



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

August 10, 2014

"Look Up!" - 1 Samuel 30:1-25

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As we followed the breaking news last week, whether it was CNN, Fox, The National Weather Service or our local KGMB, it was all the same: unprecedented bad weather headed our way. It was uncanny. Everything was right for the wrong thing to happen—the increasing wind speed, the unusually high ocean temperature, a super high pressure ridge to the north, the rare and dangerous thickness of the storm's eye walls, and not just one hurricane but two headed right for us—the computer models having us in the cross-hairs.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation personally like that where it seems everything that can go wrong is going wrong?

Anybody remember seeing the movie, "The Money Pit"? It was hilarious. Of course the stakes are not as high in "The Money Pit" as they are in the pit David finds himself at the bottom of the First Samuel passage we'll be reading in a few minutes, as we continue our series on "Facing the Giants in our Lives."

Corporately, we have been facing two giants over the past few days named Iselle and Julio. They have caused us to, in some ways, face the kind of dread David was facing in this passage

we'll read—the feeling that danger is coming and there is no way out. I'm giving the name "dead end" to this giant headed David's way. David has no answer for what he's facing and there is no exit. David is trapped.

Our passage is in chapter 30 of the Book of 1 Samuel. The similarity of Tom Hanks compared to David in this passage we'll examine is in the dominoes effect or the result of a chain reaction. With Tom Hanks, a complex house renovation collapses. With David, a complex house of cards collapses—a house of cards David has kept together with cunning, with lies, and with what seems like pure luck. (I always use the word "luck" advisedly).

There's another similarity that creeps in. It's humor. It's only because we know the end of the story—that David ultimately becomes the godly person that inspires the heart of every Christian—that we can afford to smile at David at his dead end without feeling spiteful. In fact, it's easy to imagine David himself looking back on this day with a smile thinking, "How in the world did I get myself into a mess such as that?"

What was the mess? Let's look at the chain reaction. David was a fugitive for his life. Saul, the king of Israel, has made it his life's

goal to kill David. The Bible tells us that Saul hunted David like he was a partridge in the wild. That led to David seeking a place to hide.

David took a gamble. He hid within the ranks of the Philistines, the arch-enemy of Israel. He felt Saul would not chase him into the camp of the Philistines. He figured they wouldn't chase a sheep into the wolf pack. As it turned out, he was right.

David went to King Achish of the Philistines and told him he was defecting to the side of the Philistines. Of course he was lying to King Achish, but Achish believed him because, as Pastor Tim pointed out last week, David had charm and charisma. David had many talents and abilities—some good, some bad. One ability he possessed was being a con-artist par excellence.

So David was living a lie. More accurately he was a living lie. He was a sheep in wolf's clothing. He had to maintain that posture while supposedly fighting for the Philistines. He had to constantly be guarded lest a little white wool show through. David becomes a living example of the famous saying that goes something like, "If at first we choose to deceive, oh what a tangled web of lies we must weave."

I cannot help but think of the day back in my high school years when I learned this. I was headed downtown to pick up some clothes that had been altered. My best friend, Freddy Ware, asked me to do an errand for him while I was in town. He needed to pick up a dress for his mother from the very same store. Would I do it for him? No problem.

"While I'm here," I said to the lady at the cash register, "I would like to pick up Mrs. Ware's dress." She said that was fine and she asked me how my mother was. (It was a family store where everybody sort of knew each other.) I told her my mother was fine. She asked if my brother like school. I told her he did. After several more questions she wanted to know if my father was feeling better. An odd question because my father had not been sick. I don't think my father had ever been sick. Then it hit me. "She thinks I'm Freddy!"

Well, I didn't want to make the lady feel bad and embarrass her, and anyway, the dress would be there any minute and I would be out of there. So I continued to pretend I was Freddy.

Then the unthinkable happened. They yelled out from the back room that the dress was not ready, that I would have to wait for it! I was now ten minutes into being Freddy. I felt I couldn't suddenly say, "Hey, you know what? I'm not really Freddy. I've been playing you along for ten minutes." So I decided to keep being Freddy. That turned out having to be Freddy for at least another 15 minutes!

It was a good thing I lived at Freddy's house almost 24/7. I knew his mother, his brother, his

father, his grandmother, and his dogs. I knew almost everything about Freddy and his family and what I didn't know that day, I made it up. It was such a horrible experience that I still remember almost every minute of it. It's like a movie in my mind, and it's 3-D in slow motion.

"If at first you choose to deceive what a web of lies you must weave." That was me...and that was David. But David did it for almost a year and a half. David's pretending was for high stakes and he took it to an extreme level. He finagled and actually flattered Achish, the Philistine king, into letting him leave the royal city—where all his actions were open for all to see—and move with his 600 warriors and their families to a remote country village where he could hide everything he did or everything he didn't do.

Let's read I Samuel 27:5-7:
5 - Then David said to Achish, "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;... 7 - The length of time that David lived in the country of the Philistines was one year and four months.

So David in secret and on Achish's time and money, began attacking town after town of those who were enemies of Israel, and all the time telling Achish the spoils he brought back were spoils from the Philistine enemies he destroyed. David stayed secretly allied to Israel and he saw to it that Achish never knew the truth.

David's guise was so complete that he became Achish's hero and his most revered warrior. Look at verses 10-12 in Chapter 27.

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."

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."

This trust for David led Achish to make David, of all things, his bodyguard. And when the commanders of Achish's army gathered all the Philistine forces together to fight the Israelites, Achish asked David to fight with him against Israel. In response David plays his role to the hilt.

Let's look at the first two verses of Chapter 28.

1 - 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."

But the war-wary Philistine commanders said, and I'll condense their words, something like, "Hold on King Achish. Not so fast! Do you know who this guy, David, is? He's an Israelite warrior, known for his military prowess. He could turn on us in a moment and knife us in the back [David and his men were bringing up the rear]. This man, David, will not go to war with us against Israel! Send this man and his troops back to where he belongs—to Ziklag!"

When a very disappointed Achish tells David he will have to depart and go back home to Ziklag, it is one of those subtle moments of humor in the Bible. David begins to act exactly like Bruh Rabbit in "Bruh Rabbit and the Briar Patch." Being ordered to be dismissed from fighting his own beloved Israel was *exactly* what David hoped would happen. And David puts on an act to seal the deal.

Here's the dialogue from Chapter 29. **6** - *'[David] I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me until today. Nevertheless the lords do not approve of you.* **7** - *So go back now; go peaceably; do nothing to displease the lords of the Philistines.'* **8** - *David said to Achish, 'But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I should not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?'*

Lay it on David! Lay it on thick and heavy! I'm being facetious here. Am I being a little bit too facetious—a little bit too glib, maybe, towards a man whose name is mentioned in the Bible almost 900 times and most of those times in a good light? A name that meant "beloved."

Shouldn't we cut David some slack? After all, he's like a spy moving among the enemy. Don't spies have some license?

I have to admit that when I first started reading these narratives in First Samuel I had a bias in favor of David. I thought of him as mentoring me as I read. However, the more I read the more I began to wonder, is this is a man I want to emulate, especially in these passages we've read today?

I like the fair summation of David's actions by a team of Bible scholars commenting on this section of Scripture. They say, "[David's] indiscriminate slaughter, and his facility in practicing deceit at this time, give us an unfavorable view of David's history at this period. We cannot, however, judge him [completely] by the standards of New Testament morality." (*New Bible Commentary*, by Davidson, Stibbs, and Keven)

Yet, in chapter 30, David becomes my mentor—my mentor big time. He becomes my hero. I hope that will be true for you, too.

David did go home with his 600 men. It took them three days to turn around and go back to Ziklag. When they rounded the last bend in the road they were horrified at what they saw. They were stunned. David and all his men were devastated by the scene that lay before them. What they found there was almost the end of David.

Let's read the first six verses of Chapter 30.

1 - *Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalakites had made a*

raid on the Negeb and on Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag, burned it down, 2 - and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great; they killed none of them, but carried them off and went their way.

3 - *When David and his men came to the city, they found it burned down, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. 4 - Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept, until they had no more strength to weep.*

5 - *David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail the widow of Nabel of Carmel. 6 - David was in great danger; for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in spirit for their sons and daughters. **But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.***

That last verse is a good verse to put to memory. It's not a whole verse, but enough of a verse to call it a verse, and short enough to memorize. It's an important verse. **"But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God."** Without looking at the printed verse let's say it together: **But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.**

The verse is from the 30th chapter of First Samuel. It's the sixth verse. That's easy to remember because "six" rhymes with "fix." David was in a *fix* but he found the way to *fix* it.

For David, the bad just got worse. On top of everything else in his life, he's now dealing with the loss of his family and he's dealing with his 600 warriors—his only true loyal friends who are now talking about stoning him to death.

And it's not just David in jeopardy. If David survives this moment he will go on to become the King of Israel. He will live to supply us with half the Psalms of the Psalter. He will establish the Jewish Church. He will put Jerusalem on the map. He will deliver God's people and found a mighty dynasty for God. He will raise the bar on the leadership of God's people to where only Jesus will satisfy the demand.

If David does not survive, the history of God's people will suffer and that includes you and me.

When we hit these times in life, these dead ends, these times when there is no answer, when there are two (or more) unprecedented hurricanes headed into our lives and we have no power to change their courses; when we hit these times, or they hit us, we need to remember that—just as with David—many people are affected by our decisions. No matter who we are, or what our station in life, or whether we like it or not, others will gain or lose by the decisions we make at the crossroads of our lives—especially if we belong to Christ. Our lives as Christians are personal, but they are not private.

David survived, but how did he do it? It would be valuable, practical, take-away information if we could determine what David did when he **"Strengthened himself in the Lord his God."**

I think if we look carefully at this passage we can determine that there are at least four things David did. I'm going to identify them by the letter "P."

The First "P" Stands for Poise

That little word "poise" is powerful. It means keeping your composure. I think it honors God

tremendously when Christians keep their composure. By that I don't mean being passive. I mean thinking through what's going on and responding rather than reacting. In nearly every decision David made in the earlier passages we read David reacted—until now. David is now poised like a man after God's own heart.

Maybe the best description of what poise might look like in action is in the classic poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling—with my added prefix.

[You have poise]
If you can keep your head
when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming
it on you,
If you can trust yourself when
all [others] doubt you,
But make allowance for their
doubting too.
If you can wait and not be
tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't
deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give
way to haring.

If I am going to practice poise as a Christian I need to have two necessary ingredients to keep from having a snobby, holier than thou attitude.

First, I need to reflect on who I am and that means reflecting on whose I am.

One thing that constantly gnawed at David was the fact that about 15 years earlier God, through the prophet Samuel, had anointed him King of Israel. What had gone wrong?

David didn't know, but he had grown tired of waiting and began to take his destiny into his own hands.

But here, now, at this crisis moment a composed David remembers that he belongs to God and not the other way around. He remembers that the Lord his God sought him out and chose him to become royalty. He did not choose God. He is humbled and strengthened in the knowledge that the Lord his God is working out his plan, which is bigger and farther reaching than anything David can imagine.

So with us. These words from First Peter describe us: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* (1 Peter 2:9)

God chose us to make us royalty. We did not choose Him. He chose us. Knowing whose I am keeps me humble, but I need another ingredient to keep me from false humility. That ingredient is God's grace.

David seems to demonstrate that grace toward Saul. He does not seem bitter or angry toward Saul. David struggles to do it, but he seems to put those circumstances he cannot control and are not of his fault into God's hands. It seems that in doing so he is able to forgive Saul.

This is a tremendous action on David's part, but what impresses me most about David in this moment of **strengthening himself in the Lord his God** is David's ability to also put into God's hands the circumstances brought about by his own sins—receiving God's grace for the wrongs he himself has done. David's God doesn't say, "You got yourself into this mess now live with it."

There's no doubt there was confession for his sins, but David accepts God's forgiveness, holds his head high, and moves on. To be confidently poised in Christ we need an attitude of forgiveness toward others and toward ourselves. David achieved that position when **he strengthened himself in the Lord his God.**

The Second "P" is for Prayer

It's more than prayer. It's David finally looking up. He's not looking inward now. His wit and wisdom has run dry. He is aware of his weaknesses. And he's not looking outward. Looking outward is hopeless, because every avenue is a dead end. David's help will come from God. David looks up as **he strengthens himself in the Lord his God.**

David goes to the priest and together they inquire of the Lord what they should do. In that day the indwelling of God's Spirit and His guidance that we can experience in our lives today was not available. God's guidance came through his prophets and priests and the means they had at their disposal. Look at verse 7 and 8 in Chapter 30.

8 - David said to the priest, Abiathar son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David.

9 - David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" He answered him, "Pursue; for you shall overtake and shall surely rescue."

What was this thing called the ephod? It was a garment the priest wore which had in it a pocket that contained something like dice. One dice said "Yes" and another said "No." Through ways Bible scholars are unclear about God would communicate to the priests.

I have a dice on the desk in my office. One side says "Yes." Another side says "No." The other sides are "Try Again"; "50/50"; "Forget It"; and "Call a Meeting". It's a Presbyterian dice!

Wouldn't it be great if we could just roll dice like that and get God's will? The trouble is God would have our minds but he wouldn't have our hearts. God had David's heart. And when David became composed and poised the compass of his life turned to his God and he looked up.

Contrast that scene of David to one whose heart God did not have. I'm speaking of King Saul. I won't read any of the account of Saul as it's laid out in Chapter 28, but I hope you'll read it on your own.

Saul, like David, was in the path of great danger. The great army of the Philistines was amassing to attack him. Like David, Saul went to the ephod, but God didn't speak. Saul panicked. He tried every way he could to get God's will. Nothing worked so he went to his long time friend and counselor, the prophet Samuel. One problem. Samuel had died. To get to Samuel Saul had to go to a medium and delve into the darkness of the occult. Saul went to the witch of Endor and he went to his downfall.

The Bible is clear about getting God's will. **Look up!** And that looking up does not mean looking to the constellations in the heavens. I'm not talking about appreciating our universe. (By the way, if it's clear tonight you'll see a big full moon, which they call a Supermoon. That's the term given it when it's closest to earth when it's full, and that's occurring

tonight for the entire year of 2014).

I'm not talking about astronomy. Astronomy is great. I'm talking about astrology. I'm a sitting duck for horoscopes. Now, I will read the fortune cookie from Panda Express: "You are a nice person", "Good things will happen to you this year." I like those. But I will not let myself look at my horoscope where it might say, "Do not make an important decision today." That line will stay with me all day and it will run my life for 24 hours.

It takes an effort to keep my eyes off the horoscope. There are two or three comic strips I like to read in the Advertiser, and the horoscope is right there across the page. It's always tempting, but I refuse to look.

Back to Saul. Saul missed that first step—that of being poised and composed in the hands of God, of owning up to his sins and receiving the grace of God. David became poised. Saul panicked. Early on, David had given his heart to God. Saul never did. David came to realize you cannot always change your circumstances, but you can always change yourself.

Saul never worked on changing himself while David did—**strengthening himself in the Lord his God.**

The Third P is for Having a Plan

Be proactive not passive. David took the initiative. God didn't grab David by the scruff of the neck and say, "Get on with it!" David had to grab himself by the scruff of the neck and act! After David prayed he developed a plan to meet the Amalakites head-on and he followed through with his plan.

What comes to me as I think of an example from my own life may seem mundane to you but to me it was profound. It was not life or death but it was the first time I can recall having a sense of mission in the face of big odds.

As a youth pastor in Florida I was also the bus driver for our church bus for the long trip up the Sunshine Parkway to our retreat sites at least four times a year—Mimi and our three young kids always riding in the front seat directly behind me.

We had good times on that bus—kids singing choruses and hymns and of course their favorite song, "Ninety Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall." I never liked the beer part, but somehow changing it to Sprite ruins the song. But that all came literally to a screeching halt.

It was an old school bus with an oil leak. One Sunday afternoon coming home from a retreat the engine ceased. It got so hot it melted into a big steel blob, and there we were 20 miles from home. Somehow we got all the kids home and the bus got towed to a field in a nearby town.

Months later as I was sitting praying about what could we do without a bus, God spoke—not audibly but almost. He said, "Sim, go get the bus!" I objected at first. After all, the bus may not be in that field anymore.

Others told me it would be a hopeless, expensive, and futile effort. But I developed a plan, some miracles happened, and we got the bus—new engine, new paint job, new name on the side, and many more great times together on the Sunshine Parkway.

Some of you may be in a dilemma today. You're stuck. Dead end. Take a cue from David. Make a plan. Get off your okole and act. God will be with you like he was with David. We read, *"David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken; and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken; David brought back everything."* (1 Sam. 30:18 & 19)

The Final "P" for Perseverance

David had much against him when he started to carry out his plan. One third of his men got tired and discouraged and dropped out, but David kept on going. It may have been at this very time that David wrote the 27th Psalm.

The first verse reveals the entire spirit of the Psalm: *"The Lord is my light and my salvation: Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?"*

This 27th Psalm ends with my favorite perseverance verses. I learned them years ago and they have stood me in good stead. I learned them from the King James version: *"I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."* (Psalm 27:13,14)

I'm grateful to David for that passage.

I'll end with another version of that passage. It's an unforgettable version from my urologist. There I was just out of the hospital. I felt weaker and worse than I had ever felt in my life and

I had absolutely no hope that I would ever, ever again feel any different. That surgeon looked me in the eye and he said seven words that filled me with hope—words through which God spoke to me that day and raised me up to more than I could be. He said, "Sim, life is going to be good again!" And I believed him.

I want to say that to you today who may be in that place of need—praying that God will encourage you and raise you up to more than you can be. Life is going to be good again! Amen.

Prayer: You, O Lord, are our light and our salvation. You are the stronghold of our lives. Walk with us on our stormy seas and raise us up, Lord, to be for You, more than we can be. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

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