

Place: Lurgan Baptist 5:1:2003

Readings: 1 Samuel 27:1-12 30:1-10

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DAVID

## 8. THE SLOUGH OF DESPONDENCY

One of the most famous books ever written was written by a man who was serving his third term in prison. The book he wrote has changed the lives of literally millions of people. The man was John Bunyan and the book is

" The Pilgrim's Progress." At one point in this story, while Pilgrim is making the long, arduous journey to the City of God, he falls into a deep, miry, muddy hole called the Slough of Despond. He cannot get out by himself, but when he begins to cry out, Help .... a picture of the Holy Spirit .... reaches down and lifts him up from his despondency. If we were to translate Bunyan's Slough of Despond into today's terms, we would call that muddy hole " the pits," .... and that is where we find David at this time. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who himself was sometimes in the slough of despond said, " most of the Lord's family have traversed the pathway of discouragement."

Martin Luther came home greatly distressed one day. Things were never easy for the German Reformer, but at this time the accumulation of difficulties seemed appalling, foes were pressing hard and friends were letting him down. He felt completely overwhelmed and unable to cope. He knocked at the door of his house and there stood Catherine his wife dressed in black, " Ah," she said, " I have worse news than your news, Martin,"

" Worse news than mine," he exclaimed, " Yes," replied Catherine, " God is dead." " God is dead," shouted Luther " never." Reaching eagerly for his lyre he played and sang with intense feeling the hymn that became the anthem of the Protestant Reformation.

" A safe stronghold our God is still

A trusty shield and weapon

He'll keep us safe through all the ill

Which hath us now o'er taken."

The Slough of Despondency ! Is that where you are this .... ? Are you at the end of your tether ? Are you ready to quit ? There's no way out. You just can't make it ! I tell you few tools of the devil are so effective in derailing God's people as despondency. Here is David the man after God's own heart in the slough of despondency, in the pit of depression. " I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." ( 27:1 ) Notice despondency and:

### (1) ITS CAUSES

Why did David feel the way he did ? What brought about this fit of depression ? You see, he didn't just happen to tumble into " the pits." He experienced it because of three things. There was:

#### (a) DIABOLICAL AGGRESSIVENESS:

How would you like it if a king, with all the resources of the nation at his disposal, was haunting you down because he regarded you as a threat ? You see, for about ten years David had been on the run, fleeing for his life from King Saul. Perhaps the most vivid statement concerning the situation is found in ( 23:14 )

" And Saul sought him every day." Here was David's pressing problem. David thought that his trial would never end and he cried out " How long wilt Thou forget me O Lord ? for ever ? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me ?" ( Ps 13:1 ) As Spurgeon put it, " A perpetuity of tribulation is very hard to bear." Because of this he gave way to despondency ! My .... is this the very reason for your despondency ? Have you been subjected to the constant

buffeting of the devil ? For in such a spiritual warfare there is no cessation. Rather the devil has an endless variety of methods of attacks and one of his most successful is depression.

The story is told that the devil was having an auction selling off some of his most effective tools. One of the tools was unbelief and it went for a great price. Another tool being sold at the auction was doubt. But do you know the tool that sold for most in the auction ? It was depression because this creeps in where doubt and unbelief do not. (a)

(b) NATURAL WEARINESS:

" And Saul sought him every day." ( 23:14 ) Can you imagine the PHYSICAL Strain of all this ? How was David to avoid capture by the three thousand trained men of Saul's army who were constantly after him and who knew every inch of this territory ? ( 26:2 ) Can you imagine the MENTAL Strain of all this ? For David had not only to think about Saul but six hundred men with their wives and children ? ( 23:13 30:3 30:6 ) How was he to feed such a crowd ? How was he to care for such a multitude ? My .... can you imagine the EMOTIONAL Strain of all this ? Here was a man who was totally exhausted. Physically, Mentally, Emotionally, then the devil came in for how cleverly he times his attacks !

Was it not so in the life of the Saviour ? For when He had fasted, and was hungry then " the tempter came."

( Matt 4:3 ) Has it been the same with you ? Has the devil not tried to get in, has the darkness not begun to gather, has the despondency not begun to fall when you've been totally exhausted ? When the mind is weary, the body tired, the nerves frayed look out for these may be stepping stones to depression ! There's an old Greek motto that says, " You will break the bow if you keep it always bent." Do you need " to come apart and rest awhile ?" ( Mk 6:31 )

(a) (b)

(c) SPIRITUAL CARELESSNESS:

David took his eye off God ! Do you see how the chapter begins ? " And David said in his heart." Or,

" David said to himself." Do you ever talk to yourself ?

Well, its important that when we talk to ourselves that we tell ourselves the right thing. David didn't. He looked at his situation and sized it up strictly from the horizontal. You won't find David praying even once in this situation. He wrote no psalms, he asked for no help, he simply pushed the panic button.

He makes a major blunder. He runs right into the hands of the enemy. He decides to live in the land of the enemy. ( 22:5 ) Just like a lot of Christians do. It seems like a success. For Saul did not seek him again. My .... never assume that because things seem to be working out that every thing is right. Don't assume that because you've compromised with this old world that God is pleased and everything is going to be fine. Do you see what despondency can do ? It can cause us to leave the place where God wants us to be ! My .... David is coming off a spiritual high. Remember he could have slain Saul twice, but he didn't. Then he was about to kill Nabal, but Abigail talked him out of that, thankfully. So he's walked in victory for quite some time. He's come off the crest of victory, and, as all of us know, that's a very vulnerable place to be. " And David said in his heart, I shall now perish .... " ( 27:1 )

(c) Is that what has caused the clouds and darkness in your life ? Have you taken your eye off the Lord ? Have you failed to consult the Lord ? Have you simply pushed the panic bottom ? The result ? This .... you're living in Ziklag and out of the will of God ! (1)

(2) ITS CURSE

Now we might not think that David's despondency was such a great evil. In fact if you look at ( 27:4 ) you'll discover David's Remarkable Relief: the battle was over, the pressure was off and David had peace. Do you know that's exactly what happens when a believer defects to the world ! The devil will get off his back.

Did you notice David's Seeming Success ? He got on so well with the Philistines that he was given the gift of an entire city. ( 27:5-6 ) For a time it appeared that it certainly paid to sin. Has your deceitful heart ever suggested that to you

? Oh, when you lived as you ought to live in fellowship with the Lord, things didn't go very well. The more you tried to please the Lord the worse things got .... prayed daily, read the Word, attended the services, but the pressure got worse so you quit the battle. And now ? Oh, things seem better, you're climbing the ladder of success, you're getting ahead, the devil has climbed off your back and you like it. David knew such relief but his depression which led to defection brought about some serious problems. For one thing:

(a) GOD'S NAME WAS DISHONOURED:

David dishonoured the Lord by what he said: " I shall now perish .... Saul." ( 27:1 ) He dishonoured the Lord by what he did: he " fled to Gath." ( 27:4 ) Had God not promised that he would be King ? Hadn't that promise been confirmed by Samuel ? ( 16:33 ) by Jonathan ?

( 20:14-15 ) by Abigail ? ( 25:30 ) even by Saul

himself ? ( 26:25 ) " David are all the promises of God to be discarded ?" In effect David was saying, " God hath taken on too much, Saul will sooner or later get hold off me, I have waited long enough for the Lord its time I took matters into my one hand." Oh, David, oh you, oh me ! My .... do you see what happens when we take matters into our own hands, when we choose a disobedient lifestyle ? We begin to serve the adversary's cause ?

I can't believe that David calls himself the " servant of Achish," but that's exactly what he is. ( 27:5 ) My .... has depression led to defection in your life ? Have you made a hasty, unguided decision ? (a)

(b) GOD'S PEOPLE WERE DEFILED;

For this move exposed David and his men to the sinful idolatry and lifestyle of the Philistines. ( 2 Sam 5:21 ) Have you ever heard a Christian say, " So what if it's wrong, I'll pay the price. I'll choose this route and live with the consequences, anyhow it won't hurt anyone but me." Wait a minute. Do you not realise that you'll drag others with you ? You see, if it's true that no man lives to himself, and no man dies to himself .... then we can be certain that no man sins to himself either.

( Rom 14:7 ) For when David left his wilderness home and retreated into Philistine country, he didn't go alone.

We have David and his family plus six hundred more households. My .... do you think that you can compromise and it won't effect your family ? Listen: when you make a decision that is wrong, when you choose a course that is not God's plan, it affects those who trust you and depend on you, those who look up to you and believe in you. Though innocent they become contaminated by your sinful choices ! Tell me, who have you brought down to Ziklag with you ? (a) (b)

(c) GOD'S SERVANT WAS DEFEATED:

For this was a time in his life when he lost out:

1. MORALLY:

Look at ( 27:10 ) " David, that's a lie you have not been doing anything of the kind." My .... has truth become a casualty with you in your despondency ?

2. SPIRITUALLY:

The Song He had Sung was gone: for during this sixteen month stay in enemy territory, the sweet a Christian who was seeking to be a witness for the Lord. He was involved in dancing and the pastor had told him there are some places where Christians don't belong. The young person I can be a witness for the Lord on the dance floor. The pastor said,

" I invite you to try." So, out on the dance floor he stopped right in the middle of one of the dances and he said to the girl, " Are you a Christian ?" The person was shocked, she said, " No, I am not, are you ?" He said, " Well yes." She said, " well what are you doing in a place like this ?" Has the standard you once held gone ?

### 3. DOMESTICALLY:

For while he and his men were marching in the ranks of the Philistines to battle with Israel, they were losing their homes, families, dreams ! My .... are you beginning to see the consequences of David's despondency ?

### 4. INDIVIDUALLY:

Do you see him as he stands in the ashes of Ziklag, in the debris of defeat. He has lost his possessions, his family and now to crown it all he has lost his men " for the people spake of stoning him." Depression has led to defection and defection has led to disaster. David has lost everything he held dear. Is that where you are this .... ? Are you standing in the smoking ashes of your Ziklag ? Does everything you hold dear in life seem

lost ? Have you cried so much that there were no more tears to cry ? Where can you find encouragement ? Just where David found it. " But David encouraged ...." 1: 2:

### (3) ITS CURE

" But David .... his God .... " ( 30:6 ) The Hebrew conveys the notion of " continuous persistent effort."

In other words David doggedly set about resisting the pressure of circumstances and flung himself into the arms of God. Whats the cure for the slough of

despond ? Where can I find encouragement ?

### (a ) IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD:

" But David .... " ( 30:6 ) My .... for the first time in sixteen months David looks up and he says, " Oh, God help me." And He does. My .... do you need to get alone with God ? Do you need to recall His past blessings in your life ? Do you need to contemplate His great power ? Do you need to meditate on His wonderful promises ? Do you know something ? God never gets discouraged. The prophet Isaiah says, " He shall not fail nor be discouraged." ( 42:4 ) God never gets discouraged, therefore go to someone who gets never discouraged and get some encouragement from Him ! " But David encouraged .... his God." Oh, He was the God of Israel but He was his God, and this conviction strengthened in the moment of despondency. Do you know what it is to encourage yourself in the Lord ? Do you remind yourself that the God of the Universe is your God ? (a)

### (b) WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

Look at ( 30:7 ) In the language of Hebrews, " not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but exhorting one another." That means " encouraging one another." Is this not one of the reasons why we meet ? There's the therapy of fellowship and incidentally you don't have to rush home.

If you want to stay and chat please do ! But that in this place as we fellowship we might be lifted from the depths to the heights ! (a) (b)

### (c) ON THE PROMISES OF GOD:

Look at ( 30:8 ) " David go get them, you cannot lose."

I can imagine that right there his encouragement went from minus 10 to plus hundred.

David got encouraged and that encouragement was based on the promises of God. Adoriam Judson laboured hard for six years in Burma before he saw a soul saved and baptised. At the end of the first three years he was asked by a sceptical co-worker this question, " what evidence had he of ultimately succeeding in the work there ?" He said this, " I have just as much assurance of succeeding as there is a God who keeps His promises." My .... God keeps His promises and His promises banish despondency.

( Deut 33:17 Isa 26:3 41:10-11 Heb 13:5 )

The Slough of Despondency ! Are you there ? One thing is sure before this new year ends you may be there. The shadows will be there but so will God. All else may be removed, but God will remain. Circumstances and friends may change, but God is changeless. Everything may be go but God ! May we then like David encourage ourselves in the Lord our God !