

# To Whom Is God Faithful?

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Preacher: J.D. Edwards

[0:00] 1 Samuel chapter 21. It leaves us wondering whether David's story will turn around at all. If you'll remember, and you can look back to the end of chapter 20, David is a man who lost everything.

His head is wanted by the wicked king Saul. He may never see his wife again. He may never enjoy rest at home. We have to imagine, what is he wondering?

What is this attack he's going through? If I were in his shoes, I would probably be wondering whether God will keep his word. Whether God can be trusted at all.

So now let's see if things turn around for David. 1 Samuel chapter 21. As he says his goodbye to Jonathan at the end of 20, we read in 21 that David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest.

And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David and said to him, Why are you alone and no one is with you? So David said to Ahimelech the priest, The king has ordered me on some business and said to me, Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you or what I have commanded you.

[1:14] And I have directed my young men to such and such a place. Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand or whatever can be found.

And the priest answered David and said, There is no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread. If the young men have at least kept themselves from the women. Then David answered the priest and said to him, Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day. So the priest gave him holy bread, for there was no bread there but the showbread, which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.

Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day detained before him. And David, and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul.

And David said to Ahimelech, Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.

[2:38] So the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it.

For there is no other except that one here. And David said, There is none like it, give it to me. Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

And the servants of Achish said to him, Is this not David, the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands? Now David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. So he changed his behavior before them, pretending madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down on his beard.

Then Achish said to his servants, Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? Have I need of madmen that you have brought this fellow to play the madmen in my presence?

[3:49] Shall this fellow come into my house? Look at the next verse in 22. David therefore departed from there and escaped. The word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God. Please be seated. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord stands forever. Let's pray.

Lord, we trust the promise that your word is living, it's active, and it's more sharp in your hand, the hand of the Spirit, than a double-edged sword.

We pray, Lord, that your word, even in this narrative of 1 Samuel 21, will be alive. We pray that this will teach us about your kingdom and about you, Lord, that we can know you in your covenant faithfulness.

To all those, Lord, who are here today, I pray that you'll draw us closer to you and Jesus Christ. To those who are spiritually hungry, Lord. Those who may be in great need now, even need that they're not aware of, Lord.

[5:08] We pray that you'll stir that up, and you'll give us no other option but to run to Jesus Christ. We pray this for your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Have you ever wondered if God will be faithful to you even when God sees you at your ugliest? This is something that will tell us a great deal about God. When God sees you or me at our ugliest, can you go to him still?

I'll be honest with you, in this chapter there's a lot of questions I still have, I think even more after our discussion and our Bible study this morning. Praise God, it's wonderful.

What I want to do as we approach this chapter, though, is to take our cue from the Psalms.

Because in the Psalms we see the great despair of men like David. David is not the Messiah.

[6:09] He's a weak sinner like you and me. But we also see David throwing himself unabandoned, just completely at Christ's feet. The feet of the Lord who's the covenant keeper.

And so that's what I hope to do in this passage is to the extent that David may be foreshadowing a hidden kingdom and the fact that many will miss the kingdom and it'll be the kingdom like a mustard seed in Christ's first coming.

I mostly want to keep our focus on David as a sinner who needs the Lord, the Lord of covenant faithfulness. So the title for today is this, To Whom Is God Faithful?

To Whom Is God Faithful? And what we'll see over and over is God is faithful, but it's not because of David deserving this. And the encouragement for you and me is that God is faithful, not because of who we are, but despite who we are.

When we are at our ugliest, our Lord is faithful still. The first observation is this, God proves his covenant faithfulness to the lonely and brokenhearted.

[7:21] God proves his covenant faithfulness to the lonely and brokenhearted. In the last verse of chapter 20, we're told that David wept and Jonathan wept, but David wept the most.

And if you'll remember those parting words from Jonathan, who's a picture to us of the covenant keeping friend, his words to David are, Shalom.

Go in peace. May the Lord be between us. I found it interesting that the very next action David takes in response to that word is to go find a priest.

He goes to the tabernacle. He goes to the mediator between people like him and the covenant keeping Lord. You see verse 1 in chapter 21. David shows up now before Ahimelech, the priest. It's interesting how the priest is the one meant to minister peace to sinners with God. And for reasons we're not told, instead, Ahimelech seems shocked to encounter David.

[8:26] David, he says he was afraid when he met David. He trembled, literally. And he asked him, why are you alone? No one is with you.

And that's all the information we have to go off of. But David's response seems to fill in a gap of what was Ahimelech potentially trembling about. David says in verse 2 to the priest, the king has ordered me on some business.

He seems to want to right away establish that the king and I are talking. The king and I are on good terms and I'm still working for him. We know that at this time Saul had spies across the entire nation and it's taking sides.

Whose kingdom will prevail here? So David says, the king has ordered me on some business. He seems to be using vague words on purpose.

It leads the priest to believe David is on a secret mission. And he asked him, why are you alone? And David says, I have directed my young men to such and such a place.

[9:30] So we have one of two options. Either David is telling the truth or he's lying. He's deceiving the priest. It seems like David is truly alone because he left with no provisions, no plan.

He doesn't even have food to eat, doesn't have any weapons. We last saw him all alone behind the rock and Jonathan says his goodbye. So I believe that in this entire chapter, David is practicing deception, telling half-truths, speaking in vague terms, and letting people assume something that's not right.

Why are you alone? No one is with you. I wonder how those words hit David's ear.

What's evident, despite the questions we may have, is that God has humbled David. Remember, this is the same David who went out leading the men to battle and coming back victorious, getting promoted and getting more armies, more men, leading them out and coming back victorious.

That's been the story of David so far, never alone, always with an army. Why are you alone? No one is with you. David is desperate, but David is in the presence of God.

[10:54] There's no other place to be when we're desperate. The world will tempt us. Oh, you're desperate. Satan will accuse us. Desperate people do desperate things.

We need to put ourselves in the presence of God. There's no other place to enjoy shalom, to enjoy peace, unless the Lord is among us. This is the place where God's grace is mediated.

When you and I feel our sins abound, we can approach God the same way, put ourselves back in His house, ask God for mercy through Jesus Christ.

John Gill commented that mercy is not shown to any because they are worthy of it, for that would be a contradiction in terms. Mercy is for those of us who don't deserve it.

Romans 5.20 encourages us, where sin abounds, God's grace abounds all the more. God proves His covenant faithfulness to the lonely and brokenhearted.

[12:00] Number two, God proves His covenant faithfulness to those who hunger. God proves His covenant faithfulness to those who hunger. Well, by verse three, David's most urgent need has come to the surface.

In verse three, he says, therefore, what you have on hand, give it to me. Five loaves or whatever you can find. See, one more way now in which God has humbled David.

Remember, it was David who took the bread to his brothers. He's the one bringing provision. Now he's the one without even a loaf of bread to eat. He had been married to the princess, King Saul's daughter.

He feasted at the king's table. And all of that's been stripped away from David now. He's hungry. He's starving. In verse four, the priest answered David and said, there is no common bread on hand.

But next, the priest does something very interesting. And let's shift our focus now from David's perspective to the perspective of the priest for a moment. What he does, we could call a theological triage.

[13:12] If you're a nurse in the emergency department and people are coming in, you've got to decide which need comes first here. And I'm triaging the needs based on importance.

The priest considers in verse four availability. He says, there is holy bread. We do have some bread available. And verse six describes this.

It was removed in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away. This is a ceremonial law God had given his people. Leviticus 24 9 tells us, 12 loaves were baked and placed on a golden table in the tabernacle every Sabbath.

So once a week. When the new loaves were brought in, the old loaves were removed. The day old bread or multiple days old, it was reserved exclusively for Aaron and his sons, the priests.

And it had to be eaten in a holy place. But the principle that the priest is evaluating right now is captured for us in Proverbs 3 27.

[14:16] There is bread available. And the principle in the proverb is, do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to give it. But notice how the priest doesn't go all the way to antinomianism to saying there is no law or the law of God doesn't matter.

He still shows submission to God's law at verse 5. Look at that. He says, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women.

He's not throwing the law, even the ceremonial law, all the way out. Well, David and his men, they were not priests, but Ahimelech seems to be making for them a mercy-based exception.

Since David said they were ritually clean, even though I believe he had no soldiers with them, and the priest then decided that the moral obligation to preserve life, which is upholding the sixth commandment, outweighs the ceremonial restriction.

See, he did a triage. The moral law takes a higher precedent, higher weight than the ceremonial law. In verse 6, we read, so the priest then gave him holy bread.

[15:27] And then we get this wonderful little detail that we won't make much of now, but it's important as this story gets layered for an upcoming chapter in verse 7, that there was a witness to all of this who stood by, observed the whole thing, and he worked for Saul, the chief shepherd.

He would later testify in the defense of this priest. So let me ask your opinion. You got the scene, you got the situation. From Ahimelech's perspective, did the priest do the right thing?

What do you think? Well, it seems that by the time we get to the New Testament, to the New Covenant, all of the Jewish tradition affirmed and celebrated both the priest and David.

Remember, David is the greatest hero of Israel, national Israel. Yet, when the Lord Jesus was teaching them the true meaning of the Ten Commandments and how he is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Pharisees were very quick to condemn Jesus and his disciples.

So in Matthew 12, Jesus quotes Isaiah 6.6 and Jesus says, God desires mercy, not sacrifice. And the word mercy is the same word that Jonathan and David spoke to one another.

[16:41] It's hesed. Our Lord Jesus revealed God is a God of hesed, covenant kindness, covenant faithfulness to those who need it most.

David was a man in need. So, in my opinion, it's okay if you disagree, but the New Covenant affirms the decision of the priest.

Leaving David's actions and behaviors aside, the priest in this case elevated the moral law. The ceremonial law was a pointer to Christ and it would fade away. It would be done with. But the moral law is upheld.

The life of David is precious and God is pleased to show his covenant faithfulness to this man who hungers. John Calvin had a comment on this.

He said, Christ uses this very example to teach us that the law was made for man, not man for the law, showing that his own ministry is one of mercy and life to those in need.

[17:40] You see how twice now the Lord has humbled David. He was popular, now he's alone. He had plenty and now David hungers.

Can this God be trusted who deals with his people this way? You see, it's God's kindness to humble his people, isn't it? It's the Lord who in his covenant faithfulness, he humbles us too.

We've each been through different seasons of being humbled, being made to hunger and it's one of the greatest joys of being in church life is to hear God's faithfulness to each one of us about how he made you hunger more for his word and how he fed you and has proved his covenant faithfulness to you and to me.

Deuteronomy 8, 3 bears witness to that. It's the Lord who humbles you. He made you hunger and he fed you with manna that you did not know nor did your fathers know.

Why? That he might make you to know that man shall not live by bread alone but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Amen?

[18:53] John Cotton commented God's overruling hand in this case used David's need to sanctify his dependence on God. David was reminded that he was sustained not by Saul's table but by God's in his sanctuary.

Amen. That's the end of Cotton's quote. The life-giving bread that fed David and sustained him now. It says it was the holy bread taken from the presence of the Lord.

And literally the language in the original is taken from before the faces. It means before the face, the presence of the Lord. It was not merely food.

This was a gift from God himself. You can see how God's holiness even as it was protected in the ceremonial law ultimately God's holiness is not a barrier but it's the very holiness of God to which

we're united through Christ that is the only source of eternal life for those that God has made to be spiritually hungry.

God proves his covenant faithfulness to those who hunger. Number three, God proves his covenant faithfulness to the empty handed and weak.

[20:11] God proves his covenant faithfulness to the empty handed and weak. Look at verse 8. David said to Ahimelech the priest, is there not here on hand a spear or a sword?

Here's God humbling David one more time. David, the one who first from Israel held Goliath's sword, is now empty handed. David, whose military might was famous not only in his nation but also among the Philistines, he now is weak.

He has nothing with which to fight or defend himself. Defenseless. No way to build a kingdom for himself. Will God keep his covenant?

Will God keep his promises? How will God do it? We see David now at a moment of weakness.

God has stripped him of any source of strength in himself and this too is a blessing.

David says, I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me. Now that's true. He left in haste. He's got nothing. And then he says, because the king's business required haste.

[21:25] Well, if he's referring to Saul as king, then this is bearing false witness. Will God show mercy to this broken, lonely, hungry, weak man?

If David's being deceptive here and trying to be crafty and get things by his own efforts, he doesn't deserve God's mercy. And God is merciful still.

Look at verse 9. The priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah. There it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.

The ephod was that elaborate multicolored garment that the high priest would put on to perform the ceremonial duties. Benjamin Keech commented how, this is interesting, God kept the weapon of the enemy in the place of worship.

It reveals that the power to overcome the giant was God's power all along. God gets the trophy. And now he had laid it up and preserved it for his anointed one in his time of greatest need.

[22:37] In verse 9, the priest says, If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here. Can you picture David, you know, there in the tabernacle from behind the priest's garments comes the sword of Goliath.

They unwrap the cloth. I don't know where in his body he put it, you know, maybe like on his back or on his belt, on his side. I mean, from then on, David is going to get to walk around now with this sword of Goliath.

A constant reminder of God's past deliverance. Whenever you doubt, whenever you fail, God is putting this visible, tangible reminder on you of God's past faithfulness.

Of course, he will be faithful to the end. He will keep his covenant faithfulness to you. David said, there is none like it. Give it to me. Matthew Henry's comment was this, by giving him the sword he once used to cut off the giant's head, God was saying the battle is the Lord's.

It was God's way of saying, of arming those who come to God in their distress. That's the end of Matthew Henry's quote. Why did God do this?

[23:55] Why was God so kind to David? It's because this is who God is. He is the God of covenant faithfulness. Psalm 111.5, God will ever be merciful to his covenant.

Titus 3.5, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us. John Gill, one more time, mercy is for the miserable.

I love that. Mercy is for the miserable, not for the worthy, but it shows, it is shown because God has made a covenant with his chosen and his faithfulness is the security of it.

if you feel empty handed, if you feel weak, God's word, God's spirit through his church are constantly his reminder to you of his power and his past deliverance.

Reading stories like this from 1 Samuel, keeping it always before us, God is merciful for you and me who are weak, empty handed, especially when we're miserable.

[25:10] Number four, God proves his covenant faithfulness to the fearful and desperate. God proves his covenant faithful to the fearful and

desperate.

In verse 10, we read, then David arose and fled that day from before Saul and went to Achish, the king of Gath. Gath?

That's the next city he goes to. You remember Gath. This is one of the five powerful cities of the Philistine nation that have tormented and enslaved the Israelites.

Not only just one of the five, but this is the city that Goliath himself is from. Right after getting the sword of Goliath, probably made by iron workers in the city of Gath, he now goes marching back into that city with this sword.

And why did he do this? Well, as we mentioned, this is still the kingdom of Saul needing to be reclaimed for the Lord. But right now, everywhere that you go within Israel, you will be now viewed as a threat to Saul's kingdom.

[26:22] And God isn't the one sending David to Gath necessarily. Maybe this is David in his flesh thinking there's no other way to survive. But this in God's providence is where David lands.

We read in verse 11 that the servants of Achish, these Philistine soldiers, said to the king, is not this David the king of the land?

And then they quote that song that the women of Israel sing. And this gives us an insight from an outsider's perspective, from another nation, how famous David was, how high his popularity had soared to the point that they think he was the king of Israel already.

His following was swelling. In verse 12, now David took these words to heart, and notice the next words, and was very much afraid of Achish, the king of Gath.

I think this entire context is important because it sets up, even though you've got Goliath's sword, a reminder that God has defeated this entire nation and their greatest champion, and you're going back to their city.

[27:31] It just sets up how much David is humbled again. Even there, with all of this, he's afraid. He's weak. He's like you and me. God humbled David.

David, who was feared by the entire army of the Philistines, they were the ones who saw him cut off Goliath's head. Remember, David carried Goliath's head around with him everywhere he went. And now David is afraid. In verse 13, we're told what he does in his fear. He changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands.

So apparently they laid their hands on him, and they're bringing him before their king. And as he's going in, David is scratching at the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

In ancient Near Eastern culture, the beard for a man was a symbol of dignity and masculinity. So for a man to let saliva, which is associated with a lack of self-control, for that to defile his beard was like the ultimate sign of craziness, total loss of status.

[28:49] David is humbled, once feared, respected, now considered crazy. John Flavel commented, even great saints like David may have ebbs and flows of faith where fear drives them to shift their behavior disgracefully.

And this is true in my life, it's true in yours, and it will happen. We see those who we see as strong in the faith having these moments where their faith is weak and their behavior show it.

In verse 14, then Achish said to his servants, look, you see, this man is insane. Even when David's faith ebbed, he resorted to these unseemly shifts, but God was sanctifying David and had not abandoned him.

He uses David's craftiness here, acting crazy as a means of escape and deliverance. I love the king's comment, have you brought him to me?

Verse 15, have I need of more madmen? I don't know if madmen had just left the presence of the king there, left his court. I don't need more crazy people in here. Why have you brought him here? So David is weak.

[30:09] We see that it was not his acting this way that delivered him or gave him an escape, but it was God who did it. God sovereignly moved the heart of this pagan king, to preserve his anointed, not because David deserves it, but because God will keep his covenant.

God will establish the throne through the line of this man, this weak man, David. Proverbs 21, 1 tells us the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord like the rivers of water, and he turns it wherever he wishes.

2 Corinthians 12, 9 reminds us God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. And so we read in 21, 1, therefore David departed and escaped.

David has been humiliated, ashamed. He was afraid and he was desperate, yet God delivered him in his weakness.

David didn't have to get himself strong, get his act together, and then received God's deliverance. God did it despite David. You may be in a place where you feel backed into a corner.

[31:25] You may have shame or disgrace. It's for people like you and me in those moments. God wants us to depend on him completely.

If he delivers you when you're strong, you can take some of the credit perhaps in your flesh. But if you are utterly desperate, laid low, stripped of everything that you once put some pride into, God alone will get the glory and the credit for the deliverance.

And God will see to it that all things, even in our worst failures, they turn out for our good and for his glory. God proves his covenant faithfulness to the fearful and desperate.

it. Well, we've made it through our passage and I want to give you one final encouragement as we meditate on this. You and I, whom God has redeemed, we cannot fail ourselves out of God's covenant faithfulness.

We cannot fail ourselves out of God's covenant faithfulness. in this chapter, we see David at his lowest to the extent that he was acting out of his flesh.

[32:43] Even there, we just see God's grace shining through and as David gets humbled lower and lower and lower and lower, it's the power, the faithfulness of God that gets elevated higher and higher.

So, brothers and sisters, we need to remember our security, just like David's, it doesn't rest on our performance, but on the perfection of our Savior. Our standing before God is grounded solely on God, the covenant keeper.

Our assurance is found not in our faithfulness, but in God's. The Lord is the refuge for the sinner who has nowhere else to go.

If God is making you to hunger spiritually, it's so that he can feed you. Christ is not for the self-sufficient, but for those who, like David, realize they will perish without God's immediate provision.

Jesus Christ is the bread of life. We read John 6 earlier. Jesus Christ is taken from before the face of God, and he declared in John 6, 35, I am the bread of life.

[34:00] He who comes to me shall never hunger. Jesus Christ gave his own body, his holy body, given to wicked people, commoners like you and me, who are perishing and would starve in the wilderness of this world.

Matthew Henry pointed out how the priest did not hesitate to give the bread for David and his necessity. him. And Jesus Christ does not hesitate to give himself to sinners like you and me.

Our Lord is faithful to lavish his grace upon us who are spiritually desperate. When we're empty-handed beggars, when we know that we are guilty in our sin on our own, and when we feel completely disgraced, most humbled, that's when our Lord Jesus loves to come near to commune with us.

He feeds you, he equips you, and he delivers you. Amen. Because our Lord has bound himself in covenant faithfulness to us as people.

Go to him. Let's pray. Lord, we praise you for those times when you humble us, when you make us hunger, hunger.

[35:26] And we praise you that you don't hesitate to give yourself to us. You love to commune with us. We praise you that you, Lord Jesus, are the great high priest who pulls your people close, who keeps us close to you.

We thank you, Lord, for your great compassion. We thank you, Lord, for your good law. God, we thank you, Lord, that your kingdom is not a kingdom dependent on man, but your kingdom is established in Jesus Christ forever and ever, and that by your grace and your covenant faithfulness alone, we belong to you.

Help us to know more of this assurance, to find more of this comfort in you, and we know that your grace is a redeeming grace from start to finish. We thank you for the good work you have begun in each life here, in each household, and in this church as a whole, and we trust that by your covenant faithfulness, you will see it through to completion.  
We ask this for your glory. Amen.