

1 Samuel 22 Sermon

v6 Saul heard that David and those who were with him had been located. Saul was sitting at Gibeah, under the tamarisk tree on the height, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. 7 Saul said to his servants who stood around him, 'Hear now, you Benjaminites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? 8 Is that why all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a league with the son of Jesse, none of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as he is doing today.' 9 **Doeg** the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's servants, answered, 'I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to **Ahimelech** son of Ahitub; 10 he inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.'

11 The king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of **Ahitub** and for all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob; and all of them came to the king. 12 Saul said, 'Listen now, son of Ahitub.' He answered, 'Here I am, my lord.' 13 Saul said to him, 'Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, by giving him bread and a sword, and by inquiring of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as he is doing today?'

14 Then Ahimelech answered the king, 'Who among all your servants is so faithful as David? He is the king's son-in-law, and is quick[b] to do your bidding, and is honoured in your house. 15 Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? By no means! Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or to any member of my father's house; for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little.' 16 The king said, 'You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house.' 17 The king said to the guard who stood around him, 'Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David; they knew that he fled, and did not disclose it to me.' But the servants of the king would not raise their hand to attack the priests of the Lord. 18 Then the king said to Doeg, 'You, Doeg, turn and attack the priests.' Doeg the Edomite turned and attacked the priests; on that day he killed eighty-five who wore the linen ephod. 19 Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; men and women, children and infants, oxen, donkeys, and sheep, he put to the sword. 20 But one of the sons of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. 21 Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. 22 David said to Abiathar, 'I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I am responsible[c] for the lives of all your father's house. 23 Stay with me, and do not be afraid; for the one who seeks my life seeks your life; you will be safe with me.'

Reading 1 Samuel 22v6-23

Introduction. This is a painfully brutal story, but perhaps it is fitting on Remembrance Sunday. What to do with this? The Bible never sugarcoats the human condition. We are hugely privileged to live in relative peacetime. But never forget the wars that were fought, and still go on. Our peace is hard earned. And what we are confronted with is the reality of the human heart, and the dangers of power.

Context

The is the nadir. But lets look closely at the text and see if there are glimpses of light.

David in the wilderness gathers people around him. Look at the kind of people who go out? v2 *Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them.*"

The rich and the powerful remain loyal to Saul, because they have too much to lose. Echo of Jesus - who were those who followed him? Sinner and Tax collectors, prostitutes and the poor. The shepherd king goes into the wilderness and gathers around himself those on the margins, there is another kingdom at work here, a kingdom of God.

Read the signs.

v6-8 A doubling picture of an obsessed, vengeful ruler. Sitting under a tree (does he not have anything else to do?) With his spear in his hand. He only wants one thing. v8 *He is self pitying, and sees conspiracy against him everywhere. "Is that why all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a league with the son of Jesse, none of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as he is doing today."*

Remember he was the populist king, the one Israel set their heart on. Look at what happens to corrupt populist leaders. Their need for popularity is ultimately their downfall. The the checks and balances are their to protect the people but also to protect the leader from themselves. Be very careful when leaders deal in hatred, have no self awareness and see conspiracies everywhere.

But here is the darkness in the human heart. this is what it looks like when ambition and pride and hatred have their full unhindered effect. Always be careful of that tabloid tendency to describe a criminal as evil. The Bible has much more of a sense of "there but for the grace of God go I". And when you are angry, or want revenge remember where that road leads.

Those who have helped David are betrayed.

This character v9 Doeg the Edomite betrays the temple priests who helped Jesus. *This Doeg says v9 "Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."* Ahimelech the priest had provided the alter bread for David and his followers. It is no accident that Jesus quotes this story.

And in a darkness here is our first glimpse of light.

It is an example of utterly courageous truth spoken to power. *14 Then Ahimelech answered the king, 'Who among all your servants is so faithful as David? He is the king's son-in-law, and is quick[b] to do your bidding, and is honoured in your house. 15 Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? By no means!*

They say "*The first casualty of war is truth*"

It is the duty of the people of God to speak truth to power even though his knees shake. And he witnesses to the faithfulness and goodness of God chosen king.

v16 Saul response is ruthless and out of all proportion. "*You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house.*" Saul is willing to murder innocents is nothing short of an atrocity and a warcrime.

Then another glimmer of light.

v17 "*The king said to the guard who stood around him, 'Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David; they knew that he fled, and did not disclose it to me.'* But the servants of the king would not raise their hand to attack the priests of the Lord."

How significant is that. These soldiers, servants of the King would not raise their swords to do this injustice.

There are these moments when evil becomes apparent. No longer difference of political opinion. It is simple right and wrong. This was MLKjr genius. His insistence of peaceful resistance allowed evil to show its face.

And the kings own guard can no see the evil at work here.

And so Saul has to turn to a Godless outsider to do his evil work.

v18 Doeg the Edomite, the kings chief of staff.

v19 Brutal indiscriminate vengeful slaughter. Not just the priests, but the city that they lived in. It is genocide.

So What do we do with all that. Can we justify or explain it? Not beyond that recognition that this an accurate depiction of what human beings are capable of.

But these glimpses of light point us to a bigger truth.

Because ultimately this story points us to another kingdom and another king

v20 *One of the sons of Ahimelech escapes and flees to David in the wilderness.*

And Davids response is all you would hope.

v23 David takes responsibility, acts compassionately and offers sanctuary.

No excuses, no blaming. I am responsible, (though he surely can't be accountable for the madness of Saul) nevertheless he says I will protect you.

And in these actions David foreshadows another Shepherd King who called the least of people to himself in the wilderness, responded to hatred and violence with love, and instead of explaining evil, stands in front of it, taking its full force. And in doing so, offers sanctuary to all those who will put their trust in him.

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadows of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me, your rod and staff comfort me.

And that is what the bible offers us. The gospel is not a promise of a privileged or easy life, it is refuge from the storm, rescue from the ravages of sin and even death.

So when you are confronted with the harsh realities of this world,

Like the priest, speak the truth, even if your knees shake.

And bear witness to another kingdom and another king.

Like the Soldiers - refuse to cooperate with corrupt power

Like the son of the priest, flee to the shepherd king who offers sanctuary not just in life but even in death.

Conclusion

The violence of the OT can be utterly shocking. It is tempted to turn away, but it is holding a mirror to the realities of the human heart.

Never be naive about the human condition. Out liberty is hard won.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.” Desmond Tutu

Speak truth to power,

Refuse to co-operate with corrupt power.

Confess the true king.

Seek refuge in the shepherd of your souls.

He take responsibility, He has faced the full wrath of the unjust and the consequences of evil

He offers sanctuary.

Because nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.