

Prodigal David

1 Samuel 29:1-30:31

Key Verse: 30:6

“David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.”

Many of us know the story of the Lost Son from Luke's gospel. In that story, there is a man that has two sons. The younger son goes to his father and asks for his inheritance, and the father gives it to him. Not too long after that, the younger son leaves the house and goes off to a far off land and starts partying living a wild life. He spent everything he had and was starving. In his desperation, the man hires himself out to a local man, who sent him to feed the pigs. Even with such a low level job, he didn't have enough to feed himself and he longed to eat as well as the pigs did. Finally, at the bottom of his situation, he came to his senses and decided to return home and ask for mercy from his father. The man makes the long journey back home and has a prepared apology for his dad, but when he gets home, his dad sees him from afar and runs to him, embraces him, and celebrates his return. (Luke 15:11-24) It's a beautiful story about the love of the father for his sons and it is a story that plays out throughout the Bible. Did you know that David had his own prodigal son experience? Today, we can see God's great faithfulness to David as he returns to LORD.

It's been a little while since we've seen David. When we last saw David, he thought that it was best for him and his men to go to Philistine territory to get away from Saul. It worked, when Saul found out that David was in his enemy's land, he stopped looking for him. While with the Philistines, Achish the king of Gath gave the town of Ziklag to David. From there, David began to attack the Amalekites, Geshurites, and Girzites, destroying everything in any town he attacked. Then he would tell Achish that he went raiding in Israelite territory. His deception allowed him to gain favor in the eyes of Achish. Achish was very pleased with David. To him, it looked like David would be his forever, and to David, he had assurance that Achish would not try to kill him and his men. David was safe. Then at the beginning of chapter 28, the Philistines were going to battle against the Israelites and Achish said that David was to join him in battle. David's web of lies was starting to backfire.

At the beginning of this passage, David and his men are riding out to battle with the Philistines. **“As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish.”** (29:2) I honestly don't know what David was feeling at this moment. Here he was, Israel's champion and future king, going out to fight his own people on the side of Israel's sworn enemy the Philistines. David began his career in Saul's service by defeating the Philistine giant Goliath of Gath, but now he was reduced to being on the other side. If he showed up to battle, David would be viewed as a traitor to his people; he would never become king. David had carefully crafted a safe life for over a year through his cunning and deceit. He was very brilliant, but David's scheming put him between a rock and a hard place. What was he to do? If he went on, he would have to face his own people. If he left, then the Philistines would hunt him down. Maybe he could turn on them in battle. I really don't know what David was thinking, but he followed along.

The other Philistine kings saw David and his band and were very concerned. **“The commanders of the Philistines asked, ‘What about these Hebrews?’ Achish replied, ‘Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him.’”** (29:4) The other Philistine leaders did not trust David and in the next verse they assume that David would turn on them in battle. That wasn't unprecedented. In chapter 14, a bunch of Hebrews that were allied with the Philistines switched sides and attacked the Philistines when Saul came to battle. The other

kings thought that it would happen again and they wanted to send David away. They didn't want to face a battle on two fronts. Even if David only had 600 men, he was the famous champion of Israel. David's fame was well renowned and the Philistines didn't want any of that.

Achish, on the other hand, only had glowing things to say about David. He told the other leaders that he found no fault in David, and when they put their feet down, Achish goes and tells David that he has to return home. Achish uses words like "as surely as the Lord lives", and describes David as pleasing as an angel of God. Achish is really taken by David; he completely believes that David is his forever. David only fed him lies, but Achish sees David as entirely sincere. It's amazing to see how masterful David was with lies. In the end, David was sent back to Ziklag. Even though David was making a mess of things, God, again, protected David from falling completely. God used the Philistine commanders to get David out of the sticky situation. "So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel." (29:11)

"David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way." (30:1-2) It was about sixty miles from Aphek, from where David left, to Ziklag and about a three-day journey. To put it into perspective, around sixty miles from here is Kenosha to the north, Dekalb to the west, Kankakee to the south and the other side of Lake Michigan to the east. It was a long way to march. The men were probably happy to go home and see their wives and children. They were looking forward to it from the day they left Aphek. It was a lengthy journey with good thoughts at the end. I know for me, I am so happy to be able to go home at the end of the day. On the way home, I look forward to seeing my wife and soon my little girl. Being reunited is one of the highlights of the day. I can imagine the apprehensive joy that the men were feeling as they went back to Ziklag, but when they reached home, the mood changed entirely.

"When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive." (30:3) When David and his men approached Ziklag, they saw smoke rising from the city and their hearts fell to the ground. When they reached the city, they were torn to shreds. Ziklag was burned and abandoned. All the women and children were gone...taken captive by the Amalekites. "So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep." (30:4) Who says that men can't weep? When your family is taken captive, you definitely can cry your hearts out. David and his men, battle-hardened men, did so until they had no strength left even to weep. Had God saved David and his men from battling the Israelites only to return to tragedy and horror?

The mood of the scene quickly changed—as it often does—from weeping and despair to anger and rage. "David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters." (30:6) David's men were enraged at what happened and they blamed David. David was the one who had brought them into Philistine territory. David was the one who led the raiding parties against the Amalekites. David was the one who led them out to go to battle with Achish. Because of that, David was responsible for Ziklag being burned and their families taken captive. These thoughts were rolling around in the men's hearts, and they wanted to stone him for it. David was the champion of champions. He had success in everything he did. David was gracious and it was well known that he was the future king, but how quick it is for sinful man to be consumed by despair! At that time, it didn't matter. To them it was all David's fault. And David was greatly distressed because of his men. As bitter as the men were, David probably did feel responsible for what

had happened. Like his men, David lost his family—his two wives were taken along with everything else. But David did not give in to his anger. It didn't make him stronger. He did not give in to power of the dark side. Instead, **"David found strength in the LORD his God."** (6)

Finally, we see the Prodigal David! It is never recorded in the Bible that David even thought about God while he was in Philistine territory before this moment. He was there for over a year, but the Bible doesn't say that he called on God's name. All the Bible shows is that David lied and cheated to gain security. He was weaving a web of lies and finally the dam broke and he lost everything. David's schemes kept him, his men and the families under his care safe until the lies made him have to leave them vulnerable. Now, all of it was gone. It sounds a little like the lost son from Luke. He, too, lost everything because he followed his own plans. Like it was mentioned earlier, that younger son, when he had realized how far he had fallen, went back to his father. David, when he lost everything, found strength in the LORD his God. In the passage five weeks ago, Jonathan visited David in the caves to help him find strength in God. This time David didn't have Jonathan to help him, so he had to find that strength himself. Probably, like last time, David remembered God's promises to him. David may have remembered that God had promised that he would become king. It was so long ago that that promise was made, but David held it in his heart and he turned to ask God what he should do. **"Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelek, 'Bring me the ephod.' Abiathar brought it to him, and David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?' 'Pursue them,' he answered. 'You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.'"** (30:7-8)

Do you see the greatness in this passage? Do you see the wonderfulness of the Lord our God? God is the hero of this passage. David was lost in lies. God saved him from himself, and David finally turned back to God. But what is truly amazing is that God accepts him back. David became a liar, a cheater and an enemy to God's people, but God accepted him back with open arms. The Bible says of our God Jesus, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9) That's what David did. He realized that he had sinned against God and came back to the Lord. Then, the Lord was faithful to the fallen sinner and reinstated him as his son. God answered David by telling him that he would have success in finding the raiding party and rescuing the captives. When David came back, God was so happy. Jesus says in Luke 15:10, **"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."** There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels. Who do you think rejoices in the presence of angels? It's God that is rejoicing when even one sinner repents. When David came back to God, the music came on and there was a party. God turned to David and told him that he would help him and give him the means to do so.

David left Ziklag and began to pursue the raiders. Two hundred of his men became exhausted and had to be left behind. I don't know if David knew where to go. Searching the wilderness for a raiding party must not be an easy business, but even then David received help from God. **"They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat—part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights. David asked him, 'Who do you belong to? Where do you come from?' He said, 'I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. We raided the Negev of the Kerethites, some territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag.'"** (30:11-14) David and his men found a slave of the Amalekites that they abandoned in a field. He was nearly dead due to starvation and dehydration. David took care of the slave and nursed him back to health. Then he led them to the Amalekites and David and his men destroyed them. The rescue was a huge success. **"David recovered**

everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back.” (30:18-19)

On the way back to Ziklag, David's men were in better spirits. They had their families back and a great deal of plunder. When they came to the two hundred that were left behind, some wicked men wanted to give none of the plunder to those men. They were to have their families back and go away. To the wicked men, the ones left behind were weak and failures, but David saw things differently. He said, “No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the raiding party that came against us. Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike.” (30:23-24) What gracious words. David called the wicked men “brothers”. He was gracious to them even though they showed none. It really looks like David subscribed to the language of Paul. He wrote, “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:21-26) David saw that the men who were unable to continue on with him still had worth and still had a part to play in the rescue. They deserved to rejoice with the rest of the men.

The graciousness that David had is much like that of God’s graciousness. David loved his men and saw that the two hundred stayed behind not because they didn’t *want* to go. They were *unable* to go. He saw their shortcomings with love, much like how God saw David’s shortcomings when David came to him. God didn’t tell him that he would no longer have a part in his history; God freely forgave him and began the working in David to change him and it is evident here. A verse I mentioned earlier talked about forgiveness of sins and purifying all unrighteousness. That purification process restores the image of God within us. The Bible says that humanity was created in God’s image, but when man sinned against God that image was broken. However, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18) When we come to God with open and repentant hearts and recognize who he is, that image of God is restored with ever-increasing glory.

You see that David contemplated God’s glory. David recognized God’s hand in the rescue and victory. Look at what he said again, “No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the raiding party that came against us.” (23) David gave all the credit to God. God protected the men and God delivered the raiding party into their hands. The contemplation and transformation intermingle with one another. They happen at the same time and we see that in David. As David recognized what God has done, God is restoring his image in David. David is no longer a liar, a cheat, and an enemy to God’s people. David becomes more like God being gracious and thankful. In fact, David sends much of the plunder into Judah to thank those who helped him. The father in the story of the Lost Son restored the younger son as his son. The father was so happy to have him back. The young man was his son no matter what. In the same way, God restored David because that is the kind of God we have.

Now, I am certain that we have all made terrible mistakes in our lives. Usually, those things seem like good ideas at the time, but they lead to trouble. Thousands of years ago, there was a man named Abraham. Now, God had promised this man that he would be blessed and be a blessing. However, during his lifetime, there was a famine in the land where he was staying. It was like recession right now. People were having trouble paying the bills and feeding the family. Homes were in foreclosure and a lot of people didn't know what to do. Abraham had a great idea. He heard that the economy was roaring in Egypt, so he decides to go. He didn't seek God; he just went. Now, Abraham's wife Sarah was a looker and when he got to Egypt, he was worried that some Egyptian would see her and kill him for her. So, Abraham persuaded his wife to pretend that she was his sister. Sure enough, Pharaoh heard about Sarah and took her as his wife. Now Abraham had no wife. His plan just backfired. That's not the end of the story. God intervened and made sure that Abraham could get his wife back. God was gracious and forgiving to Abraham, much like he was to David.

The same grace and forgiveness extends to us. Take a look at yourselves. How many times do you think solely to yourself about what to do? Do you put more stock into your ideas and finding your own way of security, than trusting in God? Even though there is talk of economic recovery, unemployment is still high and the job market is not growing yet. There are many of us here that feel the constraint of the recession, but what do you do more of: seeking God or trying to find your own solution? In a very short while, my wife and I will have a baby girl. My wife will stop working and our income will constrict. We've had a hard enough time making ends meet before, but with less income and another person in our family, I really don't know how things will play out. I can't find anything in the job market and I am often tempted to look elsewhere. I am called to provide for my family and I am a man who likes action: too much talking and I get irritable. But I have to fight that natural impulse and trust God. Jesus says in Matthew 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" God takes care of the birds; surely he'll take care of my family. I do have to act, but I need to act according to God's word and the conviction he has given me. For me, that conviction is to stay. For David, that conviction was to pursue.

Our God is faithful to us. He provides for us and takes care of all that we need. We need to trust that. And when we go astray and wander off the path, God is faithful and he is waiting for us to return. God didn't hesitate when David came back to him. David was distressed that his men wanted to kill him and he had no way to go but to God. His strength was gone and he had no one to rely on, so he found strength in God. He repented and God forgave him and he lived his life as a forgiven sinner. There is a song by Sanctus Real that goes, "Well the past is playing with my head and failure knocks me down again. I'm reminded of the wrong that I have said and done, and that devil just won't let me forget. In this life, I know what I've been, but here in your arms I know what I am, I'm forgiven. I'm forgiven and I don't have to carry the weight of who I've been, 'cause I'm forgiven." Know that despite your sins, God sent his son to forgive you. Despite our natural tendencies to trust ourselves more than others, including God, he is waiting for us to realize we need him and he will reinstate us as his children and restore his image and glory within us. There is one thing about David that we should really admire and learn from, and that is the way he repents. David is a very sincere repenter, and God is very faithful to those who are sincere.