

Twin Truths  
1 Samuel 21-22  
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One very rainy Sunday morning, Joe was heading to church in his little two-seat sports car. As he turned onto Main Street, he saw three people getting wet as they tried to huddle under a single umbrella at the bus stop. Joe immediately recognized them as fellow members of his church and quickly stopped his car beside them.

One of the individuals under the umbrella was Mrs. Jones, an 84-year old widow, who despite her arthritis, which was always worse in wet weather, found her way to church every Sunday.

Dr. Page, the physician who had performed life-saving surgery on Joe a few years ago was also there, as well as Melissa, the gal who Joe has had a crush on for the past six months, but has lacked the courage to ask out.

Joe exclaimed, "I know the lord has brought me here to help you!" Then he quickly made his decision. He jumped out of the car, handed the keys to Dr. Page and helped Mrs. Jones into the passenger seat. He quickly waved goodbye to the two of them and then asked Melissa, "Do you mind if I huddle under that umbrella with you?"

Pastor Chris Appleby says, "The lesson here is that God's sovereignty and our actions go hand in hand!"

Well folks, I think that is a lesson we also see in our text today. Our journey through the book of 1 Samuel brings us to chapters 21-22 (page 244). As we go through this passage, we will see the roles that both the Lord and David play in this true story.

Let's pause and pray the Lord will use his word to instruct and encourage us today.

At the end of chapter 20, David flees from the royal court, knowing that King Saul intends to kill him.

**1 Samuel 21:1a – David went to the priest Ahimelech at Nob.**

Nob was a town a couple of miles south of Gibeah, where Saul was, and a couple of miles north of Jerusalem. Following the destruction of Shilo by the Philistines, Nob had apparently become the religious center of Israel where the tabernacle and the priests were.

When asked what he is doing there, David (verse 2) tells Ahimelech that the king has sent him on a secret mission.

David then asks the priest for food for him and his men. Apparently within a few days or weeks, he has gathered a small band of young men who are with him. This group eventually grows to 400 and then 600 men, a small army.

**1 Samuel 21:4 – The priest told him, "There is no ordinary bread on hand. However, there is consecrated bread, but the young men may eat it only if they have kept themselves from women."**

Now, under the Old Testament law, the consecrated bread was to be only eaten by the priests in worship. Yet, when Jesus refers to this story in Matthew 12, he seems to commend Ahimelech for bending the rules and feeding David. Jesus also doesn't seem to see anything wrong with David eating the bread in an emergency situation. Yet, there are a couple of strange things about this passage.

**#1 David lies to Ahimelech about why he is there.**

Some suggest that by "the king sent me," David means, "the Lord did," but the priest certainly thinks he means Saul.

**#2 Ahimelech is willing to bend the rules and allow people to eat the holy bread, but he still insists they must be ceremonially pure.**

Yes, under the Levitical law, even though the sexual relationship between a husband and wife was a good thing, it still made them temporarily "unclean."

Folks, this is a passage where I find it difficult to discern if the author's intention is to simply tell us what happened, or if he is making bigger points.

Remember, we have two authors of this narrative, this true story. There is a human historian and God himself. I don't believe they are endorsing David's lie about why he was there.

Now, maybe David intended to protect the priests. Because of David's deception, they are not knowingly helping someone try to escape the king. However, if that was David's plan, it backfires.

As far as Ahimelech is concerned, it is possible that he knows he knows, from Samuel, that David is the anointed one, the messiah (lower case "m"). He may believe that David has been chosen, not only to be king, the political ruler, but also the spiritual ruler of the people. Thus, he would have the right to eat the consecrated bread, just as the priests did.

Indeed, the point in Matthew 12 is that because Jesus is the Messiah (capital "M" Messiah), he is not bound by Sabbath rules, because he created the Sabbath.

Yet, perhaps it is simply Ahimelech's mercy in feeding someone who is hungry that made his rule-bending permissible.

OK, back to the text.

**1 Samuel 21:7 - One of Saul's servants, detained before the LORD, was there that day. His name was Doeg the Edomite, chief of Saul's shepherds.**

In other words, one of Saul's men is there and knows how the priest helps David. David then asks Ahimelech if he can borrow a weapon, and the priest gives him...

**1 Samuel 21:9a - "...the sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah."**

David takes this magnificent weapon, but then does something very strange. He heads for

Gath, Goliath's hometown, located about thirty miles west of Nob. He apparently thinks a Philistine city will be a good place to hide from Saul.

Yet, one of the servants of the Philistine King, Achish, recognizes David. "This is the man who killed Gath's greatest warrior," the servant tells the king, and it seems the Philistines will seek revenge. So David...

**1 Samuel 21:12-13 - ...became very afraid of King Achish of Gath, and he pretended to be insane in their presence. He acted like a madman around them scribbling on the doors of the city gate and letting saliva run down his beard.**

This ruse works. Achish says...

**1 Samuel 21:14a-15 - "Look! You can see the man is crazy...Do I have such a shortage of crazy people that you brought this one to act crazy around me?"**

I am not sure what that says about the citizens of Gath, but he is not interested in having anything to do with David, including taking revenge.

So David...

**1 Samuel 22:1a - ...left Gath and took refuge in the cave of Adullam.**

This is about ten miles west of Gath, and this becomes his mountain fortress. Soon his family and...

**1 Samuel 2:2a - ...every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented rallied around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.**

David now is leading a small army. He then takes his father and mother to the country of Moab, east of Israel, and asks the king there to keep them safe from Saul.

Then, encouraged by a prophet named Gad, David goes to the Forest of Hereth which is about fifteen miles south of where Saul is. Saul hears reports that David is back in the area, and

he tries to encourage people in his court to side with him against David.

**1 Samuel 2:7 – Saul said to his servants, “Listen, men of Benjamin: Is Jesse’s son going to give all of you fields and vineyards? Do you think he’ll make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?”**

This echoes Samuel’s warning to the people that if they get a king, that king will be concerned with his own interests, not theirs. Now, Saul, who has pretty much focused on his own interests throughout his reign, but tries to convince his fellow Benjamites that David is just as selfish as he is, and thus they should side with him.

It seems no one in the court is persuaded by Saul’s rather twisted logic, but...

**1 Samuel 22:9-10 – Then Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul’s servants, answered: “I saw Jesse’s son come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob (we know that from 21:7). Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions. He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”**

Infuriated, Saul summons Ahimelech and all the other priests of Nob and accuses them of betraying him by helping David. The priest says, “Wait a minute, why would we not help David?”

**1 Samuel 22:14 – “Who among all your servants is as faithful as David? He is the king’s son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard, and honored in your house.”**

But Saul pays no attention to what Ahimelech says.

**1 Samuel 22:17 – He ordered the guards standing by him, “Turn and kill the priests of the LORD because they sided with David. For they knew he was fleeing, but they didn’t tell me.” (That’s a false accusation.) But the king’s servants would not lift a hand to execute the priests of the LORD.**

Wow! This is a constitutional crisis. The king gives an order, but no one obeys. I don’t think the men in Saul’s court were very devout in following the Lord, but they knew enough not to kill those dedicated to serving him.

But Saul isn’t giving up.

**1 Samuel 22:18a – (He) said to Doeg, “Go and execute the priests!” So Doeg the Edomite (not an Israelite, not one of God’s people, but a Gentile) went and executed the priests himself.**

He murders 85 priests. But he doesn’t stop there. The slaughter continues and Doeg kills...

**1 Samuel 22:19b - ...both men and women, infants and nursing babies, oxen, donkeys, and sheep.**

In other words, every living creature in the city of Nob. However, one of Ahimelech’s sons, Abiathar, escapes and flees to David.

**1 Samuel 22:21 – Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD.**

This is crushing news to David. He responds...

**1 Samuel 22:22 – “I knew that Doeg the Edomite was there that day and that he was sure to report to Saul. I myself am responsible for the lives of everyone in your father’s family.”**

And then he makes this pledge to Abiathar...

**1 Samuel 22:23 – “Stay with me. Don’t be afraid, for the one who wants to take my life wants to take your life. You will be safe with me.”**

And indeed, Abiathar will be the chief priest and David’s close advisor throughout his reign as king.

OK folks, that is our text – 1 Samuel 21-22. It is an historical narrative, where a Jewish historian reports what happened during this time of tension where David is the anointed king, the chosen king, but Saul still holds that office.

Yet, it is also the word of God, through which the Lord speaks to his people in all places at all times, including 21<sup>st</sup> century northern Minnesota.

So, what is God saying to us today through his word?

Well, we could focus on the warning that the Lord is surely giving us: Don't be like Saul! He is a man who has tragically fallen very far away from God and fallen very quickly. Yet, today I want to focus on another very important lesson we see in this passage.

In our text, we see that David avoids two dangerous ditches when thinking about God's sovereignty. David is a man who trusts the Lord, but who does not use his faith as an excuse for being passive or avoiding responsibility.

Whether or not it was wise for David to go to the city of Gath, the bottom line is that once he was there, he was there, and he was in danger. As he looked back on that experience and escape, he realized that the Lord had protected him.

Psalm 34 and Psalm 56 are both based on David's reflections on what occurred in Gath at that time. The heading of Psalm 34 is: "A Psalm of David, Regarding the Time He Pretended to Be Insane." And he writes...

**Psalm 34:4-7 – I sought the LORD, and he answered me and rescued me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant with joy; their faces will never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him from all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he rescues them.**

David recognizes that it was the Lord who protected and rescued him from the king of Gath. Yet, trusting in the Lord's sovereign protection did not mean that David was passive. He did not sit back and say, "OK, God, do your thing and rescue me from the Philistines." He used his brain and his acting skills to keep from getting killed.

Later when David hears the news that the priests in Nob have been killed, he takes responsibly the role he played in that tragic event. Obviously, it is Saul who is primarily responsible, but David says, "I knew Doeg was going to tell Saul what had happened, and I should have known what the result would be. I am guilty of a sin of omission of not doing anything to protect the priests."

There are a number of things we could talk about here. Some of you may think David was wrong to take any responsibility for what happened, and I would be glad to chat about that with you.

But I want to note that *David does not blame God* for what occurred at Nob. He doesn't say, "Well, it was the Lord's will that those priests died. For whatever reason, God didn't protect them, so it was obviously what he wanted to see happen." No, David says, "This was partly my fault. I should have done something differently."

Friends, these are twin truths that we need to embrace. They are two very powerful and profound truths the Bible teaches that sometimes seem to be in tension.

### **#1 It tells us that God is the absolute Sovereign of the universe.**

Nothing happens apart from his will, meaning his plan. Jesus tells us (Matthew 10:29) that not a single sparrow, not a little bird, falls to the ground unless God the Father chooses to allow it. It says (Psalm 139:16) that the number of our days, the exact length of our lives, has been ordained by the Lord before we were ever born.

The Apostle Paul says that God is the one...

**Ephesians 1:11b – "...who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will."**

And yet, even though he is completely sovereign, ordaining all that occurs, that in no way changes the fact that...

### **#2 We as human beings are responsible for the choices we make.**

That is taught in probably hundreds of Bible verses, but I will mention one – Joshua’s words to the people of Israel...

**Joshua 24:15 – “But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”**

No one can say, “The Lord made me serve the other gods.” Or “It was the Lord’s will that we worshiped idols.” No, we are responsible for the choices we make, and we ought to be making choices which are honoring to the Lord.

God is totally sovereign. We as human beings are responsible for the choices we make. How do these truths fit together? I am not always sure.

Oh, the bottom line is that both of these things are true. And we fall into dangerous ditches when we choose to deny or even ignore either one of these truths.

And that’s what happens when people focus on God’s sovereignty and use it as an excuse to be passive or avoid responsibility. They are ignoring the truth that we as human beings are responsible for our choices.

Other people, because they cannot figure out in their minds how our choices can be significant if it is all part of God’s plan, decide to deny or distort this central teaching of the Bible. And they do so to the detriment of their own soul.

The sovereignty of God is the biblical teaching that brings great comfort when we are struggling with life’s trials and tragedies. The truth of Romans 8:28, that God is able and willing to work in all things, to use every situation for his glory and our ultimate good, depends on God being sovereign.

Because he is able to work all things according to the purpose of his will, he can use even our darkest times to bring ultimate joy to our lives. That is not a truth you want to forfeit simply

because you cannot figure how God’s sovereignty fits with human responsibility!

Friends, when two biblical teachings seem to be in tension or even in conflict with each other, we still need to strive to believe and obey both, even as we continue to try to figure out how they fit together.

How much David understood, I am not sure. But in this passage, he clearly believes and practices both truths. God is Sovereign. Nothing happens that he does not ordain. Yet, we as human beings are responsible for our actions and attitudes. Those are truths we need to believe and practice as well.

So, what does that mean in practical terms? I think that is illustrated pretty well in the book of James...

**James 4:13-16 – Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.” You don’t even know what tomorrow will bring – what your life will be! For you are like smoke that appears for a little while, then vanishes. Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.**

Folks, one of the sayings popular in businesses and even church circles is: “Those who fail to plan, plan to fail.”

Jesus says – “We should say: ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”

It is good to make plans because we are responsible for our actions and responsible if we fail to act when we should. Yet, the reality is, all of our plans are extremely fragile. All sorts of things from weather to illness to the fickleness of people around us can keep our plans from coming to fruition.

Only the Lord knows what tomorrow will bring. Only the Lord can ensure that tomorrow will bring what he has ordained it to bring. So, we need to plan, but we need to plan lightly, always

being flexible when the Lord reveals to us that our plan doesn't match up with his.

In three weeks, Dr. Millard Erickson is scheduled to speak during our Homecoming Sunday celebration. We are not related, but he was my primary mentor when I was in seminary. A couple of months ago, I was chatting with him on the phone, and he said, "Yes, I plan to be in Chisholm on August 5, but at my age, I cannot make any guarantees." He is now 85 years old. I said, "Millard, you could not make any guarantees when you were 35 years old." He replied, "But at that age, we think we can." So true!

Friend, if the Lord wills, you will wake tomorrow morning. That is true whether you are 90 years old or 9 years old. We need to humbly accept that and acknowledge God's sovereignty, even as we strive to live each day in a way that honors the Lord.

We should trust God, trust him even in the midst of the most difficult circumstances, but we should never be passive. We should make plans and take responsibility for our actions, even as we continually remind ourselves that our only hope is in God.

Friends, that is what it means to keep those twin truths in view as we seek to live faithfully under the umbrella of God's sovereignty.