

# Where do you go when there's nowhere else to go?

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[ 0 : 00 ] 1 Samuel chapter 30, and I'm going to read from the beginning to verse 20. 1 Samuel chapter 30.

Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negev and against Ziklag.

2 Samuel chapter 30.

And the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

3 Samuel chapter 30. And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, bring me the ephod.

[ 1 : 40 ] 4 Samuel chapter 30. So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the Lord, 5 Samuel chapter 30. Shall I pursue after this band?

6 Samuel chapter 30. Shall I overtake them? 7 Samuel chapter 30. And he answered him, Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue. So David set out.

7 Samuel chapter 30. And the 600 men who were with him and they came to the brook Besor, where those who were left stayed behind. But David pursued he and 400 men.

200 stayed behind who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor. They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate.

They gave him water to drink. And they gave him a piece of cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.

[ 2 : 42 ] And David said to him, To whom do you belong and where are you from? He said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite. My master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. We had made a raid against the Negev of the Kerethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negev of Caleb.

And we burned Ziklag with fire. And David said to him, Will you take me down to this band? And he said, Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master.

And I will take you down to this band. When he had taken them down, And behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah.

And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day. And not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who mounted camels and fled. David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives.

Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all.

[ 4 : 00 ] David also captured all the flocks and herds. And the people drove the livestock before him and said, This is David's spoil.

Amen. This is God's word. We've heard it together, and we ask that God will implant it in our hearts. Let's join together in prayer. Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will give us focus and concentration now as we come to think about your word that we've just read.

We pray that it will mean everything to us. We pray that we will make great use of the Bible from day to day, that we will be encouraged to read its history and its profundity.

We pray that we will read it prayerfully and in worship, that we will listen to your voice as we are instructed and as we are edified through it.

We pray, Lord, for where we have neglected your word. We pray for forgiveness and ask that this Lord's Day may be an opportunity to be restored to a place of regular reading of your word.

[ 5 : 10 ] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I've often heard Christians, when discussing events, whether international events, whether natural disasters, or even local happenings in their lives, they equate God with these events.

And they ask a question like, for example, what do you think God is saying in all of this? Sometimes they even go further and say, do you think God is judging us in this?

I mean, the last two years have been a classic example, where something unexpected happened to all of us. We had to face and respond to an international pandemic, a worldwide pandemic.

And I've often heard Christians, particularly at the beginning of it, saying, asking that kind of question, is God somehow judging the world in all of this?

Or what is God saying in all of this? Now, we have to be really careful when you're asking that question. Because sometimes, the very question itself means that your mind has been made up.

[ 6 : 31 ] It's a kind of rhetorical question. When you ask it, you're actually saying, I actually think God is judging us in this. And once you go down that road, you're then kind of coming to a conclusion that actually you have no right to come to.

We have to be really careful. The reformers were quite bad at this, especially the Scottish guys, people like John Knox and people like that. One of the weaknesses in their minds, and remember that they were men and women just like ourselves, even although they stood up for great things, nonetheless, they had their weaknesses.

People like Knox saw God's judgment in everything. So if the harvest was bad, it was God's judging us. If it was a particularly bad gale or a storm, it was God judging us, and so on and so forth.

We have to be really careful in doing something like that, in coming to conclusions that we actually have no right to come to.

If David had thought like this, I wonder what his conclusion would have been when he came back to Ziklag, which is the town he stayed in with all his men and their wives and families and animals.

[ 7 : 50 ] I wonder what conclusion he would have come to if he had asked the question, is God judging me in this? I think right now we need to go back a bit.

We need to rewind and recap the story. Now remember, this is not King David. This is David as a young man, and he has already been anointed by Samuel to be king, but he hasn't been crowned yet.

Meanwhile, there has been a major rift between him and Saul, who was the existing king of Egypt. Saul was intensely jealous of David, so jealous that he made his mind up to kill David, come what may.

And whatever that took, he decided that David had to go. Now, it's one thing to be pursued by Saul and his men for a day or a week or even a month.

It's another thing altogether to be pursued by Saul month after month after month. That's the way it was for David. He had gathered a group of followers, men and their wives and families who supported him, and they too were on the run because they were being pursued by Saul.

[ 9 : 18 ] And it appears, if you go back to, I think, chapter 27, it appears that it all got too much for David. And he made what I think was a rash and a foolish decision.

He decided, I can't take any more of this. I'm living in fear of my life. I need to make a decision that will protect me and my wives and the families of my men and so on and so forth.

So he decided that the strategic move was to go into enemy territory. Now, you remember who the enemies of the Israelites were?

The Israelites. Sorry, the Philistines. The Philistines were the arch enemies of Israel. And David's decision was, I'm better off with the Philistines because they may afford me some security.

So off he went, and he talked to a man called Achish, who was one of the regional leaders of the Philistines. And Achish welcomed David and his men and their wives and families and animals and everything.

[ 10 : 38 ] And he went even further. He said, I'll tell you what, I'll give you a whole city that you can take over. That can be your city. It was called Ziklag. It was in Philistine territory.

And David and his men and all that belonged to them settled in Ziklag. All right? Now, in order to prove himself worthy of Achish, David had to fight for Achish.

And so he did that in a very subtle way. Him and his men, they would go out regularly, and they would go far away to mutual enemies, and they would destroy these enemies. And then he would come back, and he would tell Achish all the exploits that he had been on. All right? So Achish thought, this is great. I have a great relationship with David and his men. They've settled down well in my territory, and they are even fighting our enemies for us. This has been a good diplomatic agreement. Except that was for the fact that the Philistines were enemies of Israel, and the time inevitably came where the Philistines gathered forces in order to make war on Israel.

[ 12 : 09 ] And David, being now part of the Philistine forces, was included in this great Philistine army that was just about to create this almighty war against Israel.

Now what's he going to do? He's on the wrong side, and he's going to end up fighting his own flesh and blood, the very people that God has promised that he would one day be king over.

You get it? You see the problem. You see the dilemma. What is he going to do? He's in a situation which he can't do anything about. Because he signed this deal with Achish, and he now is obliged to fight on their side.

Thankfully, at this moment of crisis, God providentially stepped in. And he did so in the most dramatic way.

Because remember, Achish was only the regional commander of one part of the Philistine forces. There were other Philistine kings, and they're all gathered together preparing for this war.

[ 13 : 34 ] And they see David and his men. And they go to Achish, and they say, Excuse me, Achish, who are these guys over there?

And Achish says, Well, that's David and his men. And the other leaders say, Hold on a minute. Where do they come from? And Achish said, Well, actually, they come from Israel.

And the other guys are saying, Hold on a minute. They come from Israel. We're going to fight against Israel. How does that work? And Achish says, Well, they've been on my side for months and months now.

I've given them the town of Ziklag, and they've been faithful to me. I don't see any problem. And the other rulers are saying, You don't see any problem. We are going to fight the Israelites.

They are Israelites. How do you know that in the middle of the battle, they're not going to turn around and fight against us? And Achish is like, Well, I actually don't know that. And so Achish has to say to David, I need you to not go into this war with me.

[ 14 : 42 ] In fact, just go back to Ziklag and just, well, spend some time over there and then we'll talk about it later on. That's the background. So David mercifully has been spared from this critical position.

So he goes back to Achish with all his men. But meanwhile, Achish has been attacked by another enemy called the Amalekites. They've come in and they have burned the place to the ground. Not only so, they have kidnapped the wives, children, sons, daughters, animals, all that was precious to David and his men. They have taken it all away.

And by the time David comes back, everything's burned and they don't know what's happened to the wives and the families. They don't know what's happened. And so you can understand that their world has collapsed.

Their world has fallen apart. And you can also kind of understand why David and the men who followed David were thinking about stoning him.

[ 15 : 55 ] Because after all, this all happened on his watch. And it all happened as a result of that initial decision that he had made to go over to the side of the Philistines.

Now that's the background to the story. And it's the reason why I'm asking the question, if David had asked the question, is God judging me by destroying my life, basically, taking everything that was precious to me from me, I wonder what conclusion he would have come to.

Now, at this point, I'm going to do three things. I'm going to talk about three options. One is the option that I have right now in trying to explain this passage.

There's a right option and a wrong option. Okay? Secondly, David. For David, there was a right option and a wrong option.

And then for us, as we reflect on this passage, at the end, I hope there will be a right option as opposed to a wrong option. All right?

[17:16] So there are three options. Let me explain that by talking about what we're going to do, how we're going to... For me, there is a right way of explaining this passage and a wrong way.

Let me talk about the wrong way first of all. The wrong way is to say, yeah, David made a massive mistake and the best lesson we can take out of a passage like this is to make sure that we learn from his mistake.

This is a warning to all of us not to make a foolish and a prayerless decision. And so the best thing we could do is to go away and to make a resolution to God that having been warned by David that we're not going to do anything foolish like this and we're going to go away and we're going to be careful in the coming weeks and months that lie ahead.

Now, I'm not saying there are no warnings in this passage. Of course, there are warnings everywhere in the Bible.

You'll notice that the Bible is full of men and women, people who belong to God and yet who are defective, they're sinful, and the Bible is an honest account of how they fall and how they make wrong decisions sometimes.

[18:34] And all of these are a warning to us. I have no doubt about that. But if this is all that we're going to take from this chapter, then that's the wrong way of trying to understand it.

Because with the best will in the world, we cannot get our own lives right with God. We don't have the strength or the inclination for it.

We are sinners. And if you and I examine our hearts today, you will discover that you are just as defective as anyone you'll find in the Bible. And that's why to moralize about a passage like this is not the right, it's not the message of the Bible.

What we're going to do is we're going to discover what David actually did. Which takes me on to the second of the two options. For David, there was a wrong way and a right way.

Now, the wrong way would have been, like I say, to conclude that God had finally written him off and wanted nothing more to do with him.

[19:45] He had nothing else left. And all the appearances were that God was finished with him. He was no longer going to be king of Israel because he had made such a foolish error.

He could have concluded that. There was a certain logic in that conclusion. But amazingly, and this is what I want us to focus on most of all about this passage, amazingly, astonishingly, he does the very opposite.

You would expect him to despair. But he does the very opposite. Verse 6 tells us, David took refuge in the Lord his God.

And he does so immediately. He doesn't wait until he's cleaned himself up, until he's gathered his thoughts, until he's made himself more acceptable to God.

Have you ever done that, by the way? Have you ever done that? You're conscious of wrongdoing in your life and you think to yourself, I can't pray now. I can't pray immediately.

[20:59] I'm too conscious of the fact that I lost my temper or I did something that I shouldn't do. I can't pray right away. I'm going to have to wait a while. You ever done that?

I think we've all done that at some points in our lives. We've all been tempted to anyway. We think that somehow by sort of just separating ourselves in a way so that we can sort ourselves out, that is the worst thing that we can possibly do.

It's the last thing you want to do. And it's not what David does. David immediately takes refuge in the Lord his God.

Which leaves us with this question. What right did he have to take refuge in the Lord his God?

To approach, because that's what he does. He makes an approach to God. What right did he have? He must have been filthy. He had been away for days and days on end.

[22:02] There were tears. There was dust. There was his men. There were his men were thinking of stoning him. He was in a bad place. He was in a really dark place. And yet, what right does he have for a person who is as filthy as he was to take refuge in a holy God?

Well, the next few verses give us a clue. The next few verses must not be written off as some kind of Old Testament procedure that we have nothing more to do with and that we can't understand and so on.

I hope you don't read the Old Testament like that, by the way. The Old Testament is full of rich instruction, including a chapter like this. What was the next thing he says?

He took refuge, he strengthened himself in the Lord his God. Then, immediately, verse 7, he says this to Abiathar the priest, Bring me the ephod.

Bring me the ephod. Now, I don't know about you, but sometimes we're tempted when we come to a passage like this, we think, well, I don't understand it, so I'm just going to rush on to the next bit I can understand.

[ 23 : 28 ] Well, that's a big mistake because you're missing out on something really important. Let's stop for a moment and ask, what was the ephod? Right? We're going to talk about clothing.

The ephod was an item of clothing. Now, in the 21st century in the Western world, when we talk about clothing, we choose our clothing according to our culture, our customs, the people around us, what the fashions that are set for us, what we like, our color scheme, and so on and so forth. And there are millions of different options and we can exercise these options the way we want. That's the way it works in the West, isn't it? Isn't it? Well, remember, of course, it was one set of clothing for these guys.

There wasn't the same kind of choice that we have. But, the other thing we have to remember in the Bible is that in some respects, clothing was symbolic, especially when it was worn by the religious leaders of the day, the priests.

That's what we're talking about here. we're talking about an item of clothing that was worn by one single individual, the high priest. Right?

[ 24 : 49 ] And nobody was allowed to wear this. You couldn't make an ephod up. You couldn't just wear your own ephod. That wasn't allowed. Only the high priest was allowed to wear this particular item of clothing.

Let me try and describe it for you. This is why maybe it would be quite nice to have pictures of it, but these are only what we think. It was like a sleeveless vest, if I can describe it that way.

It was like a sleeveless vest. And it was made from choice expensive materials, including gold and purple and blue and scarlet cloth and finely woven linen.

And it was fastened to the priest's shoulders by clasps. And on these clasps were six onyx stones on one shoulder and six onyx stones on another shoulder.

You have to close your eyes and imagine this. And on these onyx stones there were engraved the twelve, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

[ 25 : 55 ] Now, that gives a clue as to what the function of the priest was. Remember, we have to get away from any modern notions of what priests are and kind of try and concentrate on what the Old Testament tells us.

The priest was simply a go-between between Israel and God. He was the man who represented God to Israel and represented Israel to God. He was the mediator.

So if Israel needed to hear God's voice, it came through the priest. If they wanted to approach God, which they did regularly, they had to do it through the priest. And his specific function was to offer sacrifice.

And that's what this uniform meant. He kind of, and the idea of him bearing on his shoulders the names of the tribes of Israel, that was a way of Israel being reminded that Israel was close in God's mind to him.

They were in special relationship with him. Now, there was also a kind of girdle circling your waist, holding the ephod close to the body. And over the ephod there was what they called the chest piece.

[ 27 : 08 ] And this was a really beautiful item that was fastened to the heart of the high priest. And there were twelve precious stones. Three by four. Twelve precious stones.

Each one representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Now, here's what it told David. It was a message. The ephod was, it was God's declaration that whatever he, whatever happened, his special covenant relationship with Israel was not going to be affected.

He continued continued to love David and love his people with the same steadfast love as he always had. And that's what gave him the confidence to take refuge in God.

It wasn't what he had done and how he had failed. It was that God was steadfast. God is steadfast and continues to be to this day.

[ 28 : 18 ] That's what covenant love means. A love that will not let me go. A love from which nothing can separate me.

And that's what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ who is our great high priest. The one who stands between God and me and the one who represents me to God.

We have a great high priest who has offered the ultimate sacrifice when he died on the cross.

Now there was something else about the ephod and this is really interesting I think. Also there was a fold in it to kind of form a pocket and in this pocket there were two things the Urim and the Thummim they called it.

The Urim and the Thummim. I know we're getting into a world that is very different from the world that we live in but don't you find it fascinating?

[ 29 : 26 ] I really do. The Urim and the Thummim were things they were objects that the priest used to decide or to determine what God's will was when you asked him will I do this or will I do that?

So if you went to God with a prayer he went through the high priest and the high priest would pray and God would answer yes or no through the Urim and the Thummim right?

So that's the other reason why David why it was important to David to have the ephod at that time because he needed to know am I wasting my time going after these guys or not? Am I ever going to find my wives and family again?

He needed to know God's word on that right? So he brought the ephod and he prayed to God will I go after them and God said yes go after them. I know what you're asking.

You're asking well what were the Urim and the Thummim? What did it look like? What are they made of? What shape were they? Tell us more about this. And the answer is I have absolutely no idea and nobody has.

[ 30 : 29 ] It's one of these things that Bible scholars have tried to figure this out for many decades and centuries and it's impossible.

It's impossible to figure out what they were. In other words, God's saying to us, you don't need to know this. You don't need. Wouldn't it be great if there were still the Urim and the Thummim?

Wouldn't it be great that if you ask God, will I do this or will I do that, you were to get a direct answer, yes or no? I mean, I remember as a young Christian I used to wonder, you know, what kind of job will I have?

What does God want me to do? Who does God want me to marry? Where does God want me to live? And of course there's nothing, I think every young Christian goes through that, at least I hope they do, where you're asking God to guide you and all that, but how do you know that he's guiding you?

Wouldn't it be so great if we had the Urim and the Thummim where there was a yes or no answer and you knew exactly doesn't work like that, does it?

[ 31 : 39 ] That's not to say that we don't have the mind. And all that we need to know the mind of God for our lives is here.

This is all we need. God has replaced all of these objects and visible things in the Old Testament with his word, the Bible. And if we live by the Bible, then we don't need to worry about yes or no specific answers to specific questions.

You simply live as we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and God will lead us and guide us in the right direction. That's been my experience and that's not to say I've lived a perfect life.

But it's been my experience that God has been faithful and he has instructed. And I'm sure it's yours as well. And so David discovered once again or rediscovered the faithfulness and the covenant love of God that not only received David back but went on into the next chapter and achieved the victory for David and for his people.

God wasn't finished with David. David's failure did not mean the end of his relationship with God. God is steadfast.

[ 33 : 06 ] His grace goes beyond our failure. It covers our failure. And God was one day going to fulfill this great promise of sending Jesus, his own son into the world to reconcile us to him so that there would be a new covenant in which we could walk in him and be united with him and know that he was ours.

That's the Jesus that we have this morning. That's the God that we have this morning. A God who is more ready to give than we are to ask.

Now lastly, how do we respond to this great truth of the steadfastness and the love of God towards us?

How do we respond to that? There's a wrong way and there's a right way. The wrong way is to say, well, if God is going to forgive me, then I can live any way I want. It really doesn't matter how I live. I'll just do what comes naturally to me and I won't necessarily bother about being obedient to him. Well, that's the wrong way.

[ 34 : 26 ] In fact, to be honest, if that is your response to a chapter like this, then I wonder if you've ever understood the gospel in the first place. right way is what David did to come to God in faith and in repentance and to discover or to rediscover the grace of God and in what he is in himself.

And so I hope that our response today, wherever we are, will be to discover once again how ready God is to be reconciled to us.

If you're not a Christian this morning, you need to be reconciled to him for the first time. That is an invitation that God gives you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we think about being right with God, it's not something that we can do for ourselves. It is something that only God can do for you. It is his gift that he offers you here and now this morning. But as we reflect on what David, and the great message in this passage, and the central character in this passage is not David, it's God.

[ 36 : 05 ] His faithfulness, his character, his loving kindness towards us that is ultimately displayed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, our mediator. Let's take hold of him afresh this morning.

Let's turn away from everything that is unclean and sinful in our lives afresh this morning. And let's walk and live and obey in joy, in the joy that he gives us, the liberty and the freedom that he gives us in the converted life, the new life, the life that lives for him, for his glory.

Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we ask now that even an obscure passage, what appears to be an obscure passage like this from the Old Testament, will speak volumes to us, and that will lead us to Jesus, where the whole of the Old Testament leads us, our mediator and our great high priest, so that in him, so that we may know afresh and that we may continually be aware of what he has done for us and what he continues to do for us as he dwells within us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

So Lord, we pray that you will receive our worship this morning and this evening as we come to you and guide us, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.