



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

August 3, 2014 ♦ 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2

Disillusionment & Depression: Entering Into the Danger Zone"

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A couple of years ago, I saw a TV program about a man on his first open water dive off the coast of Florida. On that first dive he was accidentally abandoned, on his own in the open water of the Gulf of Mexico, out of site of land. The captain of the boat that he and a group of friends had chartered to take them scuba diving, left him behind. For 17 or 18 hours he floated alone in shark-infested waters. It wasn't until the next morning when his friends realized that it was just a pile of clothes in his bunk, and not their sleeping friend, that they and the Coast Guard started looking for him.

Let's think about that for a moment. Can you imagine what it must have been like to float alone in the open ocean, in the middle of the night, powerless to do anything to save yourself? That man was a tiny speck in a huge ocean. It's easy for us to feel like that sometimes when the challenges and disappointments of life threaten to overwhelm us.

The next morning a bird wanted to make a snack out of him. He batted it away saying, "Hey, I'm not dead yet!" Miraculously, he survived and was located by the Coast Guard. This man, adrift and alone, refused to stop treading water. He refused to surrender to hopelessness. He later reported that he made a few deals with God. He promised to go to

church if God would get him out of that situation. But most of the time he simply battled to hold on to hope. He knew that if he lost hope it would all be over.

Hope is to our spirits what oxygen is to our lungs. When hope dies something begins to collapse inside of us. Take away hope and we live life somewhere between depression and despair. Hope is what reassures us that no matter how badly things might be going for us right now, God is not done writing our story. Hope is what gives me the ability to say that today is worth living because I know the God that is control of my future.

David loses sight of God's hand in his life in the story we'll look at today. And he loses hope. He drifts away from God, choosing to go his own way. Only a full-blown disaster will bring David back to his relationship with God.

Next week, Pastor Sim is going to tell you about David's story of resurrection. I'm going to take us on David's journey right up to the precipice of despair.

**1 Samuel 27:1** *David said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than to 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."*

David is slipping into a sense of hopelessness. He's not completely there yet. He still has a few strategies for survival left but he's moving dangerously close to giving up. He's beginning to accept the real possibility that in the end, Saul will win and he will lose. What's his plan? David's strategy for survival is to hide out among the people who gave the world Goliath—that enormous Philistine giant Pastor Dan talked about at the beginning of this sermon series. David defects to the enemy camp because he thinks that the enemies of Israel will prove to be a shield that will protect him from the murderous intentions of King Saul.

**2** *So David set out and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to King Achish son of Maach of Gath.*

**3** *David stayed with Achish at Gath, he and his troops, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow.*

Abigail? Yep! That's right. After her foolish husband Nabal died, David married her.

**4** *When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought for him.*

**B**oom! Mission accomplished. Saul finally gives up. He ends his pursuit of David. Saul, and his son Jonathan, will be killed in a battle with the Philistines and David will never see his good friend Jonathan again.

David hides with his enemies. He takes an enormous risk by moving in with the enemies of Israel, the Philistines. First, the Philistines would certainly have no reason to trust him. From the perspective of the Philistines, this all could have been an enormous ruse. Was David pretending to have a conflict with Saul when what David and Saul were really up to was a sophisticated counter-intelligence ploy? For some reason, Achish, the king of the Philistines does trust David. He shouldn't. Achish is a very gullible man.

David also takes an enormous risk with his own people when he goes over to the enemy camp. Will the people of Israel be able to trust that he truly has their best interests at heart after watching David abandon them in their hour of need and seemingly join forces with the despised Philistines?

**5** Then David said to Achish (that's the king of the Philistines), "If I have found favor in your sight, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, so that I may live there; for why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" **6** So that day Achish gave him Ziklag; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. **7** The length of time that David lived in the country of the Philistines was one year and four months.

David camps out with the enemy. For 16 months he lives among the Philistines; 16 months

living among the idols of Philistia; 16 months living in a culture that had little regard for human life; 16 months living among a violent people. What impact did that have on David and his men? To what degree did the culture and values of the Philistines begin to reshape the values of David and his men?

David's strategy was to seek refuge in the camp of the enemy. How well did David do to stay true to the God of Israel while living in the enemy camp? In this chapter of David's life there are no recorded conversations with God. There is no evidence that he sought the counsel of godly people. So what does he do while living in the enemy camp?

What unfolds in these next few verses is David's top secret, counter-insurgency against Israel's enemies. This, too, is extremely risky.

**8** Now David and his men went up and made raids on the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites (these are all allies of the Philistines and enemies of Israel); for these were the landed settlements from Telam<sup>e</sup> on the way to Shur and on to the land of Egypt. **9** David struck the land, leaving neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the clothing, and came back to Achish. **10** When Achish asked, "Against whom have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites."

Pay particular attention to what David does here. Is he being faithful or unfaithful to God? Just because a character in the Bible is

doing something, especially if they are a revered character in the Bible, does not automatically mean that what they are doing is what God wants them to do.

**11** David left neither man nor woman alive to be brought back to Gath, thinking, "They might tell about us, and say, 'David has done so and so.'" Such was his practice all the time he lived in the country of the Philistines.

**12** Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself utterly abhorrent to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."

David raids the enemies of Israel but tells Achish that he's made raids on the Israelites. David is getting pretty good at lying. Either David must have been an incredibly charming and convincing individual, or Achish was not the brightest bulb in the box—or some combination of the two. Also, the Philistines must have had a terrible intelligence gathering system. For 16 months, no one reported to Achish that his allies were being pummeled and the towns of Israel were living in relative peace. It was like a massive Jedi Mind Trick. But David's secret war against the Philistine from within the Philistine camp begins to come unraveled. The harm that he's done will come back to hurt him.

**1 Samuel 28:1** In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, "You know, of course, that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." **2** David said to Achish, "Very well, then you shall know what your servant can do." Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

**A**chish trusts David. I have no idea why he does. The Philistine generals do not trust David. In the text that follows, they tell Achish that there is no way in the world they're going to allow David and his men to join them in fighting against the Israelites. They say to Achish, "How do you know David wouldn't start to fight on the side of Israel from within the ranks of the Philistine army?"

That would be a fantastic strategy that could reestablish David's reputation among his own people and could end up destroying the Philistine army. The generals win the day and David is not allowed to accompany the Philistines into battle. David and his men are sent home. What they discover when they get home will lead David to a point of crisis that almost destroys him. But it is precisely at that point of utter despair, when he is at the end of his rope, that David returns to his relationship with God.

David and his men return to Ziklag where they discover that the Amalekites have overrun Ziklag, burned it to the ground and kidnapped all their wives and children. David's men are so angry that they intend to kill David. (Next week Pastor Sim will tell you what happens then!)

In this story of David's time in the enemy camp there are no recorded conversations with God. There is no indication that David sought the counsel of others. On his own, David comes to the conclusion that Saul will eventually do him in. He will try to forestall that inevitability by not only fleeing from Saul, but by leaving his county. Gone are his dreams about one day becoming King of Israel.

All sorts of question must have gone through David's mind. He gives in to what seems to him to be the inevitable outcome of his life. Saul is going to win. David gives in and in doing so, lives in his enemy's camp and, I think in some ways, is influenced by the brutal, callous culture and values of the Philistines.

We enter a danger zone when we make major life decisions on our own without seeking the counsel of God or other godly people in our lives, especially during times of stress and discouragement. Once again David goes it alone, without God and without godly friends.

Eugene Peterson writes, "I know scores of men and women who are living under the patronage of Achish of Gath. Many of them feel terrible about it. Many of them feel guilty but quite honestly don't know what else they can do. They have jobs with companies that do business in defiant contempt of the Kingdom of God. They're married to spouses who hate the name of Jesus. They seem to be inextricably tangled in an economic system that exploits the poor and ignores the oppressed. They're doing their best to honor parents who dishonor God in thought, word and deed. There's hardly a Christian I know who hasn't put in time, sometimes far more than David's sixteen months, under Achish of Gath."<sup>1</sup>

At a minimum, this story is a cautionary tale that should encourage us to ask ourselves some hard questions. What

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Eugene H., *Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians*, (New York: HarperSan-Francisco, 1997), 99

examples from our own lives do we have to illustrate the fact that we feel the pull of the world's cultural undertow? How might a sense of hopelessness lead us to accommodate some of the misguided values of our culture? Sometimes the pull of our culture seems too strong to resist. Sometimes, we are so disappointed with God that we are tempted to walk away from Him and His vision for our lives.

David is right there on that edge. He's doing everything he can think of to just survive. As he heads back to Ziklag he is right on the edge of confusion, discouragement and despair. That despair will almost overwhelm him but it is precisely at this moment that God will meet him and he will return to the Lord. Disappointment can be a gift that can become the place from which a new chapter in our lives can begin.

Without stealing Pastor Sim's text, I'll say this much about what happens next week. What's most important is not that David finally, or once again, got it together as far as his relationship with God was concerned. That's not unimportant, but what's *most* important is that God graciously and compassionately met David, right where he was in the pit of despair, loved him, and restored his sense of hope.

One of the things I love about the story of David is that his story tells us something about us. When he fails, if we're honest with ourselves, we see ourselves in his failures. When we see him succeed we can see ourselves in David and his example can give us something to which we might aspire.

**B**ut we make a big mistake if that is all we do with these stories. We make a huge error to think that David's story, or any other story in the Bible, is first and foremost about us.

The reason we study the life of David is not first to learn something about how we can live our lives. There are lessons we can learn from David but that's not the most important lesson we can learn. We study the life of David in order to learn about Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Messiah. All the stories of the Bible are first and foremost about Jesus Christ before they are about us.

On the Road to Emmaus, the risen Christ holds a huge informal Bible studies with two disciples who are totally discouraged after Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. As they walk along that road, Jesus talks them through the Old Testament and shows them how the scriptures are all about Him.

If we read the Old Testament as if it were primarily a collection of morality stories that we're supposed to try and apply to our lives, then we'll miss the main point of these stories. If you make the mistake of going directly from David's story to your story then you're not going to get very much out of it. But if you first see these stories as teaching us about Jesus Christ and what only He can do for us and for the world, then you'll walk away from these studies with something that will begin to truly transform your life.

You're going to gain a lot more wisdom if you let these stories point you to Jesus before you see them as lessons you need to apply to your lives. If you skip that step, all you're really going to experience is the Bible beating you over

the head about how you're supposed to try and live your life.

You can read the Bible as if it is primarily about you—or you can read the Bible as being primarily about God. You can read the Bible as if it is primarily about what you need to do—or you can read the Bible as being about what God has done. You can read the Bible as if it is primarily about what you give God—or you can read the Bible as being primarily about what God gives us. If you read it that way then you're going to see Jesus Christ everywhere on every page.

If you come away from these stories with just a little inspiration about needing to make some changes in your life, or if you come away crushed that there's no way you can live the way the Bible is encouraging people to live, then you will have missed what the Bible is all about. It's not first and foremost about you and me. It's about Jesus Christ.

I don't know about you but as we've studied the life of David these last few months I've had such high hopes for David. I've wanted him to succeed, to do what is right, to be a servant leader who is willing to serve his people. And week after week, I've come away a little discouraged.

Saul was a terrible leader. In David, Israel will get a better king but at the end of the day they didn't get the king they longed for in David.

We have similar longings. We look at our world and long for leaders who will be courageous, who will give all they've got so their people might thrive. We long for leaders who will lead with humility and righteousness and

we are regularly disappointed.

And when we look at our own lives we can sometimes be disappointed with many of our own decisions and actions.

God does call us to live lives that more fully reflect His heart and character. These stories are designed to help us evaluate how we're living our lives. These stories are designed to encourage us to become the women and men God wants us to be.

But don't miss this. These stories are also here to drive us in one direction: to Jesus Christ.

This Communion Table reminds us that it's not about you and me. It's about Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can satisfy our longings for a leader, for a King whom the entire world needs and whom we need. He is the only one who has been and will be the Leader, the King, the Friend, the Companion, the Teacher, the Helper all of us are looking for and need.

Look first at Jesus Christ and see His forgiveness, His compassion, His grace and His love—and then we will begin to have the spiritual resources we need to live our lives with hope.

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*Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://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](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)*