

April 2

1 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, Psalm 34, 56, 142

Good morning, good afternoon or good evening...depending on when you are tuning in. This is Lisa Ashton here again with your April 2nd accelerator. Your reading today covered excerpts from 1 Samuel 21 and 22, 1 Chron 12 and Psalm 34, 56 and 142.

Once again, as we read today, we find David living by his wits and practicing deception both in the form of an outright lie to Ahimelech, and feigning madness at the court of the Philistine King Achish at Gath. Now I want for us to notice something here. King David, unlike Saul, was a man who really wanted to please God. He really did have a heart for righteousness. Unlike Saul, the glory of God was at the top of his priority list. Did you read Psalm 34, written probably when he was going through the incidents recorded in chapter 21 of 1 Samuel? "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together." That's pretty heady stuff for a war hero who has had to flee from his own country and family because he's on the king's hit list for being more widely known and more greatly loved than the king himself. Those lines, written after David was driven away from the King of Gath, show us where his heart and soul is. They also show us that he probably learned something from his experience, because here's what I want you to notice about this whole thing ... David made some really bad decisions when he had to flee from Saul -- really bad -- and he did some things that he clearly should not have done. But he still was a man who truly loved God and wanted to bring him glory. Lesson? Christians -- even good Christians -- aren't perfect, and they aren't infallible, and they are liable to make some absolutely colossal mistakes, and even to sin spectacularly, and all the while they are really wanting and trying to honor God and serve Him. That's a pretty sobering thought, isn't it? Just because the desire of your heart is to please God, it doesn't mean that you won't make horrendous mistakes; it doesn't even mean that you won't fall into colossal sin. Both King Saul and David made mistakes but the difference between the two men was their basic attitude toward God. David's deep desire was to honor God and love him, whereas in the heart of Saul, the honor and love was reserved for himself. Saul lost his kingdom -- David still experienced the blessing and protection of the Lord. The other thing to remember is that David always repented of his sins. That wasn't a habit King Saul ever learned. The difference between them was not that one king was a sinner and the other wasn't. The difference is that one sinner really hungered after God and the other didn't.

How about in your own life? Do you see yourself as one who, despite your sin, hungers after God? Do you, like David, want to honor and love God above yourself? Mistakes will happen. The question is, will they drive us closer to your need for God or further away?

Well we have mentioned that David made mistakes. Let's look at a few of these bad decisions a little more closely and see what we can learn from them.

Bad decision #1. From yesterday's reading we saw that David was running for his very life from Saul. David embraces his best friend and then he starts to run. He has no provisions and apparently he has fled without ever having time to arm himself. He can't go home to get provisions and weapons, because Saul's men are watching the house to take him. If he shows up -- and knowing that on at least one occasion Saul even tried to kill Jonathan for protecting him -- David is unwilling to endanger his wife Michal. Not knowing where else to turn, David goes to Ahimelech the priest. We can't get into David's head to know why he lied to the priest at Nob. It may be that, sensing the priest's willingness to help the anointed of God no matter what, David thought that if the priest could somehow plead real ignorance of David's intentions, Ahimelech might be sheltered from Saul's wrath. Whatever the plan, David's actions placed Ahimelech and his family in the greatest of peril. His remark on hearing that Saul had massacred these servants of God indicates a clear understanding from the outset of the danger into which they had been placed by his actions. David's lie indicated a lack of trust in God. He should have inquired of God before he went there.

It is interesting to notice that Jesus referred to this incident in the New Testament, not to say anything positive or negative about David, but to make the point that the ceremonial law was not to be viewed in a legalistic way, and that it is always lawful to do good to save life. The bread of the presence that was given to David, you will remember, was the bread that was set out in the Tabernacle before the Lord. (Just in case you noticed that in the Gospel of Mark 2:23 Jesus says this incident occurred in the days of Abiathar the high priest and are wondering about that, Ahimelech was Abiathar's father. Chapter 22 tells us that Abiathar escaped the massacre and joined David, subsequently becoming high priest under the reign of David. Since Jesus only says this happened in the days (during the life) of Abiathar, there is no contradiction!)

David's **second bad decision**, of course, was to go to Achish, the King of the Philistines. I'm sure you noticed (as David did with horror) that the Philistines already knew that he had been anointed by Samuel to be the next King of Israel. By pretending to be a crazy man, another deception drawn from David's bag of wily tricks, he managed to get himself driven off, taking up refuge in the wilderness cave of Adullam, where, like the legendary Robin Hood of English lore, "All those who were in distress or debt or discontented gathered around him."

Now I want you to turn our attention back to Psalm 34 that I began with today. It was written after the slaughter of the priests at Nob and after David is driven away by the Philistine king, sought by King Saul who plans to kill him.

In the early days of his sojourn in the cave of Adullam, David writes, "I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who

look at Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and He delivers them..." Now that you know the background of this Psalm, you can understand it ten times, a hundred times better. David wrote it when those men were coming to join him -- "Let the afflicted hear and rejoice. (Come) glorify the Lord with me..." Every line reflects his own recent experience. "I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears" (like when I was at Gath). Just in case you read the title for the Psalm as well as the Psalm itself, you may have noticed that the title (which is not part of the original inspired text of Scripture, but which does reflect a very early understanding of the setting and use of the Psalm) – the title says the king's name was Abimelech. Either that is a mistake on the part of a copyist, that had been preserved out of reverence for the text, even the superscriptions, even though the early scribes knew the king's name was Achish, or Abimelech was a traditional dynastic name for the Philistine kings.

In any case, when I read the Psalms this way, reflecting on the actual situation into which they were written, they really come alive for me. If you want to go a little deeper today I encourage you to move through Psalm 56, and Psalm 142 line by line and see if you can imagine what David might exactly be referring to in each verse. I believe this will be a very profitable exercise for you.

This is Lisa Ashton signing off for today and may the precious word of God dwell in you richly as you meditate upon it.