

1 Samuel 29

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[0 : 00] Am I on, Andrew? There I am.

Yeah, great. I'm going to tighten up this stand so it doesn't fall over mid-sermon. That would be embarrassing. Hey, if you started attending Trinity ten years ago, you were here at the beginning of our 1 Samuel series.

Just kidding. We've been in 1 Samuel for a while. We've been doing the whole book, which has been exciting. We're in 1 Samuel 29 tonight. We're nearing the end. That's page 251 in the Pew Bible.

And actually, if you're used to just looking at it on the screens, let me encourage you to pick up the Pew Bible and turn there because we're going to do a little bit of flipping to get the context of our chapter tonight to sort of see what God wants us to see in this text.

So, 1 Samuel 29. Let me read this for us. Now, the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek.

[1 : 08] And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Akish, the commanders of the Philistines said, what are these Hebrews doing here?

And Akish said to the commanders of the Philistines, is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years? And since he deserted to me, I found no fault in him to this day.

But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, send the man back that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle.

So less in the battle, he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his Lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David of whom they sing to one another in dances?

Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands. Then Akish called David and said to him, as the Lord lives, you have been honest.

[2 : 10] And to me, it seems right that you should march out with me in this campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you.

So go back now and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines. And David said to Akish, but what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king? And Akish answered David and said, I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, he shall not go up with us to the battle.

Now then, rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you and start early in the morning and depart as soon as you have light. So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines.

But the Philistines went up to Jezreel. So let's pray. God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that each part of it is inspired and is useful, Lord, for our growth and grace.

[3 : 21] So help us tonight to understand this passage. And Lord, speak to us so that we might grow in our knowledge and love of you. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Well, so chapter 29 of 1 Samuel.

What is this chapter about? Well, it's really the story of how God rescues David from going to war against his own people. That's what's kind of going on here in this chapter.

And what we see here are some of the unlikely means that God is willing and able to use in order to extend his undeserved mercy to David and to his people.

Some of the unlikely means God uses to extend his undeserved mercy to his people. Now, to understand our chapter tonight and what it means for us today, we have to understand the context. If this is your first time here at Trinity and you're jumping right in, you probably think, what in the world is this chapter about? So let's set some of the stage. Turn back to chapter 27. Back in chapter 27, what happened?

[4 : 25] David had fled from Saul and taken refuge among the Philistines. Look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 27.

Then David said in his heart, Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. Remember, Saul is hunting David down. There's nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand.

So David arose and went over, he and the 600 men who were with him, to Achish, the son of Maok, king of Gath, which is one of the great cities of the Philistines. So he's one of the sort of head chief Philistine commanders.

And the Philistines, obviously, at this point in Israelite history, are their sort of like primary enemy, the Philistines and the Israelites. So David flees to the land of the Philistines. And for the moment, the plan seems to work, right?

Look at verse 4 of chapter 27. And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him. Great. Mission accomplished, right? But there was a price.

[5 : 28] After all, how would David convince Achish, his Philistine host, to let him stay? After all, David had tried hiding out in Gath once before, and it backfired.

Do you remember that? Turn back a few more pages to chapter 21. Chapter 21 is when David is first on the run from Saul. Look down at verse 10 in chapter 21.

And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish, the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said to him, Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances?

Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands. That song must have been a total earworm because everyone in, like, the surrounding regions knew of it.

It was like Taylor Swift. Everyone was singing it in their heads on the way back and forth to the grocery store. In other words, what are Achish's servants telling him? They're saying, look, you've got to be crazy to let this guy stay here.

[6 : 33] He's the one who massacred all of our troops. What are you doing? He's got to go. And if you remember what happens, how does David get himself out of that jam? He pretends to be crazy. He pretends to be mad.

And Achish says, look, I've got enough madmen to take care of. Get him out of here. And David barely makes it out alive. So now here we are in chapter 27 and 29, a few years later.

How is it that David's going to convince Achish that he and all his 600 men that have now gathered around him, this sort of mercenary fighting force, how is he going to convince him that he and his men aren't a threat? How is he going to keep his cover among the Philistines?

Well, in verses 8 through 12 of chapter 27, we see how. David and his men go out. They raid some of the Gentile tribes sort of to the south of the Philistine country.

Then they come back and lie to Achish and say that they were raiding the cities of Judah and some of their allies. You see, they make Achish think that they've defected, that they've deserted Israel and Saul.

[7 : 42] They've just sort of given up on that once and for all. And now they've sort of come over to the other side. And David's scheme, again, seems to work. Look at verse 12.

And Achish trusted David, thinking he has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel.

Therefore, he shall always be my servant. David's scheme seems to work.

But at what cost? You know, the sense of these verses in chapter 27 is that David goes out again and again.

And he ends up going deeper and deeper into deception and lies. And in order to do that, he has to descend further and further into brutality and violence.

After all, he can't leave any witnesses of what he's actually doing because it will blow his cover, right? So when David and his men raid these Gentile tribes to the south, they end up killing all the men and women, leaving none of them alive.

[8 : 49] Which was not, by the way, common sort of tribal raiding practices in the ancient Near East. He usually just sort of got the stuff and got out and let the people alone. So you see, David figures out how to stay safe in the land of the Philistines.

But only at the cost of more and more lies and more and more violence. And what's interesting is that the narrator of 1 Samuel, 1 Samuel, is completely silent.

He doesn't make a moral statement about David's actions here. The text doesn't come right out and say, oh, and by the way, this was really despicable of David. But, you know, I think the narrator doesn't do that because he doesn't have to.

I think we're meant to see David's actions as wrong here. And I think we see something even more in this episode in David's life.

Notice how, in David's life here, one sin leads to another. How it sucks him in deeper and deeper.

[10 : 03] It's like quicksand that every move he tries to make just sends him down faster and faster. Look at it. He stops trusting God to protect him and he flees to the land of the Philistines.

And once he flees to the land of the Philistines, he has to start lying. And in order to keep up the lie, he has to start killing. And, of course, you and I might think, whoa, I'd never do anything like that. Okay, fair enough. But I think that's just because you and I underestimate just how quickly and how powerfully sin can grow.

No, you and I might not end up murdering anyone. But we underestimate how quickly sin can take control in our lives. You see, sin always grows in compound interest.

That lustful glance here and there becomes, over time, a seemingly unstoppable pornography addiction. The bitter root of unforgiveness when someone hurt you years ago that you never really take care of takes root until you can barely have any relationship at all without constantly getting angry and hurt and burning all your bridges.

[11 : 13] The little tinge of self-pity gets nursed and nursed until eventually you see yourself as utterly worthless and unloved and you start to wonder whether life is worth living at all.

You see, no matter what the sin is, it always takes you farther than you want to go. And sin, it seems, can strike at any time, too.

We're never immune or off limits from its attack. That's another thing I think we see here. The shocking thing about chapter 27 is that it comes right after chapter 26.

In chapter 26, David has this great moment of obedience and trust in the Lord, right? I spent a whole sermon talking about how David was a great model for how to fight sin and temptation in chapter 26.

And what happens in chapter 27? Boop! Total opposite direction. Remember in chapter 26, David has the opportunity to kill Saul and all his troubles, and he refuses to do it.

[12 : 21] He obeys God and doesn't lay a hand on the king's anointed. And in that chapter, ironically, David even says, Saul, you know why what you're doing is so bad? Because it's forcing me to leave the land. I can't stay in the land if you keep coming after me like this.

That's why this is so bad. And I say that's ironic because, look, when chapter 27 begins, David's like, okay, I'm out. I'm leaving. He stops trusting God will protect him and runs to the land of the Philistines.

And I think the lesson for us is this, is that there's never a time when we can put our guard down. David has this great spiritual victory.

And the next moment, a downward spiral. Even after great moments of trust and obedience, we can still succumb to moral failures, both small and great.

You know, it's very interesting. One of the very first sort of pictorial images of sin that the Bible gives is of a crouching predator ready to overtake its prey.

[13 : 20] Do you remember what God told Cain? Sin is crouching at your door. We need to always be vigilant to fight and to flee.

There's never a time when sin can't strike. The old Puritan theologian John Owen once wrote what I think is probably the best big idea in a sermon ever written.

He wrote, be killing sin, or sin will be killing you. But not only does sin grow exponentially, and not only does it strike at any time, but do you see here how sin also begins to steal control?

In chapter 27, David is playing an incredibly dangerous game. Trying to win Akish's favor, while at the same time trying to not do any harm to his own people back in Israel.

And for a while, it looks like he can keep it together, right? It looks like he can stay in control. It looks like he can keep manipulating the situation to his advantage. But then the day comes when David is in too deep.

[14 : 28] And he finally gets stuck in an impossible situation. Look at the beginning of chapter 28. In those days, the Philistines gathered their forces for war to fight against Israel.

And Akish said to David, Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army. David said to Akish, Very well.

You shall know what your servant can do. And Akish said to David, Very well. I will make you my bodyguard for life. The day finally comes when the Philistine forces are going to march out to war against Israel.

You know, this is the day that David was probably hoping would never come, but any outside observer knew it was bound to happen. He'd been feigning allegiance to Akish, against Israel for almost a year and a half at this point.

So, of course, Akish is going to say, Okay, David, you're coming with me. And then David gives this incredibly politically vague answer in verse 2. Very well. You shall know what your servant can do.

[15 : 40] David knows he's in trouble. After all, if he tells Akish he can't go to war, he risks blowing his cover, right? Not a very good idea. When you and your 600 men are surrounded by Philistines, you've got nowhere to hide because you've been living in broad daylight with them for the last year.

Oh, by the way, Akish, I've actually been lying to you for the last year and a half, and there's no chance I'm going with you to war. But, of course, if David actually goes into battle with the Philistines, he'd be fighting against his own people, shedding the blood of his brothers and his cousins and his friends.

And besides David not wanting to do that for the obvious reasons that they're his own people, such a move would functionally destroy any chance that David had of becoming Israel's king.

After all, who would follow a king who goes to war against his own people in the ranks of their sworn enemy? In fact, even if David were to get into that situation and then sort of become a fifth column in the midst of the battle, the damage will have already been done.

The men will have seen him marching in, and his hopes of kingship will be dashed. David's foolishness, his lack of trust, his blatant sin have backed him straight into a corner with seemingly no way out.

[17 : 11] That's what's going on when chapter 29 begins. With the ranks of the Philistines assembling for battle by the hundreds and by the thousands, you can see them sort of marching in.

There's David. His face is probably stone cold, but inside his heart is probably anxiously pounding and his mind racing, wondering whether everything that he had been holding out for for these long years in the wilderness, everything that he had been promised, the kingdom, the crown, whether all of that was about to be thrown away because of his foolish move of fleeing to death.

But as David draws near to the gathering armies, the Philistine commanders see David and his men, and they ask rightly, what are these Hebrews doing here?

And Akish, ironically, stands up and defends David. And of course, we as readers know way better than Akish.

We know that David's been lying to him this whole time. But Akish can't convince the Philistine commanders. Those commanders, too, remember that same song. Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands, and they force Akish to send David away with all of his men.

[18 : 36] And then Akish comes to deliver the news to David, and again, the irony is thick. Akish just is sort of bowing over backwards to sort of declare David's innocence in verses 6 and verse 9.

And David will even fake disappointment in verse 8. And of course, his language there is just as ambiguous as it was back in the beginning of chapter 28, wasn't it?

Look at what he says there. He says, look, why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king? Who exactly is David referring to as my lord the king? Akish?

Saul? God? Who exactly is the enemy that David thinks he's going to fight? It was a pretty shrewd thing to say in that moment. But either way, when morning comes, David is released from his duty to the Philistines.

And he's delivered from the dilemma, from the catch-22 that his own foolish and sinful decisions had put him in. You can imagine the relief of David as he and his men marched away from the battle lines, seeing the sun break over the hills, knowing that he'd been rescued from his own stupidity and wickedness.

[19 : 59] But how does the author of 1 Samuel want us to understand what happens in chapter 29? Again, very interestingly, the narrator is completely silent almost. There is very little theologizing going on in this chapter, right?

In fact, the only time that God's name is even mentioned is when Achish is praising David for being so honest and so blameless. But of course, this is another instance where the narrator doesn't say anything because he doesn't have to.

It wasn't luck that rescued David that day. It wasn't the fact that that song was so incredibly catchy. No, it was God who rescued David on that day. God working his undeserved mercy to David, working through the unlikeliest of means, the Philistine commanders.

That's what this chapter is really here to show us. That God can use even his enemies to do his will and that God's will is one of unmerited favor, of completely undeserved mercy.

[21 : 19] When David had boxed himself in and caught himself in a trap of his own making, God's quiet, sovereign hand did what seemed impossible and rescued him.

So what's the practical application for us today? Of course, the application for us today is not that we should just go ahead and sin ourselves into the corner and trust that God's going to bail us out at the last minute, right?

That would be a poor application of 1 Samuel chapter 29. And in a way, Paul addresses that in the book of Romans, right? Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? He asked, by no means. If you're alive with Christ, you've died to sin.

So this chapter in 1 Samuel isn't giving us some license to sin. And the text actually, in addition to that, isn't promising us that we'll never experience the earthly consequences of our sin.

In fact, sometimes God definitely allows us to undergo the earthly and natural consequences of our sinful choices in order to teach us eternal spiritual lessons.

[22 : 29] In other words, sometimes getting busted and getting found out is the best thing that can happen for us, spiritually speaking. Because we finally can come clean. Because in that moment, we can finally see sin for what it is.

And often it's the times when we've been busted and found out that we run back to God. So if this chapter is not a license to sin, it's not a promise that we'll never experience the consequences of our sinful actions, 1 Samuel 29 is still a massive display and reminder of God's relentless and persistent and undeserved mercy.

Some of us know what it's like to make a total mess of things. Through our own cleverness or through our own selfishness, thinking that we can control things and work things out in our own way apart from God, we know what it's like to try that and in the end to make a total disaster for ourselves and for others.

And this passage is saying that even then, even when your mercy would have withered and run dry, even when you would have given up on you, even then, God's mercy isn't done with you.

That God's mercy is an ocean whose waves don't stop pounding the shore. God's mercy is like the sun whose beams don't stop shining down.

[24 : 08] And that same mercy is pursuing you. even out into the country of the Philistines where you've buried yourself.

Even there, God's mercy is coming after you. Even tonight, beckoning you and barging in on you using the most unlikely means if necessary, the foolishness of preaching even.

All in order to get you to see that the morning is about to dawn and it's time to come home. And you know, you and I, we aren't David, right?

You and I are not God's special anointed king. But why did God save David here? You know, it was more than just a mere example of his mercy.

No, in saving David from David's self-imposed ruin, God was actually carrying out and carrying forward his plan to save us all.

[25 : 28] Because it was through David's line, you see, that an even greater David would come, the Lord Jesus Christ. God rescues David to keep his great rescue plan for all of creation moving forward.

And in that plan, and in that one Jesus Christ, God's persistent mercy has come after all of us. No matter how deep you're in it, no matter how stuck or trapped you feel, Jesus has come to fulfill God's mission, to be the king who gives his life so that you might live, to be the king who lives and reigns as a rightful Lord of all, the one who says, come taste and see that the Lord is good. And if you trust him for his grace and if you bow your life to him, know all your problems won't instantly go away. Some of the consequences of sin will remain but the condemnation of sin, the guilt of sin, that will be washed away.

And his spirit will begin to work a change in your heart that will affect everything. This Sunday is the first Sunday of the month and on those Sundays we go to the Lord's Supper.

and when we come to the table we're remembering just that. We take the bread and we take the cup to remember Jesus' death for all who believe in him, for all who take him as Savior and Lord.

[27 : 11] His death is our substitute that sets us free from the penalty of sin that we deserved. So maybe tonight you see a pattern of sin in your life that needs to be stopped before it grows any bigger.

Maybe you even see a sort of complacent attitude thinking that no that could never happen to me. Well friends tonight as we go to the table confess your sins and take the bread and take the cup if you're a believer in Jesus as a sign that he died for you and that he's working in you to free you from sin's power and that you are not stuck and you are not trapped.

And maybe tonight you've lost sight of how persistent God's mercy is. Maybe you've been trying to be good on your own steam.

Maybe you've blown it and you don't think you can get back up. Well friend if that's you tonight then take the bread and take the cup as a sign that the mercy of Jesus never runs out.

God's mercy once and for all flows forth never losing its power never growing old never revoked never drawn back.

[28 : 40] Isn't that a sign of what we do continually in the Lord's supper we take it up again and again and again. Not because Jesus needs to die again and again and again but as a sign that what he did was so magnificent and so mighty that it can never run dry.

So friends let's pray and let's prepare our hearts to receive the Lord's supper tonight. Oh Lord Jesus thank you that you have come to rescue us from the impossible situation that our sin had bound us in.

Lord we had turned from you and in turning from you we had lost it all and then in trying to save ourselves we just went deeper and deeper down.

Lord thank you that you've come and used the unlikely means of a Roman cross that sign of torture and torment to bring us life life and peace.

To bring us up from the pit and to set us on solid ground. To take us from darkness and to set us free to run towards the morning.

[30 : 04] Lord as we come to your table may we be confessing sin and finding assurance in your grace we pray. Amen. So the music team is going to come up and Matt would you help serve tonight?

Thanks. Jonathan would you help serve tonight? Thanks brother. The way we celebrate the Lord's Supper here at Trinity is that we're going to take the bread together and then we're going to eat it together.