort are made long before one gets to that crossroad. Actions here happen because of ***who we are***, not what we ***decide to do***. Survivors live in the reality that the crossroads are coming...that such testing is inevitable. David apparently made the decision which way he would go long before he got there. It seems from the scriptural account, that there was not even a hesitation. Why would David go to rescue these people...a people that would not do the same for him?

***Because he was that kind of man.***

The second decision that made David that day...the second 'choice of roads before him' involved **control**. Would he...in the heat of passion and pain, grab the reigns of his life...the 'bull by the horns'? Would he take matters into his own hands? After all...it seemed there was no one to be trusted...no one who was on his side! Who or what would have the final word with him? The final say? Instead of "counting on old number one," he repeatedly went to God for direction. He could have been overwhelmed by his bitterness. He could have questioned God or even blamed God for his state! *"What's going on here God? I thought you said you loved me? I thought you had my back and would never fail me ...never abandon me?"* (Heb 13:5)

But this was not David's response! In fact he prayed. He went to God *repeatedly*. Does this mean he was happy about things? *Not necessarily*. Does this mean he had no doubts and no angst about his life and direction? *No*. But he apparently knew there was no place else to go. He had to of known that to break this ultimate relationship would be his *ultimate undoing*. He had to of known that *he just wasn't that man...*

***Are you that man or woman?***

Hebrews 12:1-3 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up.*

After David's heroic action in Keilah, the people did not protect him...they did not love him for his sacrifice. The enemy kept coming and David had to keep running. God did not rescue him because he was righteous. God did not take away the problems because he did the right thing. How often we act for God...we do right, but truthfully we do so because we expect reciprocation on God's part. We so often do not do what we do *because* it is righteous...*because* it is right, but because we figure that if we do so God will keep us out of difficulty and testing. But that absolutely isn't true, and if we don't get that into our heads we are heading for a sure crisis of faith!

The fact is, King Saul kept coming. He inexplicably just kept attacking even though David never did anything to Saul except support him and back him! Maybe this explains something David would write later in his life. Looking back over his shoulder, as that crossroad faded in his memory, he would pen those words: "...*though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me...*" (Ps 23:3-4) "*Walk through...*" not *around*. For we see it wasn't that David was particularly smart or clever or daring. It wasn't for these reasons he survived. He did not win because he was that good! He stayed alive and free because...as verse 14 tells us, God 'did not allow him to be captured.'

And David did all this, not for a perceived "deserved response" by God toward him, but because He is God...David's God...our God, and we follow Him, and "*He is with me...*" We do so because we love our God and our loyalty compels us. Even if we die, "*we will not bow to your false gods oh king!*" (Daniel 3:16-18)

Through it all, Jonathan was a breath of fresh air...he was one man who consistently supported David. Maybe it was Jonathan that kept David from losing his mind! Jonathan did what each of us must do for those people in our lives that come to that place...what each of us can *only* do when they come to that place. Verse 16 says "*Jonathan went to find David and encouraged him to stay strong in his faith in God.*"

But Saul...he was like a lot of people for whom the "spirit of the Lord" has so departed. (1 Samuel 16:14) When the Spirit departs, the vacuum that remains will pull in all sorts of things around us...bitterness, anger, jealousy, violence. As we covered in the last 2 chapters, Saul would find himself doing things that earlier in his life would have been absolutely unthinkable! Those are the "*choices that make you.*"

When Jonathan came to David that final time in verse 16, he not only once again swears his allegiance to David, but he says he knows that God has chosen David over his own father. An incredible display of strength and integrity on Jonathans part! Then he says something in verse 17 that we may skip right on by if we aren't looking closely! He says "I know that you are the chosen one" and then goes on to say "*and my father knows it too.*"

Yes...Saul *knew* he was running against God, but he would not be deterred! He would not stand down and surrender! For in Saul's mind his surrender would be *to David*, when truth be told, his surrender would be *to God*. Because God was running this show, not David. Saul, like so many who are fighting against God, verbalized and executed his wrath against a *man* when his battle was against God. Saul was angry at **God**, and Saul was going to kill David because he was angry at **God**...

I wonder how many of us are in that kind of battle today? I know there are plenty who are chasing me, who aren't really mad at me as much as they are mad at God. Mad that God told them no about something. Or mad because God called me to the pastorate and not them. Mad because God wouldn't support something they wanted to do, and I wouldn't either, so since they can't blast God they instead spent years blasting me. Ahhh..."*they protest too much, me thinks*" as Shakespeare said! Jonathan knew this. Saul knew this too, but he wasn't talking!

In the end...the suspense builds as it seems David and his boys are going to be captured. But God intervenes...*again*. And just like with us...God intervenes *again*, ...*and again*, ...*and again*. Not taking **away** "*the valley of the shadow of death*"...not even walking us **around** it. But walking us straight through it...and walking through it with us. And when we come out the other side...will we remember? Will we worship? Will we remember when we come to the crossroads again? *Did we this time?*