

“The Fugitive”

1 Samuel 19

¹And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David. (ESV)

We've been looking at I Samuel for the past several years in the fall. People often ask me, "Is your sermon done?" The standard answer I always give them is, "A sermon is never done, ever." In between services, I just say, "It's never done." Today was no different. I was in my office early this morning, I've worked all week on it and I was just staring at this thing. I literally wrote it out on butcher paper and it just wasn't clicking. Then, all of a sudden it came to me: HALO school. That makes sense of the whole chapter 19 of I Samuel. You could probably see immediately when I said that what I was talking about. Do you even know what HALO school is?

Oftentimes when I'm out and about in the community I'm almost never mistaken for being a pastor. In fact, people are often surprised. However, when they find out I was in the Army, they're almost never surprised. I haven't figured that out yet. When I was in the Army I had the opportunity to do several things and attend several schools: Ranger school, Jungle Warfare school for example. The one that was the most interesting and that seemed to apply most today was HALO school. If you're not familiar with HALO school it's basically free-fall parachuting (High Altitude Low Opening is what that stands for). Unlike the rest of the Army HALO is very precise because you're jumping out of airplanes from 16,000 to 17,000 feet. They don't want to put a lot of pressure on you, but you have to pass the course. That's where it becomes interesting. In HALO school it's broken down into different sections. You spend the first week literally lying on picnic tables as they say, "Left turn" and you put your left hand down. It's very boring but they're trying to brainwash you, literally, so if something goes wrong you'll know automatically what to do. The second week you go into a wind tunnel. And then the third week is where everything happens. Basically there are just three things that you have to do to pass the class. You have to be able to fall stable. You have to be able to fall stable with your equipment. I'm going to call equipment baggage this morning. And then you have to be able to land. You'd think that would be obvious but landing is part of the course. In HALO school the interesting thing is that once you pass a certain stage, if you ever fail it again you're dropped from the course. The first thing you have to do is to fall stable, and so the first five jumps you fall and an instructor flies with you (in front of you, and he watches). Once you have flown stable, if you ever pull your parachute in an unstable fashion anywhere in the rest of the course, you're gone. You can't just leave behind one step. Just because you've fallen stable one time doesn't mean you don't have to do it every time. What's that have to do with the Gospel?

We tend to think that the Gospel and our Christian walk are linear. We trust Jesus and then we learn theology and then we look at the Book of John and then we learn the Book of Matthew, Mark, and so on. Once we've learned those things we go onto bigger and better things. What you learn in the Christian faith is you always have to go back to the very first thing. If you forget about it, you're out. You can't win. I remember about my sixth or seventh jump in HALO school we had to jump with equipment that's about 40 or 50 pounds between your legs and a rifle on your side. For some reason when I jumped out something came loose and it threw off the whole physics of the jump. So for 9,000 feet I was tumbling head over heels and moving around in circles. You know that old saying, "Your life flashes before your eyes"? That didn't happen to me. The only thing I was thinking was, "I've got to be stable by the time I pull this thing or I'm out of here." I was in this kind of configuration [one arm and one leg extended] trying to balance things out and I pulled stable right before I hit 3,000 feet, which was the deadline, and the instructor gave me thumbs up and flew away.

The question is, "When we start going through hard times and things become difficult, what comes to your mind?" Does your life flash before your eyes? "Life is over. Life is gone." Or do you immediately think, "I have to fall stable. Where is my stability? Where is the rock? Where is the place that I need to go – the very beginning?" That's what we're going to look at today in a way.

We're going to look at three things from today's text, but they all tie together. It would be wrong to say one of them comes first or second or third. They all tie together. The first thing is the means of God's deliverance. The

second thing we're going to look at is the irony of God's deliverance, and the third thing we're going to look at is the certainty of God's deliverance.

The means of God's deliverance – the way He saves us is the baseline. It's the stable place where you have to be falling; otherwise everything else doesn't make sense. We're going to look at it in the life of Jonathan and David here. Let me read to you a few verses in chapter 19.

¹And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David. ²And Jonathan told David, "Saul my father seeks to kill you. Therefore be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself. ³And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything I will tell you." (ESV)

Up to this point in the Book of Samuel, Israel asked for a king like the other nations. God gave them a king like the other nations, in other words a bogus king who was very spiritually dull, in the person of Saul. Then Saul came on the scene with great fanfare in chapter 10. By chapter 15 the Lord had rejected Saul as king of Israel because Saul had rejected the word of the Lord. In chapter 16 David is anointed in secret. In chapter 17 David defeats Goliath. Once David defeats Goliath and everyone starts lauding and praising David, that's a little too much for Saul to take. Saul and David end up in conflict. Last week Saul starts his conflict with David. He begins to work it out in a covert fashion. The first wasn't covert when trying to pin him to a wall with a spear, twice. But the second is: he tried to give his older daughter in marriage and he said, "Just fight for me." He wanted the Philistines to kill David. And when his younger daughter, Michal, wanted to marry David he thought, "Great. Now's a great time for the Philistines to kill David." And he said, "The bride price is one hundred Philistine foreskins." And David was successful. At every turn David was successful. Then when you get to chapter 19, Saul is tired of playing around with things. He's finally decided, "I'm not going to do this covertly. I'm not going to do this in any way but just right out in the open." So he calls everyone together and tells them, "Kill David." It says he told Israel and Jonathan to kill David. What is Jonathan's response? Remember the whole purpose of the book is to make the case that Israel needs a king like David. So as Israel needs a king like David, what you hear first of all, is that Saul wants to kill David. And then the very next words you hear are, "But Jonathan." Remember whenever you hear the word "but," you delete everything that came before it. So Saul wants to kill David but Jonathan wants to save David. If you're making a case that David ought to be the king, right up front you see that one of Saul's sons, his oldest son actually, loved David and he's going to advocate for David. As he talks to David he goes and says, "My father wants to kill you." Jonathan utilizes a very familiar sales technique: he under-promises and over-delivers. I don't know if you caught that when I was reading it. He under-promises and over-delivers. He hears that Saul wants to kill David so he goes to David and says, "Here's the deal. My father wants to kill you and I'm going to go talk to him. You hide until I talk to him and then I'll come back and tell you what he says." So David has no idea that Jonathan in fact is actually going to intercede for him. David just figures Jonathan will tell him what's going on with Saul. So what does Jonathan do?

⁴And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you. ⁵For he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine, and the LORD worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?" (ESV)

So what case does he make before Saul? Jonathan goes before Saul and lays out a very rational case before him. He says, "The first reason you should not kill David is that he's innocent." That's pretty simple. "Not only should you not kill him because he's innocent, because not only has he not done anything wrong, he's only done everything right. He's not done anything wrong but in fact he's delivered Israel from Goliath. Not only did he deliver Israel from Goliath, but you, Saul, praised him for that." He's innocent. He hasn't done anything wrong. He's only done that which is right. And the last thing that Jonathan threw in would have been the zinger. It's because of the language he uses. The book of I Samuel was written to people who had been exiled. They'd been exiled from Jerusalem, they'd been carried off into Babylon and they were probably now on their way back. The author is making the case that when you get back to Jerusalem you need a king like David. Now the question is, "Why were they in exile in the first place?" The reason they were in exile was because of a wicked king,

Manasseh. I believe that's in II Kings. Manasseh was guilty of shedding innocent blood, and it was the shedding of innocent blood that pushed God over the edge and he said, "That's it. You guys are going into exile. I'm not going to tolerate your sin any more." So the people who would have originally heard this would have heard Jonathan being incredibly bold by in a sense by saying, "If you kill David you will be just like Manasseh. You'll be just like the wicked king who caused the people to go into exile. You don't want to do that, do you?" Saul's response is pretty simple.

⁶ And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death." ⁷ And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before. (ESV)

So Saul basically says, "Okay. I won't kill him." But he makes a stronger statement than that doesn't he? He says, "As the Lord lives." He swears by the Lord that he will not kill David. On one hand, that would seem like it would be very encouraging if you were David. On the other hand, if you think about Saul's life, does he have a very good track record of keeping the oaths and vows that he makes? He really doesn't. We don't know if he's just lying in order to get David into the house or if he thinks he's really going to do it. But ultimately we know that he's not going to honor this vow.

What's the means of God's deliverance here? His comments say the means of God's deliverance here for David is simple. It's a friend who is willing to intercede for him. But it's more than that. It's not only a friend who's willing to intercede for him but it is a son, a prince who has every right to the throne who is risking his life to intercede for his friend. He's giving up his rights as the future king of Israel. He's giving up everything he has in order to intercede and save his friend's life. In that sense when you fast forward into the New Testament you see that that is the exact mission that Jesus came to fulfill. Remember the Bible says, "There's a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

David's means of deliverance is no different than ours. What is our means of deliverance? First, our enemy isn't Saul, it's this thing called sin. We have Someone, a King who comes and gives up His rights, and where Jonathan would risk his life on behalf of his friend, Jesus would give His life on behalf of His friends. It's so powerful.

I remember shortly before I became a Christian. I was seventeen years old. I was a senior in high school. It was sometime in the fall, I think around October. I was cleaning out a closet for some reason at our house and from one of the top shelves fell a very beat-up white King James Bible. It had been my mother's that someone had given to her from a communicant's class or something. I'd never read the Bible. I flipped it open and the first thing that I saw was John 15:13 which says, "Greater love has no man than this, than to give his life for a friend." I remember sitting there thinking, "Would that that were true. Wouldn't it be great if that were true?" I shut the Bible and tossed it in the pile with the rest of the stuff. A couple months later I learned that there was in fact a Person who was willing to give His life for a friend. In fact, He didn't give His life for a friend, He gave His life for an enemy in order to make him a friend. And His name is Jesus. That's the baseline of our faith. When you're in free fall or you feel like you're in free fall and things are spinning out of control, when all of your baggage is making you just go crazy, what is the place you need to go to in order to pass, if you will? It's this Gospel of Jesus. That's the stable point. The stable point is the knowledge that Jesus has died for your sin. Knowing that Jesus has died for your sins, then you're enabled to fall stable. If you forget about that you're never going to fall stable. You're never going to be able to rest. The Christian faith isn't linear. You're always going back to the very first lesson. And the very first lesson is this: That you are a sinner and Jesus died to take away your sins. Do you believe that? If you're a Christian, do you believe that? You need to believe it all the time. Once you are in that stable place then you can begin to contemplate the bigger things.

What I mean by that is sort of the irony of the Gospel. The means of God's deliverance is through the person and work of Jesus. Now what's the irony of the Gospel? We see that next. Actually there's a transition passage here because David comes into Saul's household and what you see is that David has more great success and Saul apparently wigs out. He can't take it anymore and he tries to pin David to the wall again. Three times, and David finally says, "You know, two times with the spear thing I can live with, but the third time with the spear in the

wall I'm out of here." It says, "He flees in the night." That's the next place that we see the irony of God's deliverance.

¹¹ Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, "If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." ¹² So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped. ¹³ Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats' hair at its head and covered it with the clothes. ¹⁴ And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." ¹⁵ Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him." ¹⁶ And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goats' hair at its head. ¹⁷ Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'"

Another way to translate that or read that is that she's basically blaming it on David. "He said he would kill me if I didn't. What am I supposed to do?" You not only see irony here but you also see God's sense of humor. The original audience probably would have been laughing at Saul at this point, which of course would have made Saul even more angry. If you notice at the very beginning, Saul wants to kill David but Jonathan interceded. Here Saul wants to kill David but Michal interceded. "But Jonathan." "But Michal." Saul wants to kill David, but basically Saul's whole household wants David to be king.

There's positive stuff about Michal, but there's also negative stuff. There's the positive side where she's basically compared to Rahab in the book of Joshua when the spies came. How does she save them? She let them out through the window. I think that the imagery there is on purpose. Maybe there's a comparison here to Rachel. When Laban came to seek out Jacob and she stole his household gods, she sat on them. The word for that [god idols] is teraphim. That's the word here. But either way it's a practical joke.

The joke is on Saul, and there's a lot of irony here as well. What does God use to deliver David here? Besides using the daughter of David's worst enemy God uses a worthless idol in order to save David. That's the bad thing about Michal, by the way, that Michal actually thought it was the idol who would deliver David. The spies are outside and Michal said, "David, go outside." And she puts this huge idol in the bed with goat's hair on it and they come in and say, "Saul wants to see David." You can imagine, she being a princess she would have a little bit of pull. She said, "You can't come in but you can see right back there he's in bed." The messengers went back to Saul and said, "She wouldn't let us in the house but we saw him in bed." Saul, furious, said, "Bring him to me, here in the bed." You can imagine these guys carrying it (I imagine it was heavier than a person), thinking, "Man, he has gained some weight." They're carrying this idol in the bed to Saul and picture Saul lifting up his sword and bringing it down in the bed on this idol and it going "thud." And he pulls back the sheet and sees that he has been had. The irony of that is that God is using this worthless idol in order to achieve David's deliverance. Think of all the things that God says in the Old Testament about idols. You could be stoned for being an idolater. It's one of the Big Ten. You don't deal with idols and yet God takes an idol and uses it to deliver David. When you think about the Gospel, you fast forward into the New Testament with the whole thing one big picture of irony. Why is that? What is it about Jesus that God used to accomplish our salvation? God accomplished our salvation from our sins by using our very sins themselves.

Don has been looking at several chapters of Acts in the evening service. Awhile back he talked about how Peter preached a sermon in Acts chapter 2. He said, "By the predetermined plan you crucified the Lord of Glory. Who's guilty of crucifying Jesus? You are." Peter says. "Well, how guilty am I?" Here's the good news. You crucified the Lord of Glory but it is through His crucifixion that you find deliverance. It's through His death that you find life. It's through Him being mocked that you find assurance. It's through all of these ironic things that God has used. Remember in I Corinthians it says God used the foolish things of this world to shame the wise. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. What you see here is a great example of Old Testament foolishness. What kind of idiot would fall for the old "idol in goat's hair in the bed" trick? Saul would apparently, and it just makes him more mad. So, God has a sense of humor. We see the means of God's deliverance through a friend who is willing to risk or give everything for you. The irony is that God uses things you wouldn't normally think of.

The certainty of God's deliverance is what we'll look at next. I'm not going to read the whole thing for the sake of time, but I'll tell you the story quicker. Basically, Saul has been foiled twice now and he is now going to pursue David. What does David do when he flees from Michal's house? He flees to Samuel. It will be interesting to see how that went as well because remember Samuel at one point felt in danger by Saul. So I can imagine Samuel sitting there and David coming up and Samuel saying, "I was wondering when you were going to show up here." David fled to Samuel. It's only about two or three miles northwest of where he was to begin with. Saul finds this out and immediately dispatches a group of messengers. As this group of messengers goes to find David, they find Samuel with his prophets, and immediately the messengers that were sent to kill David begin to prophesy. One of the big debates in all of the Bible is what's going on here: what does prophesy mean or what is it when someone prophesies? We talked about it last year. In the Old Testament it can mean a number of things. It can mean that someone is speaking on behalf of the Lord through God's Spirit and they're bringing a message of God. In other words it's the places where you hear, "Thus saith the Lord." It could also mean an ecstatic experience of worship where you're not sure what they're saying and they're sort of dancing around sort of out of control. Or it could mean some kind of worship where they're just singing and using musical instruments. So when you read, "and they prophesied" it could mean any one of these things. But what they all have in common is that God's Spirit is completely in control of what is happening in that person's life at this minute. If they're speaking on behalf of God, or they're dancing on behalf of God, or they're ecstatic, God is the one who is controlling them at that point. God is the one who is operating in their hearts and in their lives, and the reason that is important is because these men came to kill David and God Himself has intervened and caused them to prophesy. He is in control. Whether they were preaching or whether they were singing and dancing we don't know. What we do know is that God was in control. So what does Saul do? He sends another group of messengers. That other group of messengers comes and before you know it they also are beginning to prophesy. Saul is foiled again. He sends another group of messengers. Three times and each time the messengers arrive they begin to prophesy. So Saul basically says, "You know, if you want something done right you have to do it yourself." Saul takes off and heads out on his own and let me read that to you.

²³ And he went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. ²⁴ And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (ESV)

God normally utilizes someone in our lives to tell you about Jesus. Sometimes he actually intervenes personally. That's what God has done here. Inasmuch as Saul said, "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself," you can imagine God saying, "I'll match that and up you one." God intervenes personally now. Before when Saul became king, God's Spirit came upon him in order to empower him to fulfill his job as the king. Now God's Spirit has come upon Saul specifically in order to undo that. Sometimes in my office I laugh because commentaries make statements where it says, "It was very uncouth and embarrassing for someone to lie around naked in the Ancient Near East." I think, "You know, in the twentieth century in Seattle it would be pretty uncouth as well. What's the point there?" But either way, did you notice what happened here? Remember how important clothes are? We talked about that. Saul stripped off his clothes and prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Saul was forced in the presence of God to take off these kingly garments because, "Saul, you have been rejected." Another bit of irony here is that the very one who was rejected for rejecting the word of the Lord is now in some sense either preaching it, praying it, singing it, or dancing it naked in front of everybody. God is in control here. That is the certainty of your deliverance. God is not only the one who saves by providing the means, but God is also the one who makes certain that it happens.

When we read this story most of us read it from David's perspective. At least I do. You just think, "Man, how crazy is that? First he has to hide in a field and Saul might kill him and Jonathan intercedes and Saul tries to throw the spear and then he escapes by the hair of his chinny chin chin and then the whole idol thing and he goes out the window." From David's perspective he's constantly in danger. When you step back and look at it from God's perspective, was David ever in danger for a second here? One time, ever? In our lives how often do you feel like things are just out of control? "I'm in danger, my finances are bad, my marriage is bad. Everything is just going crazy." From your perspective that's how it feels. But from God's perspective if you have trusted Him, if you're one of His, nothing can separate you from His love. Not only can nothing separate you from His love but nothing can harm you until it is your time to go.

I think one of the questions I have on your list of small group study questions is, "Some have said that the Christian is immortal until they've finished with the mission that God has given them to do." There's nothing that can harm you until you've accomplished what God wants you to accomplish in this life. Until that point you are bulletproof; you are immune. The person I learned this most of all with an exclamation point was a man named Jack Arnold. Some of you have heard me tell stories about Jack Arnold. His wife, Carol, spoke at the women's conference here a couple years ago. Jack was just a big guy. He played basketball for Wooden at UCLA years ago. He was a kind of guy who was fun to pick on, as well. What I mean by that is oftentimes I'd go to Baltimore and meet my friend Paul Warren and his sons, and we'd sit around and tell stories about Jack. Jack, among other things, would always say, "Maybe I just believe the Bible more than most people." He meant that when he said that. In fact, six months after I got into ministry I called him up and said, "Jack, you know that whole thing about you believing the Bible more than most people? I think you do. Ministry sort of opened my eyes to that." The reason I tell you that is because we would all sit around telling stories and he would always say, "Oh, you guys, you just embellish things. You're just making that stuff up about me." I downloaded this story of his passing because I don't want to be accused by Jack when I finally go to heaven for having embellished it. This is written by his assistant pastor, and it was put in the newspaper, January 9, 2005.

Jack was preaching at Covenant Presbyterian Church on the cost of discipleship. As he neared the end of the sermon, he spoke of his favorite verse "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." He quoted Wesley saying, "Until my work on this earth is done, I am immortal. But when my work for Christ is done," and he slapped his hands together toward the sky saying, "I am outa here! I don't know about you, but when my work is done, I go to be with Jesus. And that will be gain! And when I go to heaven, . . ." At this point, Jack paused briefly, looked up, swayed slightly, and grabbed the podium before falling back to the floor. And he was gone. [see http://right-mind.us/blogs/blog_0/archive/2005/01/11/1188.aspx for more text and photo]

When he said he believed something he believed it. The interesting thing is that he spent a good bit of his life depressed because he was the tutor for people like Charles Swindoll and Hal Lindsay and a lot of other guys, and he never had a church that was bigger than 300, I think. He felt like a lot of it had been a waste. Yet in his death he got more fame and more acclaim from more people than those guys can ever dream of having. Right until the very end God wanted a mission to be accomplished and God protected him until the very end. When the end was there God took him. The question is, "What has God called you to do and why aren't you doing it?" If you know that God is going to protect you and that you are immortal until the mission that he has given you is accomplished, why then aren't you doing it? Now, a lot of you are sitting there thinking, "I don't know what my mission is." The problem in most churches is that most people don't have one. Most people in most churches are just sitting there. They'll say, "Yep, when it's my time to go it's my time to go and I'm going to just sit here in this pew and wait. I'll just wait until it's my time to go." That's a horrible way to go. You know how you find your mission out? What you do? You just do something. Do anything, but just do it. Begin doing ministries. Start taking some risks. I was thinking about it this morning and I thought, "Man, how offensive would that be to people I thought of things like, "If you're retired, why are you still here? Why aren't you on the mission field somewhere? Why aren't you leading short-term missions or doing these kinds of things?" People often complain to me about missions for example. "Why don't we do more? Why don't we do this? Why don't we do that?" We have so many people that could be going. Why aren't we? That might not be your particular call. I realize that. But, it has to be somebody's call because someone needs to go. The fact is, we are immortal and nothing can touch us until God is finished with us. So the challenge I leave you with today is just this. First, do you understand the means of God's deliverance, that it is through Jesus and Him only? Secondly, that God uses crazy circumstances often to accomplish what He wants to do. The third thing is, "What is your purpose in life? What is your mission? What has God called you to do that nothing can thwart until it is done?" I'm going to give you a hint. You probably can't know that until after the fact, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't pursue it.