Man On The Run  
1 Samuel 21:1-15  

Introduction

David is now a man on the run. The man of faith is now faltering in his faith and failing in his faith. David finds himself fleeing from faith as well as from Saul. Instead of waiting on the Lord and trusting the Lord; David will find himself trying to scheme his way out of a difficult situation. Have you ever been on the run from God? You were or are running away from God instead of running toward the Lord; you are running from enemies and you are running from friends; perhaps you are running from past failures; running from past relationships; running from accusations; some false some true.

David has left the friendship and fellowship of Samuel the Prophet; the comfort and companionship of his friend Jonathan and flees to Nob--where the Ark of the Covenant was kept after the disaster in Shiloh. David--the sweet psalmist of Israel; David--the giant killer; David the future king of Israel is homeless and hungry. David is driven by the relentless pursuit of Saul. How like our flesh that deprives us of our joy and haunts us and opposes us in our desire to serve the Lord with a clean conscience and a pure heart. David has been with the prophet of God Samuel and is now with the priest of God Ahimelech. Ahimelech is the priest in the house of God and receives that which is lawful for the priest to receive.

David is on a crash course; the man anointed by Samuel, pursued by Saul will cave into unbelief and flee to the land of the conquered giant. How is it possible that a person who knows the Lord and loves the Lord and who has served the Lord can stray so far from the Lord?

I am sure you have heard of people; Christian people who begin to live like unbelievers. John MacArthur tells the story of going to a prison and the person told John how much he loved and benefited from his radio program before he went to prison and after he went to prison. “What are you in for?” John asked. The prisoner replied; “Murder”. John said, “Maybe you shouldn’t tell people you know me.”

The sad fact is people estranged from God; people running from God can sink to the lowest levels of immorality. We don’t have to look far in the Bible and we read about the less than perfect record of the saints; read the glowing report of Noah in Genesis 6 and you are surprised to find Noah drunk in Genesis 9. Abraham the Father of Faith lies to the Pharaoh about his relationship with Sarah; Samson with supernatural strength does not have the strength to control his own sensuality. King Asa is also the King of compromise; and in the New Testament the apostle Judas finds the gate to hell right next door to the way to heaven.

David lies to Saul in chapter 20 and lies to Ahimelech in chapter 21. David is defiled before Ahimelech the priest of God and then degraded before Achish the Philistine king. David is struggling in his walk with God.

Eating The Bread Of God (vv.1-8)
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The Lord spoke of this incident in Mark 2:25; “But He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him”

Matthew 12:8; “For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath”.

Jesus had been walking through grain fields with his disciples. They plucked the heads or kernals of grain from the stocks of wheat and ate them (not gluten free). The religious leaders accused Jesus’ disciples of doing that which was unlawful--working on the Sabbath. Jesus appealed to this story of how David--a fugitive king--a man on the run--from Saul, paused to eat bread in the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the bread set aside, consecrated for priests.

Both Jesus and David were rejected kings. As Jesus surveyed the religious wasteland of first century Judaism--he denounced the leaders for failing to point people to the “rest of God”. Jesus is the Sabbath--Jesus is the person and the place where a person; exhausted from running to God, or from God; running towards acceptance and freedom; running from sin and Satan; can find rest. The followers of the rejected King were hungry--and they needed to avail themselves of the provision that was set aside for the priests; the shewbread.

The religious leaders found fault with this; to them the ritual observance of the Sabbath was more important than the meaning of the Sabbath itself. Jesus reminds the religious leaders the meaning of the Sabbath--the purpose of the Sabbath--the weary can find rest.

How did we lose sight? How did the symbol become more important than the substance? How did the ritual become more important than the relationship? What was more important, the Sabbath, or the Lord of the Sabbath?

But David is not like his Lord. David eats the unleavened bread consecrated for the priests and yet speaks lies--the leaven of Satan. The leaven of deceit. The stench of his flesh must have mingled with the holy incense of the tabernacle.

The Bread of God

Let’s make a few observations about the “food” in the sanctuary or tabernacle.

2. The Meat-offering. Illustrates the new-man or the new order of men.
3. The shoulder. Illustrates strength
4. The shew-bread. Illustrates fellowship. This is the bread of his “presence”. The 12 loaves with the incense of God; represents the nation before the nations God; “accepted”.

1 Samuel 21:3 (NKJV) Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found.
Only priests were allowed to eat the priestly food. Was David a “true priest” even though Ahimelech was unaware? 12 loaves lay on the Table--but David only asks for 5 of the loaves. Five is the number of human weakness (six speaks of human strength); seven is the number of perfection. No doubt David saw this day as a day of weakness; these were had times; times of social and economic distress; but there is still a divine provision in the midst of human weakness. The lesson; God is willing to take care of us--even when we fail. Is God rewarding David’s disobedience? Of course not. David’s son--feeds a large crowd--with five loaves--over a thousand years later!

Finding The Rest Of God

Are you a legalist? Do you believe others can only be right with God if they keep the rules? I believe everyone should read their Bible every day, pray every day, go to church every Sunday--serve the Lord with gladness in the church and in the community. Do you believe God loves you less and you are in danger of losing God’s love because you fail? Do you go to church because you have to or because you want to? Do you refrain from sin because you genuinely love the Lord; or do you fear the consequences of your sin?

How do you know you have a problem with legalism?
Could you be a legalist?—Take the quiz!

Answer yes or no to the following questions:
1) God's love for me depends on what I do.
2) Meeting the expectations of others, especially those in my congregation or in positions of authority, are paramount.
3) Moral and ethical questions are usually black and white and only made into fuzzy shades of gray by hand-wringing, bleeding-heart types.
4) I try hard to obey God and it irritates me that others think they can get away with avoiding the same level of dedication.
5) I fall short because I don't have enough faith, or because I haven't prayed enough, or because I just need to be a better person.
6) God is predisposed to be angry with me because I am a sinner. My main goal in life is to try to gain God's favor by doing things that will impress him.
7) My sense of spiritual well-being is linked to a Christian leader or membership in my church rather than a personal relationship with God.
8) I tell my children not to do something in church or around other Christian families that I allow in my home.
9) I believe my church is God's true church and that most other Christians may be sincere, but are sincerely wrong.
10) The exterior choices a person makes in what they wear, hairstyle, piercings, tattoos, etc. is a clear indication of that person's character.
11) I sometimes worry that people might take advantage of grace if it's preached too much — people might think they can do anything they want.
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12) After being around Christians for a while I feel drained —weary of putting up a false front.
13) When I happen to miss a service or activity of my church I feel guilty.
14) I will likely get into heaven, even though I'm far from perfect, because I have tried to be a basically good person and God will take that into account.

How did you do?

1. You care more about the rules than people.
2. You never or rarely help people out.
3. You rarely place anyone ahead of you.
4. You think grace is what you say before dinner instead of what you need to make it through life.
5. You think you are a good person because you keep the rules and you never killed anyone. You secretly know you are unworthy to be loved by God. You make vows, resolutions and promises, struggle to keep them, and rarely do. You hope one day you will be better. You are often disappointed in yourself because you believe in yourself.

The whole book of Galatians was written for the recovering legalist. In the book of Galatians Paul writes about fruit bearing, burden bearing, seed bearing and brand-bearing. “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (concern for others). “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). “Whatsover a man sows” (Gal. 6:2). “Let us not grow weary in well doing, for. . .we shall reap” (6:9). “I bear in my body the marks (or brands) of the Lord Jesus”.

In ancient times slaves were often branded to indicate ownership.

To the person struggling with legalism--you have permission to find your rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have repented of your sin and received the Lord Jesus Christ; you are in the Beloved, you are accepted. If you are a current follower and lover of Jesus Christ; born again; you are not on privileged probation. God’s grace is available to you for free. God’s grace is not based on your merit.

Taking the Sword Of Goliath

1 Samuel 21:7 (NKJV) Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul.

David comes for bread but the site of Doeg must have awakened David’s need to protect himself (see verse 8). He then asks the priest for a weapon. David is fed from the sanctuary and armed from the sanctuary. I find it interesting that Goliath’s sword found a place of honor behind the ephod of the high priest. Again I think it speaks of another high priest; David’s future famous Son; the Lord Jesus who takes the weapon of our enemy--death--and uses it to defeat death forever. Jesus slew death by dying. Someone has said; “Death is the best weapon in the arsenal of God, when wielded by the power of life”. “The ephod would suggest that the sword must be
used under divine direction, and in harmony with priestly sensibilities. Nor was this lacking in David’s battles, he ever inquired of the Lord and he never lost a battle” (Pell; p. 191).

What a strange mix of fear and faith! The Bible does not seem to condemn the fact that David was fed in the sanctuary and furnished with a weapon in the sanctuary; but that David lied in the sanctuary and feared in the sanctuary was a problem!

Hasn’t David already won this battle? Hasn’t David learned that when you have God’s faithfulness you don’t have to be afraid? But David begins to doubt and to falter and then to fail. David becomes confused about what he believes and how he behaves. How is it possible to believe one way and then behave another way?

David paints a picture of Doeg in Psalm 52. Apparently Doeg was there and spied out the situation for Saul. Doeg was Saul’s dog and Saul’s rat; and this would lead to some rather severe bloodletting.

The Psalm is divided in two parts; in the first half if the Psalm we see a man; “Behold the strong man that made not God his strength”. The other half--in contrast we see the man who makes the Lord his strength. Later Doeg will violently kill the entire priestly community in order to avenge Saul and this will make David's blood boil red hot!

Doeg is Saul’s dog. Doeg is a butcher. Some people have seen in David’s description of Psalm 52 another man; a boaster and a butcher who is a type of the man of sin; the antichrist who will stain the nation of Israel in their own blood; and seek to establish his own kingdom. Doeg was an “Edomite” (Herod was Idumean --from Edom).

I Samuel 21:8-9 (NKJV) And David said to Ahimelech, Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste. 9So the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here. And David said, There is none like it; give it to me.

“He grips Goliath’s sword that reminds him of former power with God. This trophy of his victory should have been the symbol and assurance of future help, but he yields to unbelief, and leaves the Lord's inheritance for the very land of the vanquished giant” (Pell, p. 187).

Fleeing To The Land Of The Giants (vv.10-15)

Have you ever been in the wrong place at the wrong time? David flees the house of God and the land of God and takes refuge in the land of the Giants; the nation of Philistea--to Gath!

This is the Capitol; this is the Washington D.C. of Philistea; the Babylon of Babylonia.
Isn’t it interesting? Faith took David to Elah where the young shepherd boy slew the giant. And now fear causes David to run—straight into the Capitol of his former mortal enemy. Fear causes David to run directly to the giant’s hometown! David is running from Saul (the flesh) to the very fortress of God’s enemy. David’s fear is his folly.

So is ours. We make the biggest mistakes when we are afraid. David has abandoned the counsel of his friend Samuel. David does not have the comfort of his friend Jonathan. David is not seeking to worship the Lord or seek His will. God worked through Samuel saving David from Saul’s soldiers.

When we are out of fellowship with the Lord—we often seek counsel—from the worst sources. When you are out of fellowship with the Lord—the last thing in the world you need is bad advice.

When we are out of fellowship with the Lord—our chance of making bad choices increases dramatically! Our sad and bad choices lead to sad and bad consequences.

Doeg will tell Saul of David’s trip to Nob and scores of people will die. Doeg will kill 85 people; one will escape—Abiather; and when David is told of the disaster; David remarks; “I have occasioned the death of all the persons in your father’s house (1 Sam. 22:22).

David did not mean for all those people to die. But running from God; refusing to trust God; believing bad advice leads to bad consequences.

Lying, deceiving, departing from fellowship, David followed his own desperate plans; and he sets in motion the event that will lead to the slaughter of innocent people. Will David experience grace and forgiveness for his sins? The answer is yes. Will grace and forgiveness make the consequences of David’s bad decisions go away? The answer is no.

You had sex with your girlfriend and now she’s pregnant. You are sorry. Why didn’t God make the pregnancy go away? You selfishly made decisions that destroyed you marriage. Now you want your marriage back.

We make mistakes when we are afraid. We purchase things on the credit card. How will I live? How will I support my family? How will I eat? How will I defend myself? How will I take care of my business? How will I finish school? Our fears can overwhelm us!

Back in the days of the Roman Empire during a circus in the Colosseum, a Christian was thrown to a hungry lion. As the spectators cheered, the wild beast pounced. But the Christian quickly whispered something in the lion’s ear and the beast backed away in terror. After this happened several times the Emperor sent a Centurion to find out what magic spell could make a ferocious lion cower in fear! A few minutes later the guard returned and said, “The Christian whispered into the lion’s ear; “After dinner you’ll be required to say a few words to our audience.”
Oswald Chambers wrote; “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”

“The wicked are cowards and afraid of everything; of God because he is his enemy; of Satan, because he is is his tormentor; of God’s creatures, because they, joining with their Maker, fight agains him; of himself, because he bears about with him his own accuser and executioner. The godly man contrarily is afraid of nothing; not of God, because he knows him as his best friend, and will not hurt him; not of Satan, because he cannot hurt him; not of afflictions, because he knows they come from a loving God, and end in his good; not of the creatures, since “the very stones in the field are in league with him” and of himself, since his conscience is at peace” (Joseph Hall; 1574-1656).

The fear of man will sometimes make desperate people do stupid things. David’s case is desperate--but where is his faith? How could David have forgotten about God? David carries Goliath’s sword--but past victories are no guarantee of present trust! But God is faithful. Even though David makes some terrible decisions; David blows it big time--God is teaching David about David’s own utter worthlessness.

You mean God isn’t interested in building David’s self esteem? No--God is interested in David utterly and completely trusting the Lord.

Remember the road of unbelief--like the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The road of unbelief will always lead to trouble--not away from trouble. The pain--the sorrow--the humiliation we seek to avoid is waiting for us--when we elect to abandon God’s plan and we walk away from God’s will.

I now this sounds simple; too good to be true--but simple trust in the Lord brings deliverance.

What was David thinking showing up in Gath? How could David show up in Gath and expect people not to notice? This would be like Larry Flynt showing up at the Christian Book Sellers Convention. This would be like Paris Hilton showing up at a MENSA meeting.

Did David think that because he as fleeing Saul’s court he would be welcome? Did everyone forget that David killed Goliath? That would be like killing John Elway and deciding to move to Denver! You simply don’t forget something like that. Like Peter heating himself at the High Priest’s campfire; and someone notices; “hey weren’t you with Jesus?”

David pretends insanity. Or is he pretending? Fear causes David to foam at the mouth; and salivia starts running down his beard? David starts scratching out messages on the door posts.

Can fear make a person act crazy? It made David crazy. All of David’s crutches are gone. You know what little dignity is gone when you feign madness so that other people won’t hurt you.
With strange thoughts come bizarre behavior; and the inability to know or see the truth. 
In all this the king of Achish says-- “Why do I need a nut job here in my court?” “Gath has plenty of nut jobs; we don’t need any more. I have enough psycho’s. Get rid of him. David can’t get help in the enemies camp. David has lost his job, lost his wife, lost his friend, and now he has lost his self-respect. What’s left?

David writes Psalm 56 and Psalm 34. Look at the first few verses. 
David cannot trust human flesh. That is like trusting a rusting nail with the sharp end pointing at your eye. If you rest your weight on a nail--pointed in your direction; it will penetrate your flesh.

David leaves Gath. “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

How do you rise above the fear and the lies? David does it through worship and supplication. How do you rise above the fear and the lies? Clinical counseling and medication. Remember what a crutch is--a substitute for God.

Deuteronomy 33:27;

“The eternal God is your refuge, 
And underneath are the everlasting arms;”

We can only trust God. In the final analysis He is all we have.

Isa. 41:10;
“Fear not, for I am with you; 
Be not dismayed, for I am your God. 
I will strengthen you, 
I will uphold you with My righteousness right hand.’

If you are leaning on someone else--you won’t lean on God. You are still looking at that person; at that bank account;

Crutches provide only offer temporary relief. Will the pill make the pain go away? For a while. We want the pain to go away; we want the anxiety to go away; we want the fear to go away; Millions of people take hundreds of millions of pills to feel better, to ease the pain, to endure the storms for a little while.

Are you saying don’t take medication? Just the opposite. If a doctor has you on a medication you are foolish to self-medicate; and you are even more foolish to stop taking the medication apart from your Doctor’s supervision.

Will medication offer a short solution to the problem of distress? Perhaps. 
Will medication make fear go away and generate trust and faith in God?