

## The Messiness of a Hard Heart

1Samuel 21-22

One of the recurring themes in the life and ministry of Jesus is people (usually those who did not like Him very much) trying to trap Him with a question.

They asked Him questions about taxes, about which commands are the most important, about ceremonial law, and more.

One time they asked him about divorce. They asked, “It is lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

People were divided on the issue in those days.

Some thought divorce was unthinkable except in rare circumstances and others thought any reason was reason enough.

No doubt those asking Jesus about this thought they would cause problems for the LORD because no matter how he answered He would be making someone upset.

Jesus, being unafraid of such things, decisively comes down on the side of marriage being a lifelong covenant by appealing to God’s creation of Adam and Eve and bringing them together as one.

He says, “What God has joined together let not man separate.”

With that answer they think they have Him in a corner because they say, “Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

Their point being how can you say no to divorce if Moses allowed for it?

To that Jesus says, “Moses permitted you to divorce because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”

One clear lesson from what Jesus says there is that the hardness of the human heart is what messes up God’s design for life and that is not good according to Jesus.

It is not good because hearts that are hard hearted towards God are going to disobey God and when people disobey God there are always consequences.

Of course the greatest consequence is coming under God’s judgement, but in addition to that it can also complicate life.

Instead of life being straightforward it becomes messy and complicated which can affect a significant amount of people depending on the situation.

[We can see that in our text this morning. In **1Samuel 21-22** Israel’s first king named Saul is once again trying to kill a man named David not because David deserves to die but because Saul is up to his eyeballs in godlessness. The king’s hard heartedness towards the LORD makes a mess of a situation. Since this kind of attitude is alive and well today we can expect to

have to deal with messy circumstances from time to time and we would do well to pay attention to what happens here. There are at least four important lessons for us in this text. Number one is this...]

**Point #1 – Being wronged can easily lead to doing wrong. (21:1-10)**

Sin often leads to sin and we are very good at justifying ourselves especially if someone has or is sinning against us.

By this time in David's life he had been a soldier and a commander of soldiers for a while.

He was used to success. Whenever he went out to fight against Israel's enemies he won. He was used to going out with what he thought he needed for the fight, but now he was on the run from his own king and he had nothing but the clothes on his back. Needing some resources he decides to go to a town of priests called Nob to meet a man named Ahimelech.

Ahimelech is likely the high priest and the Tabernacle has likely been setup in this town.

It makes sense that a man who loves God would go to the servants of the LORD for some help.

Ahimelech according to verse 1 is startled by David's unusual arrival wondering why he has come alone.

David answers in **verses 2-3**.

Some commentators have tried to jump through hoops to make it appear as though David is being truthful, but I don't see how that is possible.

Some commentators argue that David has the best of intentions here.

He hides the truth so that Ahimelech will be innocent before the king.

I'm inclined to agree with that, but it is still a lie.

It could be that David goes to the priests thinking Saul isn't so far gone that he would think of harming them.

Even so, it is still not right for him to deceive the priest.

There is no indication here that the priest doubted David's story, after all this is Israel's greatest warrior asking for help on an important mission.

Having no other bread on hand, the priest offers David 'the bread of presence' from the golden table from inside the Tabernacle that was only to be eaten by the priests.

He does this with a condition of ceremonial cleanness, which is not the standard at all.

Carl Keil argues that the obligation to love your neighbor is greater than the regulation for the bread, and that may be, but it is David's deception that produces the offer.

In addition to bread David asks for a weapon and is provided with the sword of Goliath which had somehow arrived at the Tabernacle.

So Ahimelech had, without knowing it, helped a man that the king wanted dead.

Was it right that Saul wanted David dead? Certainly not!  
Did David have good intentions in lying? I think so.

Should the high priest have helped David if David had told him the truth? Yes.

Was it right for David to lie to the priest? No, but it is easy to see why it happens given what Saul is doing to David.

*That is an easy thing to happen and we should be on our guard against it because we can use it to justify all kinds of evil in our lives from the small to the very serious.*

Someone lied to me; therefore, it is ok to lie to someone else.

Someone stole my bike, so I'm going to steal someone else's.

Someone yelled at me so it's ok for me to take it out on someone else.

Have you ever heard someone justify how they raise their children with, "That's the way my parents treated me!"

This thinking has become increasingly common in society these days as well.

People feel mistreated and use it as an excuse to beat people up, to burn buildings to the ground, and worse.

[It is very important for the people of God to be on our guard against such thinking. We don't want to minimize injustice for a second. We need to be people who call it out. At the same time we never want to be people who use someone else's sin to justify more sin. That just makes things worse. Here is a second lesson.]

## **Point #2 – Trying times tend to create uncertainty. (21:11-22:5)**

When circumstances or people turn our lives upside down it can be very hard to figure out what to do.

*Leaving the Tabernacle with a few loaves of bread and Goliath's sword, David goes to a few different places.*

Ironically, the first place he goes is a city called "Gath" which was Goliath's hometown.

The writer does not tell us what David was thinking with that move, but one thing is for sure, Saul would not be looking for him there.

Perhaps he thought he could go unnoticed or perhaps he thought the king of Gath and man named Achish would be happy to take in a defector.

The servants of the king seem to know who he is and have his victories against the Philistines top of mind.

We are told 12 that this made David ‘fearful’. It is like he jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire.

His solution is to act insane which gets him shipped out of town.

The beginning of chapter 22 tells us that David then goes to a place called ‘Adullam’ which means “justice of the people.”

His family meets him there (likely out of fear of what Saul might do to them). In addition to his family it says in **22:2**...

From there he goes to Moab seeking more permanent protection for his family.

The Moabites were traditionally enemies of Israel, but you may recall that David’s grandmother Ruth was from Moab which likely afforded his family some grace among them.

From there he is told by the prophet Gad in verse 5 to leave the ‘stronghold’ and stay in Judah and so he ends up in the ‘forest of Hereth’ just a short distance from Saul.

The impression is that David is sort of all over the place, uncertain of what to do and uncertain or where to go.

He can’t just kill the king, but he also can’t sit around and do nothing so he is trying to figure it out.

Trying times can do that.

[How many people have heard of the Apollo 13 mission to the moon? One of the most famous parts to that story is needing for figure out how to fit a square filter into a round hole to control the level of CO<sub>2</sub>. Talk about a trying time of uncertainty. No doubt the question on the top of the astronaut’s mind was, “What do we do now?” After some trial and error they figured it out with, I love this, cardboard and duct tape.]

Have you ever been put in a situation where you are asking, “What do I do now?”

That happens from time to time as we live in a broken world.

Sometimes it happens because of our own foolishness and sin.

Sometimes it happens because of someone else’s evil intentions towards us and sometimes it happens because of the general fallen state of this current creation.

Whatever the reason we can be left with uncertainty.

It is not a time to throw up our hands and give up.

David does something better. He simply takes the next step.

True it doesn’t get solved right away and he has to go from place to place but he keeps putting one foot in front of the other.

[Sometimes things don't work out the way we plan. Sometimes we don't know what is around the next corner. Sometimes things are uncertain and it is important for us to know that. It is not a time to freak out, it is a time do the next right thing, and it is a time to keep trusting the LORD. Here is the third lesson...]

**Point #3 – Godless thinking is a curse to ourselves and those around us. (22:6-19)**

When for whatever reason we ignore what the LORD says in favour of what we want it always ends up hurting us and others as well.

In verse six of chapter 22 we are told that Saul hears something of what is going on with David.

At this point it is becoming clear to him that getting rid of David can no longer be a simple matter.

He is clearly angry about the situation when he gathers “his officials” at the high place in Gibeah.

Everyone is gathered around and Saul has his spear in hand, which likely had everyone nervous, and says this in **verses 7-8**.

Can you hear what he is concerned about? Instead of making the case that he is a good king, he says they should support him because of the stuff he gives them.

He wants them concerned with worldly things rather than holy things.

Did you hear how many times he says the words “me” and “I”?

Look at the result? He is paranoid about things that are not true.

David has no intention of taking Saul's life or his place but all the king can think about is losing the throne.

He is in a sad state.

His self-focus does far more than make him into a basket case.

Among the servants there is an Edomite named Doeg who we are told back in 21:7 was a witness to David asking Ahimelech for help.

Edomites descend from Esau and are often at odds with the Israelites, in fact Saul had gone to war with them according to 14:47.

How Doeg ends up here is not said, but it is clear he is a godless man.

He rats out Ahimelech which leads to Saul bringing the priests in for questioning. **(22:13-14)**.

What really stands out in those verses is Saul's accusations are based on paranoid delusions and Ahimelech tells the truth as it happened.

The truth doesn't matter to the king and he orders his servants to kill “the priests of the LORD”.

His servants refuse (which is the right thing to do) but Doeg the Edomite carries out the order of the king and puts all the priests and everyone and everything in their town to the sword.

That is about as godless as it gets.

Instead of leading God's people into holiness, the king shows contempt for God and His people and commits mass murder against those set apart to lead the people of God in worship.

Saul's continuing rebellion against God is hurting him absolutely, but his people are also being substantially harmed as well.

[Jesus warned against this sort of thing using the illustration of yeast in bread. If you have ever baked bread you know that the yeast is only a small ingredient compared to the rest, but it affects the entire lump of dough.]

It is the same will godlessness. It affects more than the godless individual, it affects those around him as well.

Godless people in government make godless laws which hurt everyone in society.

Godless teachers train godless students to lead godless lives and in hurts an entire generation.

Godless parents lay the foundation for children to follow in their footsteps down the path that leads to eternal destruction.

Listen, I especially want the men of this church to listen!

Your life is about much more than you!

The course you set in your life is impacting everyone around you and you will either be a curse or blessing.

[Godlessness is ruining lives every single day. It turned Saul into an angry, bitter, paranoid, murderous wreck and everyone around him was worse off because of it. It is a pretty bleak picture in the kingdom of Israel, but even as bad as things are there is still some hope as the text returns to David in the last few verses of chapter 22. There we see this fourth lesson which is that...]

**Point #4 – Truth is always our best refuge against evil. (22:20-23)**

No matter how messy life gets on account of wickedness we can find safety in believing God.

We are not told how, but one son of Ahimelech is able to escape the sword of Doeg the Edomite and manages to find David.

A little time has passed since David went to Nob and his circumstances have somewhat improved.

He can be reasonably certain that his family is safe and he now has a small force of between 4-500 men under his leadership.

Things are still difficult and uncertain, but he is not nearly as vulnerable as he was when he made his plea for a few loaves of bread and a sword.

With that in mind we read this in **22:20-23**.

David does something here that is incredibly important.

He takes responsibility for the role he played in the death of the priests.

Did he intend for them to be killed? Not at all.

He likely thought he was keeping them safe by telling Ahimelech a lie.

Is he responsible for the murderous actions of Saul?

No, that is one hundred percent on the king.

Did he know the king was irrational and given to fits of rage? Yes.

Did he know what kind of man Doeg was?

Yes he says so right here that he knew

Doeg's presence was a problem.

Could he have done things

differently? Yes and he is willing to admit that.

What if he had been honest with the priest?

Ahimelech may have helped anyway and still died, but at least it would have been his own risk.

Maybe David would have had to run away empty handed, the LORD would have provided for him in some other way.

At least in this moment he is seeing things in a better light, he is looking to the truth, he can see a bit more clearly how the LORD is going to watch over him and he invites Abiathar into that refuge as well.

David wrote Psalm 52 in response to what happens with Doeg and the priests.

He talks in that psalm about the foolishness of failing to make God your stronghold and about the security He finds in trusting in God's unfailing love.

[I couldn't help but think of a young child running to hide behind his father when he finds himself afraid. Why do children do that? Because they see their dad as being able to protect them.]

Is that how we see the LORD? We should.

Does He keep us from every trouble and hardship?

No, not at all. David will go through many more trials before his time is finished.

God's people, the Bible tells us, face hardship, suffering, and even death in His service.

He does not keep us from every trouble, but He does stay with us in every trouble and He has overcome every trial through the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ.

*You can know that peace and have that hope if you take refuge in the truth.*

If you can see the truth that you are a wretched sinner who only deserves eternity in hell, if you can see the truth that Jesus died for you to pay the penalty of your sin, if you can see the truth that Jesus is alive and reigning over all things forever, if you can see that truth then you can see that he is going to rescue all of His people from death.

If you can see all that and believe that then you will find in Christ a glorious and eternal refuge.

You can live in the certain hope that someday in the near future Almighty God will Himself “wipe away every tear from their eyes” for on that day “there will be no more death or crying or pain, for the old order of things [will have] passed away.”

Yes hard hearted people have made, are making, and will continue making a mess of things for a while yet, but everyone in Christ is ultimately free from that tyranny.

So then when we are wronged let us do good in return!

When times are uncertain let us lean into faith all the more!

Let our godliness fight the curse of ungodliness so that people might see that the earth is full of God’s glory.

And let us find our only refuge is the cross of Christ and His empty tomb for there we are safe forever!