

Serving Two Masters

1 Samuel 29:1-11

I had the opportunity to read a few pages of the very recently published biography of Dr. Raphael Thomas written by Jim Ruff.

It is quite a story to say the least.

Dr. Thomas' parents were Jesse and Abigail Thomas.

Jesse had attended a very good school and in keeping with his family connections he became a lawyer.

The Thomas' would have nine children together and tragically four of them died in their early years of life.

Amazingly, the LORD worked through those tragic losses to lead Jesse back to school in order to become a pastor.

A year before entering into the ministry, in 1873, Jesse and Abigail welcomed their youngest child into the world and gave him the name Raphael.

Under the guidance of his father and mother Raphael came to know Jesus as his Lord and Saviour at a young age.

As a young man he was a gifted athlete and student and because of his keen intellect he was able to pursue a career in medicine.

He attended Harvard following high school and after earning an undergraduate degree pursued theological training at Newton Theological institute where his father by that time had become professor of church history.

Through a variety of missionary influences, the most famous of which being D.L. Moody, Raphael had been turned towards missions.

Particularly he would attend Harvard Medical School becoming a doctor in order to use that skill on the mission field.

The Biographer quotes him as saying that he, "felt the call to Medicine always understanding the prior call to ministry and the medical asset always being subservient to that service, just a means to an end."

So he completed medical school, became a doctor, joined a mission board, married his wife Winifred in 1908, and in 1909 the newlyweds made their way to the Philippines.

Conditions were difficult as you might imagine, but Raphael's early ministry was a blessing both in terms of his medical ability and his evangelistic zeal to tell people about their need of Jesus.

He served there faithfully until 1927.

That was the year he was forced to make a choice. The mission agency that he had been with for over twenty years told him to stop preaching the gospel and only focus on medical work.

He knew right away that could never be ok. That was never his vision for becoming a medical missionary.

Faced with the ultimatum he resigned and returned to the US.

He was not defeated, however, and after meeting with fellow believers for counsel and direction a new mission organization was founded with the gospel at the core of its purpose for existing.

Today that organization is known as ABWE, with over 1000 missionaries in 84 countries.

I've seen firsthand the philosophy of Dr. Thomas at work and am deeply thankful for his legacy of faithfulness to his master Jesus Christ.

[That story is a reminder of what the Lord Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew chapter 6 where he says, "No one can serve two masters." The idea being that different masters have competing interests which make it impossible to be dedicated to both. We find David in a situation like that here in **1Samuel 29:1-11**. David has been living in the land of the Philistines with one of their rulers, a man named Achish, for a little over a year. As is often the case the Philistines are now marching off to fight a war against the Israelites, the people to whom David belongs, and David and his army of about six hundred men are told to march to war with Achish. Matthew Henry describes David's situation like being between a rock and a hard place. Do you ever feel like that? Do you ever feel like you have competing interests in your life that are trying to pull you in different directions? That is the situation for David. He is supposed to be the servant of Achish, but he is also bound to Israel and her king named Saul. His situation shows us some of the problems with trying to serve two masters. There are at least three lessons for us to take away from this text. Number one is this...]

Point #1 – Trying to serve two masters always leads to a choice. (Verses 1-3)

If someone tries to serve two or more competing interests sooner or later they are going to have to decide which is more important.

Verse 1 sets the scene for the two competing interests.

It would seem that Philistines are 'all in' on this campaign.

They are bringing everyone they have to the fight to give themselves the best possible chance.

They camp at a place called 'Aphek' which means 'enclosure' probably because the terrain gave them some natural protection against attack.

Israel on the other hand camps at the nearby "spring in Jezreel".

That place's name has a very interesting meaning.

"Jezreel" means "God sows".

That is a very fitting name considering that God in His providence had brought all this into being in

order to bring about the end of Saul's reign which He had said He would do many years before any of this happens.

Verse 2 goes on to tell us about David's situation.

He and his men are marching with the Philistines in the back of the army.

He ends up there it says because that was the place Achish was, the king who David was supposed to be serving.

It is very interesting that he ends up at the end of the line like he does.

If he was to fight for the Philistines it would be a defensive position, but if he were to fight for the Israelites then it would be the perfect place to launch a surprise attack from.

David's presence is noticed by the other Philistine rulers (**Verse 3**).

There must have been something about David and his men that made them recognizable.

I suspect they were following Mosaic Law at least to some degree which would make their haircuts and clothing easy to spot because God wanted His people to be distinct from the other nations.

The tone of their question to Achish is basically, "What in the world are those guys doing here?"

A good question considering they are on their way to fight these exact people.

Why are enemy soldiers marching in our army?

Achish tries to make the case for David and his men.

He believes David has changed sides on account of his problems with King Saul.

He believes that David is now his servant which means he will fight for the Philistines.

There is no getting out of it. With every step towards the battle lines David is one step closer to having to make a choice.

When the fighting starts he will either fight for the enemies of God's people or fight for the Israelites.

[It is sort of like being in a room that has two doors and all the oxygen is being sucked out. In the room there is a monitor on the wall that is telling you how much time is left before all the air is gone. No matter what is in the room to help you decide between the two doors, one thing is for sure, you have to eventually make a choice. You need to pick a door and walk through it if you want to live.]

That same thing has to happen when you try to have two masters.

Nowhere is that more clear than in our relationship with the LORD.

Far too often believers try to belong to God and the world at the same time.

We say we love God, we say we want to live life according to His word, but we also want to keep our unbelieving friends happy.

We say we want to honour the LORD, but we also want to keep our job.

We say we want to follow Jesus, but don't want anything to do with hardship, suffering, or sacrifice.

Now, if we are clear in our hearts Who our Master is, then it is quite possible to have unbelieving friends, in fact it is a good this to do so.

If you want to know how you are doing there just ask yourself, "Am I seeking to draw my friends towards Jesus or are they drawing me away?"

If Jesus is our Master then we will seek to be the best employee in every job we do, but we should never be willing to do things that God says are wrong for the sake of keeping a paycheck.

God in His mercy may keep us from hardship but if He calls us to walk through it, then are we willing?

[The point is that life is filled with countless choices both big and small. Choices between what is right and what is wrong and it is impossible to play both sides of the fence when it comes to God. We are either going to have Him as our Master, or someone else. Every choice we make is going to be a reflection of who we wish to serve. Here is a second lesson from our text...]

Point #2 – Someone with divided loyalty is difficult to trust. (Verses 4-5)

When a person shows a willingness to turn their back on something or someone they have claimed to be devoted to it tends to cast a shadow of suspicion over their future commitments.

Though Achish has been happy with David and tries to vouch for him with the other Philistine rulers, they aren't buying it. (Verses 4-5)

It is fairly certain that some of these guys had personally witnessed David in action.

There is a good chance they were there when David took down Goliath.

The song they reference here about David "slaying his tens of thousands" was first sung, according to chapter 18, when they were returning from that very battle where the giant had fallen before the young shepherd who had a sling and a stone.

When he had entered Saul's service and the king had become jealous of David, Saul sent him on mission after mission hoping he would be killed by the Philistines.

Doesn't happen, instead David wins victory after victory at the expense of these Philistines.

Saul's bride price for his daughter Michal to become David's wife also resulted in the death of Philistines.

That is why these guys are ticked off at Achish.

They are thinking this guy is responsible for the deaths of many Philistines, there is no way he is going to be on our side when the fighting starts, he is likely to turn on us to win back the favour of Israel's king.

While I don't think David would have been motivated by getting back into Saul's good graces, I definitely think these guys are one hundred percent right in what they are saying.

I think we see a hint of this in chapter 28:2 and also in chapter 27 where David deceives Achish about what he has been doing in order to make himself appear loyal and helpful to the Philistine King.

While these men are not good men they have enough common sense to size up this situation and be unwilling to trust a man who has been a servant to the king of Israel and is now passing himself off as a servant to Achish.

[Have you ever heard of a guy named Edward Snowden? He used to work for the United States government as a computer consultant. Several years ago he decided to share a whole bunch of classified information with journalists. He fled to Russia and as far as I know he still lives there. I'm guessing the Russians really enjoyed Snowden making the Americans look bad, but I highly doubt they are giving him access to their closely guarded secrets. Why? Because if you are willing to give up the secrets of your own country what could keep you from doing the same thing to another country? The answer is nothing.]

That is how it is having a divided heart, it makes you an untrustworthy person.

This can work itself out in our lives in several different ways.

If you lie to one friend to make another friend happy what is to stop who from turning the tables in the future and lying to the friend you wanted to make happy?

Why should they trust you?

If you are willing to steal for someone, why would you be unwilling to steal from them?

If you are willing to break a commitment because someone makes you a better offer, what is to keep you from doing that again if another offer comes along?

Nothing.

[That is the case here with David. It is true he fled from Saul for good reason. Saul tried to kill him on multiple occasions. It is true that for a little over a year he has managed to win the approval of Achish, but that does not mean he is truly on the side of the Philistines and so it is understandable that the other rulers are a little upset at what might happen. It is understandable

that they don't really trust him. That brings us to a third lesson from this text. This is one that can sometimes be hard to take, but it is always for our good. Here is the lesson...]

Point #3 – God always rescues His people from serving two masters. (Verses 6-11)

Because the LORD is Who He is—Namely the highest and best Being that exists Who alone is worthy of our devotion—He will always at some point remove competing loyalties from the hearts of those who belong to Him.

Having been rebuked by the other Philistine kings and unable to convince them to let David come along, Achish goes to speak with him in verse 6-7.

Achish believes David has been faithful and loyal and would be a help on the battlefield against the people he used to serve.

The question is, does David feel that way?

Matthew Henry believed that David was honour bound to serve the Philistine on account of the protection he had provided by giving the outlaw Hebrews a place to stay.

I'm not convinced David actually felt that way, but that is the case he tries to make with Achish (**Verse 8**).

On the surface this seems like a strange question to ask, because Achish had just said that David had done nothing wrong and he would be happy to have him along to fight.

It is almost as if David is saying, "Are you really sure I can't come?"

The way David talks here it makes it sound like he really wants to go to the battle, but I find it hard to imagine that he is going to raise his sword against his own people.

I think it is very interesting the way he asks his question at the end of verse 8.

He doesn't say to Achish, "Why can't I go and fight against **your** enemies?"

He asks, "Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"

Who is his lord? Who is his king? Achish assumes he is referring to him, but he could just as easily have been referring to Saul.

That is what he calls Saul the last time he spoke to him after sparing his life back in chapter 26.

It may go even deeper than that, David may have God in mind with his statement.

Do you remember why David spared Saul's life even though he did not deserve it? Because David calls him the Lord's anointed.

It was his devotion to God that prompted him to show mercy to Israel's king.

If he were to go into battle and fight against the Israelites it would mean much more than going against Saul, he would be going against his commitment to the Lord.

While I am convinced he would never do that, if he goes to this battle he would become a traitor to someone.

Either he would be a traitor to Israel or to Achish who had shown him kindness over the past year.

As it turns out he doesn't have to betray anyone. (**Verses 9-11**).

By looking for safety in the land of the Philistines David had gotten himself into a bit of a dicey situation.

He had tried to pass himself off as a servant to Achish while still belonging to the people of Israel in his heart.

It was an unstainable situation which eventually had to lead to something like this.

What would have happened had David and his men actually gone into battle?

I think they would have betrayed the Philistines, but what would the consequences have been?

We don't know because it didn't happen that way. What we can say is that the LORD graciously worked this out for David to get him out of the situation he had put himself in by trying to pass himself off as a servant to an enemy of God's people.

[Have you ever promised to be in two places at once? I've made that mistake a time or two. I agree to go somewhere or do something for someone forgetting that I've already said I would be somewhere for someone else. Have you ever had that happen? I still haven't figured out how to be in two places at once so when that happens I have to make a choice and I always feel bad about it. Sometimes though something will happen that has nothing to do with me where one of the people will call and reschedule and I get off the hook and don't have to choose who I will cancel on.]

That's what the LORD does here for David, he rescues him from his situation of divided loyalty.

I believe God does this same thing for everyone that belongs to Him.

Think for a moment about what the LORD does to bring people to Himself.

God the Father sends God the Son into the world to suffer and die so that our mistakes can be made right and we can belong to Him by faith.

I can hardly begin to appreciate the magnitude of love the LORD shows for us by doing that.

Now, if the Father is willing to send the Son whom He loves to do that, how could He ever be willing to be satisfied with letting us be devoted to someone or something else?

He can't! He will never allow Jesus' death to be in vain.

Therefore, He sends the Holy Spirit to His people to give us a heart to understand that we can only have One Master and His Name is Jesus.

The process through which He accomplishes that is not always easy but it is always for our highest good.

It is for our good because no one can serve two masters.

You can pretend. You can offer lip service to God, you can lie to others, and even lie to yourself, but sooner or later who your master is will become clear.

So let's ask ourselves this morning, "Who is in charge of my life? Who is my master?"

Listen, there is no one better than Jesus.