

**ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**REV. JIM CAPPS- JULY 1, 2012**

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**"MEN WITHOUT A COUNTRY"**

**I SAMUEL 29:1-11**

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On this Sunday before July 4<sup>th</sup> when we celebrate our independence as a nation, going all the way back to 1776, we gather here with profound gratitude. Sometimes we take our freedoms for granted. Sometimes we abuse those freedoms.

One of the great questions for us through the years has to do with the separation between Church and State. What does that mean? Some would say that it means we should have no symbols of any faith in public places and no symbol of the state in religious places. This understandable fear is that we fall into the same kind of tyranny that made our ancestors come to these United States in the first place.

I'll never forget being in a small group of pastors in California several years ago and hearing Stephen Carter, who is a professor of constitutional law at Yale, shortly after he wrote the book, *The Culture of Disbelief*. His whole thesis was that our nations' founders were concerned about guarding the church from the state and not the state from the church. He felt that we have missed the point in many of the actions we have taken in recent years.

We are here in this place of sanctuary worshipping God as we choose this morning. In my mind, we can make a kind of civil religion out of our history and government when we worship them above or at least with same reverence we give to God. We must always worship God first, giving thanks for how He has used less than perfect men and women to secure and maintain our freedoms.

Just as was true of Israel of old, we put our heroes on pedestals and forget the trials they went through and their failures. One of the most famous is Abraham Lincoln. In 1832, he was defeated for state legislature; in 1833, he failed in business; in 1835, his sweetheart died; in 1836, he had a nervous breakdown; in 1838, he was defeated in his bid for Speaker in the Illinois House; in 1843, he was defeated for nomination to congress; in 1848, he lost re-nomination for congress; in 1849, he was rejected for land officer; in 1854, he was defeated for U. S. Senate; in 1856, defeated in nomination for Vice President; in 1858, again defeated in nomination for Senate. All of this took place before was elected as President of the United States in 1860.

Could it be that our failures and defeats help us know that we must depend upon God and not ourselves? God is the One who is ultimately in control and not us. So it must have been with Israel's Great King David. As we continue this series entitled, "After God's Own Heart," on the life of King David, the passage we are looking at today finds David and his 600 loyal men as "Men Without a Country. Please turn with me to I Samuel 29:1-11.

**LET'S FIRST LOOK AT DAVID'S SITUATION.**

Last week, we left David in a moment of great triumph when he defeated the giant, Goliath. After that things begin the crumble for young David. As you might imagine, David's fame spread like wildfire.

The lyrics of the top song on the charts were “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.” Even though David became best friends with his son, Jonathan, and married his daughter, Michal, Saul was intensely jealous of David. That jealousy led to a paranoia and threat level that caused Saul to try to take David’s life.

David fled for his life taking a band of 600 trusted men with him. Saul and his army chased after them. On a couple of occasions, David finds Saul in vulnerable situations and could have killed him, but instead spared his life. That grace shown him, did not slow down Saul. In a kind of blind rage, he continued to pursue the legendary shepherd boy.

Realizing the reality of the situation, David sought asylum with their dreaded enemies, the Philistines. They at first settled in Goliath’s hometown, Gath, where Achish the king highly respected David. Living there for a year and 4 months, David and his warriors raided some of the Philistines enemies and were so successful that the Achish trusted David. Those peoples raided by David and his men had not included the Israelites, their countrymen.

This all changes in the passage I read, I Samuel 29, where the Philistines are preparing to do battle with Israel. While David and his faithful band were placed at the rear of the army with King Achish, they were ready to do battle against Israel.

If I were one of those news people embedded in the Philistine army and I had the opportunity to interview David at this point, I wonder what would have been his frame of mind? Maybe the dialogue would have gone like this:

Me: David, it wasn’t that long ago that you defeated the great Philistine Goliath, leading Israel to a stunning victory in the valley of Elah. How did you ever get to the point of now being with the Philistines, preparing to do battle with the Israelites?

David: Well, Jim, it’s been a string of events no one could have possibly predicted. It’s been fueled by the jealousy and paranoia of King Saul, who I respected and wanted desperately to serve. While I had been anointed to be the next king by the old prophet, Samuel, it was never my desire to be a threat to Saul. I was willing to wait for God’s timing.

Me: David, there is a sense in which you are a victim of your own success. All of this pain and danger for you and your family was none of your doing. It doesn’t seem fair. Are you angry with God?

David: No, Jim! A thousand times no! I have felt God’s presence and help in a far greater way than I could have ever imagined. Instead of anger with God, I am filled with overwhelming gratitude. God has been my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Me: Those are wonderful words, David, but in a few hours you may be doing battle with your own flesh and blood. How would you feel, if you were going sword to sword with one of your brothers.

David: I’m not certain how this is all going to turn out. I have been well taken care of by Achish and his people. I must be loyal to them. I am placing this whole situation in God’s hands. Somehow, someday God will work out His purpose in this very troubling situation.

## **THE PHILISTINES DILEMA**

While Achish had grown to respect and trust David implicitly, that trust was not shared by the Philistine military leaders. They had seen David in action, not only with Goliath and one of their worst defeats in battle that day in the valley of Elah, but also as he went on his numerous raids against some of the other city-states of the area. They viewed David as shrewd and dangerous.

This could be a plot in which David had gone to the enemy so that at the right moment he would turn against the Philistines and win his way back into the good graces of King Saul the man who had been trying to take his life. Or, at best, in the heat of battle when David and his men undoubtedly would face family or friends, their loyalties would change, even though it might not be their intent.

With all of this in mind, the military leaders are adamant. David and his men can be nowhere near the battle, not even in the rear with Achish.

It was Achish's unenviable task to send David and his loyal band of men back to Ziklag with their families, far away from the fray. When Achish speaks to David, he tells him that he has been honored to serve with him and that he has been reliable in every way. Yet, he must turn and go back to Ziklag in peace.

David protests. He has done nothing wrong. Has he not served Achish faithfully? He pleads with Achish to let him go into battle against the foes of the Philistines.

Achish's response is very interesting in verse 9 when he says that David has been as pleasing in his eyes as an angel of God. It's as if he is saying that he has been a messenger of God to him. Achish has seen God in David. Wow! What a statement for a Philistine to make about an Israelite. David, who was a man after God's own heart, had allowed God to shine through him in the most positive ways.

But after that, Achish tells David that he must take his men and leave early the next morning to travel south to Ziklag. He cannot go with the Philistines into this battle. David does not have a choice. It's out of his hands.

As you view the happenings of your life, like all of us, there are times when it seems that your life is out of your control. You are forced to go in directions that you had never anticipated. In some cases, you had done nothing wrong. In fact, you may have been faithful and obedient. It just wasn't supposed to happen like it did.

## **DAVID AND HIS MEN WERE MEN WITHOUT A COUNTRY**

Try to put yourself in David's place as they get up early the next morning and begin the long 3-day hard journey back to Ziklag. How could this be happening? First, they are rejected and threatened by Saul and the Israelite army. Now after almost a year and a half with the Philistines, doing everything asked of them, they are rejected again. In essence, they had been faithfully and done nothing wrong. It had been the paranoia of a troubled, jealous Saul and not their malfeasance which caused them to be rejected by Israel. Now, it was the suspicions and the mistrust of the Philistine military leaders causing their further rejection.

They were men without a country. There they were all 600 of them like a ship floating out of control in a sea of uncertainty. There was no place to cast their anchor. Literally, all they had left were their families and meager possessions toward which they were heading in the foreign town of Ziklag.

Have you ever felt that way? Oh, maybe some of it was your own doing. You may have made some mistakes which came back to haunt you. Your life was out of control. You were rejected by seemingly everyone. There was no place to cast an anchor of security. On the other hand, quite honestly, none of it may have been your making. Humanly speaking it wasn't fair. But there was nothing you could do about it. You felt like a failure.

I can think of such a time. In 2008, I felt strongly that I should leave the Southport Presbyterian Church, where I had served as Senior Pastor for 13 ½ years. I felt they needed a new voice and I needed a new challenge. The people at SPC thought I would stay for several more years until retirement and so were shocked when I resigned in May of 2008.

Through a series of events, none of my own making, in August of 2009, I was without employment and too young to retire. I had severed my quadriceps on my left leg and couldn't start physical therapy for 8 weeks after surgery. I had never felt so helpless physically. I experienced many rejections in trying to find another pastorate. A church just didn't want a pastor my age, much less one who was broken-down. I had not been without a job since my middle teen-age years. It was a tough pill to swallow.

It was at that point that I found out a young man was flying up from Orlando to see me to ask for my only daughter's hand in marriage. I couldn't even drive to the airport to pick him up; Alice had to. What's more, because we had paid Becky's way through college and seminary, we didn't have a huge savings account. While we had enough for a wedding, we would have to use that money to live on in the next few months. While Alice and I were in a place completely outside of our control, I must say, we felt a sense of peace. Even though the future was completely unknown, it was in God's hands. Somehow, I believe David must have experienced that same kind of peace.

### **GOD, IN HIS WONDERFUL PROVIDENCE, CARED FOR DAVID AND HIS MEN.**

While rejected and completely uprooted, David and his men must have also felt a little bit of relief. While they were ready to go against Israel out of loyalty and gratitude to Achish and the Philistines who had taken them in, they didn't have to do battle with their countrymen and in some cases members of their own families. David might have had to fight against his own brothers.

For our purposes today, we will skip over chapter 30 and look at the battle between the Philistines and Israel which ensued in I Samuel 31. In the first paragraph, we quickly discover that the battle was hard fought and David's best friend, Jonathan, who had protected him from his father, Saul, was killed. King Saul was critically wounded and also died.

Do you think David could have lived with himself if he had been a part of the effort which took the lives of Jonathan and Saul? Can you even begin to imagine what it would have been like to go back to his wife, Michal, and tell her that he had fought against Israel when her father and brother lost their lives? How could David become Israel's greatest king if he had fought on the side of the Philistines that day?

In God's wonderful providence, He was protecting David for the purpose that He had for Him later. In retrospect, I am sure that he could clearly see that the rejection of the paranoid king and the Philistine military leaders were a part of God's plan to preserve David. God had big plans for David.

## **APPLICATION**

Dear friends, while we may not see God's providence as clearly displayed as David, in retrospect must have seen it, God is still providently active in our lives every bit as much as He was in David's. Even though we experience rejection and feel like we are aimlessly afloat on a sea of uncertainty, God is working out His purpose. Maybe we will never understand it completely and say that it was all worth it.

Paul's words from Romans 8:28 ring true for us today, "And we know that all things work for the good of those God, who have been called according to His purpose." While I have come to believe completely in these words, I must admit that sometimes they get stuck in my throat when I read them. There are some circumstances I can't imagine working for good.

The rest of my story... In a way completely beyond my doing, in November of 2009, when we were coming to the end of our savings, I received the call to become the interim pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio, a church I had long admired. My salary was more than I had ever made and allowed us to give our daughter the kind of wedding she had always dreamed of having. In a way that I still don't fully understand, I was spared a really difficult time in the life of the Southport Presbyterian Church while serving in a place where I saw God use my experience and gifts. Less than a month after I left San Antonio, I received a call to become the interim pastor of another great church that I long have admired, the Zionsville Presbyterian Church.

Praise God for the way in which He continually works out His purpose in our lives if we will get out of the way and allow Him to do so! Even though we may feel like we are people without a country, our citizenship is in heaven. You and I can depend upon God in all the circumstances of our lives.

If for any reason you feel like you are floating aimlessly on a sea of uncertainty and would like someone to listen to and prayer with you after we celebrate Communion, there will be people by the cross who would consider it a privilege to spend time with you.

As we prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, gathering around the table as the family of faith, this table is a living demonstration of God's providential love for each one of us. Never was there a man more rejected and alone than Jesus when He died on a barbaric cross. Yet, in God's amazing grace, God has used His death as the provision for all of us who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God! Let us come humbly with joy to celebrate Jesus body broken and blood shed to bring us forgiveness for our sins if we place our faith In Him.