



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 13, 2014

"Entitlement: When Your Needs Consume You and Others"

1 Samuel 21:1-9 & 22:6-23

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This summer we're focusing on facing the giants in our lives.

Last week we talked about what all of us need in order to face the giants in our lives. We need friends.

That should not be a surprise to us since our God, who is Himself a friendship (Father, Son and Spirit), made us in His image. We are wired for friendship.

And God has a specific kind of friendship in mind. He wants to make us into the kind of friends who can look deeply into the lives of others and then invest ourselves in them for their success, even if that personally costs us a lot. That's what we learned from watching Jonathan be a friend to David.

Today we're going to talk about a giant we all can face and that is the danger created by our feelings of entitlement. I want to talk about when our needs become so great a focus in our lives that our needs, and our efforts to get them met, consume not only us but others as well. That's what happens in David's life in the text we're going to look at today.

Let me give you a couple of examples of entitlement.

Tour de France Selfies: In addition to watching the World Cup, I've been watching the Tour de France, that amazing cycling race across France. It's more than 2,500 miles long. One of the controversies that occurred last week erupted on Twitter. The cyclists started asking the spectators to not take "selfies" of themselves as the peloton sped by at 30-40 MPH. Cyclists had hit people because the person taking the "selfie" stepped into the flow of the cyclists because they wanted to get a picture of themselves at the Tour de France. That is a small example of feelings of entitlement.

On my recent trip to Africa, I traveled with Kyle Watari who came back to the United States on his own before me. His trip home was more complicated than mine. He was delayed in Uganda, the UK, and in New York City before finally heading home to Hawaii. His travel difficulties began when the aircraft coming from the UK to pick him up in Uganda was hit by lightning on the way to Africa. The airline, obviously, needed to check the aircraft before loading it with people and flying back to London. That's when one of the passengers began to yell at the British Airlines employees at the airport in Uganda. She demanded that she be put on another flight. That was not possible.

The airline paid for the passengers to stay in a very nice hotel overnight while they worked on the airplane. The demanding woman yelled at the bus driver whose only task was to transport the passengers to their free hotel. While checking in at the hotel she insisted that they extend the breakfast hours to fit her schedule. She delayed the departure of the bus back to the airport the following day because she could not be found. That's what it looks like when your feelings of entitlement consume you and other people.

One of the things that can stoke our sense of entitlement is anxiety and fear. What I mean by entitlement is the tendency we have to hold a different standard of behavior for ourselves than we have for other people. We can have one set of rules for ourselves and another set of expectations for other people. Here's what I've noticed. When we're anxious, when we're consumed with fear, our tendency to drift into feelings of entitlement increases. That's what happens to David in today's text.

After David's victory over Goliath, his life hits what I'm going to call "clear air turbulence". God called him to be King of Israel.

He didn't seek that out. All David wanted was to do what God directed him to do. With trust in God he simply tried to do what was right and when he did, his life started to come a part at the seams!

Pilots know that clear air turbulence can come without warning. There's nothing to indicate that a rough ride is ahead. With no evidence that threatening weather is on the horizon, all of a sudden pilots, and their passengers, can run into what one pilot describes as a 'thrashing, tumbling maelstrom.' That's what happened to David. Out of nowhere his life tumbled out of control.

I do not understand why passengers on commercial airlines do not keep their seat belts fastened throughout the flight, knowing that clear air turbulence is a possibility on any flight. When the captain turns off the faster seat belt sign he or she is giving you the freedom to do something you should not do, unless it is absolutely necessary. **DO NOT UNFASTEN YOUR SEAT BELT!**

A friend of mine told me that on one trip across the Atlantic on her way to London, her flight hit clear air turbulence at dinnertime. After it was over, one of the main things she remembers is the amazing number of peas in the hair of the woman in front of her!

Sometimes our encounters with clear air turbulence are sudden and over quickly. We get a quick sharp buffeting but it's over before we really know what hit us. Someone gives us an unjustified tongue-lashing and we pick ourselves up and wonder, "What was that all about?" Other times our encounters with life's

"clear air turbulence" go on for a long time and leave us shaken. Our lives sometimes seem to go completely out of control. That's what happened to David.

We have some important lessons to learn from David who made the mistake of unfastening his seatbelt and flew straight into clear air turbulence. The David who trusted God so completely in the face of Goliath, the David who acted with incredible courage, the David who faced that terrifying enemy of Israel with confidence in what God would do, is nowhere to be found in the text we're going to study today.

He's a shaken, rattled, anxious man. He has good reason to be shaken, rattled, and anxious. King Saul, the most powerful person in his nation, has tried to kill him six times.

With apparently no time to pack his bags, David is on the run from Saul. Saul has lost his mind. His jealous feelings towards David and his desperate attempts to hold onto power lead Saul to do everything he can to eliminate David as a threat to his own plans and desires. Saul is consumed with feelings of entitlement.

The first place David heads is to a priest. David goes to see his pastor. He's in search of a place of safety. David arrives at the sanctuary at Nob and he is filled with fear. He's desperate. His pastor, Ahimelech, senses David's apprehension and greets David with trembling.

Instead of bringing his pastor into his confidence, David lies to his Ahimelech, telling him that he's on a secret mission from King Saul. David expects an honest response from Ahimelech but conducts himself dishonestly with

his pastor. That's what feelings of entitlement look like.

Watch what happens.

1 Samuel 21:1 *David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech came trembling to meet David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?"* **2** *David said to the priest Ahimelech, "The king has charged me with a matter, and said to me, 'No one must know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. (That is a lie. Now watch David make demands of his pastor.)*

3 *Now then, what have you at hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here."*

4 *The priest answered David, "I have no ordinary bread at hand, only holy bread—provided that the young men have kept themselves from women."*

5 *David answered the priest, "Indeed women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?"*

6 *So the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.*

Now, here comes trouble. There is another person in that sanctuary in Nob and he is one of Saul's henchmen. And that man is listening on David's conversation with Ahimelech.

Verse 7 *Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds.*

Edomites were the descendants of Esau. Remember the story of Jacob and Esau? God chooses Jacob and not Esau to be the one through whom the Messiah would come. David is a descendent of Jacob. Doeg is a descendent of Esau. King Herod in the New Testament was a descendent of Esau. Jesus Christ was a descendent of Jacob.

Doeg was listening in on the conversation between David and his pastor. As we'll see in a minute, David knows Doeg was there and yet David still had this dangerous conversation with his pastor. It was a stupid, selfish decision. All David seemed to care about at that moment was his immediate needs. He has no real concern for the welfare of his pastor. He has needs and he's going to get them met! That's all he can see.

"What do I need? I need food for my men and for me and I need a weapon." Here's David, the man whom God has blessed with so much. He had a friend like Jonathan who showed him through his friendship what it was to look beyond your own needs and care for someone else. That example, in this moment, had little impact on David. David makes more demands of his pastor.

Verse 8 *David said to Ahimelech, "Is there no spear or sword here with you? I did not bring my sword or my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." (That's another lie.)*

9 *The priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you will take that, take it, for there is none here except that one." David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."*

"Give it to me!" That's the language of desperation. That's the language of self-centeredness. That's the language of entitlement. The language of entitlement has become the lingua franca for many of us. "This is what I need, whatever it is. I want you to give it to me and you need to give it to me right now."

Why does David lie to his pastor? Why does he do this? Here's the most charitable possible interpretation of David's motivations. David is trying to protect Ahimelech, not wanting to give the priest too much information, fearing it would only endanger him.

I doubt that is the case based on the fact, as we'll see in the minute, that he knew Doeg, Saul's henchmen, was present and was listening to David's conversation with his pastor. David doesn't seem to care. All he was focused on were his needs for food and a means to defend himself.

When we're anxious, when we're afraid, one of our greatest temptations is the temptation to give into a sense of entitlement. How easy it is for us to have one standard for ourselves and another standard for everyone else.

David expects his pastor to deal with him honestly but is unwilling to treat Ahimelech in the same way he expects to be treated.

Ahimelech takes a chance and trusts David. The priest supplies David with some food and a weapon. The chief of Saul's shepherds, Doeg the Edomite, is present and sees everything. Doeg will squeal on Ahimelech. As a result, Ahimelech and 85 other priests and their families lose their lives for helping David. You can read that tragic story in 1 Samuel 22:6-23.

David's needs were legitimate. He really needed the things he asked for. In the gospels, Jesus commends Ahimelech in Matt. 12:1-5 for breaking the letter of the law regarding the bread of the Presence. When Ahimelech gave the bread to David and his men, Jesus said the priest did what was right. He helped a hungry man who came to him for help.

With so much at stake, David should have entrusted Ahimelech with the truth so Ahimelech would be free to make an informed decision about whether to help David or not. But David would not, or could not, look beyond his own needs and as a result a good man, and many others, lost their lives.

When our lives hit clear air turbulence, when we're afraid, it is then that we are in the greatest danger of making decisions that take only our own concerns and interests into account. We can justify our actions, feigning concern for others, when the truth is we are only concerned for ourselves. We can rationalize why we can't trust anyone, all the while we are expecting others to entrust themselves to us.

Feelings of entitlement can flow out of sense of anxiety and fear and they can also flow of a sense of power and position over other people.

If you have power of any kind in any relationship let me challenge all of us to have the same standard of behavior for others that we have for ourselves.

Giving into feelings of entitlement can lead to devastating consequences for those around us and for ourselves. In part two of this story, in 1 Samuel 22, David acknowledges his responsibility for what happened to Ahimelech when he admits to Ahimelech's only surviving son that he knew what would happen if he involved Ahimelech.

"David said to Abiathar (that's Ahimelech's son), "I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I am responsible for the lives of all your father's house." He admits his responsibility, which is a good thing, but his sense of entitlement had devastating consequences.

What changed in this story for the young man who faced Goliath with courage and confidence in the God of Israel? When David's life hit clear air turbulence, instead of buckling himself more tightly to the God who had been so faithful to him, he decided he would go it alone. He would use his own wits when he should have trusted the One who had protected him in the past.

David decided to look no further than his own needs when he should have recognized how giving into his feelings of entitlement would have serious, negative consequence for others and for himself.

Giving into feelings of entitlement again and again, slowing destroys our souls.

David chose entitlement when he should have chosen to entrust himself to God. David pursued a path of apparent safety and it turned out to be a path of destruction. He changed his relationship with his pastor from a relationship of trust and into a transactional relationship. Ahimelech was of value to David as long as Ahimelech provided what David needed.

So, how do we live less entitled lives? We need to recognize the dangers we face when we are consumed with anxiety and fear.

We need to recognize the dangers we face when we are in positions of power and it is easy for us to think that the rules are different for us.

We need to recognize the dangers we face when we do not consider the impact our self-centered decisions have on others. As followers of Jesus Christ, we, of all people on the planet, should understand this.

Jesus Christ, the One who is entitled to have everything; Jesus Christ the One who is entitled to have every single person on the planet put their focus on Him... what did He do? He focused His life on us. He saw our needs and put them first.

The only One who is entitled to be entitled, looked beyond His own needs and saw our great need. And He gave up His life that we might have life to the full. He did that to rescue us and He did that so we might become people who are more like Him. Jesus Christ can give us the security we need to live less entitled and more generous lives.

Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. It can also be sent to you by e-mail. You may also request the free audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com