

The Praise of a Fool: Lessons from Gath, the Hometown of Giants

1 Samuel 21:10-15

We are not a congregation of refugees or victims that have no choices; we are a congregation of men and women who are faced with value choices every day, choices relating more to pursuit of happiness than life and liberty. Yet, though outwardly we have little in common with some, the dynamics that influence our choices are the same.

We speak of temptation usually pertaining more to the considerations of sexual behavior or use or pursuit of money than anything else. The truth, however, is that we are tempted to trivialize the important, to catastrophize every relatively minor event, to forgive only what should have been overlooked, to lose sight of proportion and balance. Temptation is usually driven by what one wants (consistent with James) or what one thinks he needs.

Very old Jewish tradition assigns this Psalm to the time when David, escaping from Saul, went to Gath, the hometown of Goliath whom he had killed. The king (called both Achish and Abimelech, possibly a title), accepted him, possibly thinking David's troubles had turned his loyalty from Israel and Saul. The whole story is in 6 verses in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. How did David come to that moment? How did he view his experience? What are the lessons from Gath?

1. How did David come to this moment? (The short answer is events and choice.)
 - a. Catapulted to fame in successfully facing and killing Goliath, 1 Sam 17;
 - b. Brought back to Saul after the battle not even allowed to go home;
 - c. Successful and popular - so different from Saul; but by 1 Sam 18:9,10 there is a hint of his dislike and suspicion of David, and a strange description of what was troubling Saul;
 - d. Chapt 19: 1-7, plot to kill David revealed by Jonathan;
 - i. V8-10, Saul is turned by his own son, Jonathan
 - ii. V18, David goes to Ramah to see Samuel, the prophet and stayed with him; Saul sent messengers to capture David and bring him back,
 - e. David makes one more effort to live in peace with Saul; Saul's bi-polar schizophrenic, evil-spirited response is so out of control he tries to kill his own son. From being a national hero, in a matter of probably months, David is a wanted man.

- f. Chapter 21, The folly of David: David goes to Nob, lies to the priest and gets bread of presence and sword of Goliath, v10, flees to Gath; all of those events seem to have taken a very short time.
 - i. Circumstances test us - our faith, character, spiritual maturity;
 - ii. At this point, David lacks experience; this is a battle for which he is poorly prepared; sees no choices, lies to priest, moves to Gath; ends up playing the fool.
2. How did David see his experience?
- a. He introduces the Psalm with a call to praise: v1-3
 - b. Listen to the verbs of the next 4 verses
 - i. David: I sought; I cried;
 - ii. What did God do?
 - 1. The Lord answered me,
 - 2. The Lord delivered me from all my fears; those things that drove him there, that troubled him, his family, his wife
 - 3. The Lord heard him
 - 4. The Lord saved him from all his troubles, that is more than fears; he saved him from the trouble that caused him fear;
3. David gives the lessons of Gath;
- a. Taste and see that the Lord is good; Old and New Testament offers empirical evidence;
 - b. The person is blessed who runs to the Lord, not just from the trouble. Running from trouble will sometime lead to more if we do not know where to run;
 - c. Vs 9,10 speaks of fearing the Lord; a reverence, not craven fear. Those who seek the Lord are more secure in their needs than young lions on the hunt;
 - d. Verse 11 he tells what he means in fearing the Lord, giving reverence;
 - e. The one who desires a good long life
 - i. Practice speaking what is good and true, v13;
 - ii. Stop doing what is wrong and do what is right;

iii. Seek and pursue peace.

4. Finally, David encourages: reasons for praise

- a. The Lord sees you and hears you when you cry to him; He delivers;
- b. The Lord is against those who do evil: in business, pleasure, public, private;
- c. The Lord is near to the broken hearted, and those who are crushed in spirit, even when they have caused their own problems;
- d. The righteous have problems like the wicked but unlike the wicked, they have help;
- e. Evil is self-destructive; right living has its own reward. It is the way God made the world;

5. My lessons:

- a. Just because the giant of Gath is killed does not make Gath a place to live; it is not friendly;
- b. Your enemy's enemy is not necessarily your friend; Achish hated Saul, but that did not make him a friend to David;
- c. David encourages because he caused his own problem, but the Lord delivered. We also cause most of our own problems. That does not limit what God will do, but sometimes we must act the part of the fool.