

“Paranoia . . . Self-Destroya”

1 Samuel 22:6-10

Today’s text is two chapters long. As I left the house this morning I told my wife, “Judy, you need to really pray for me this morning – for my sermon.” She said, “Why?” I said, “I have to preach two chapters today.” The reason that’s important is that the way I preach is to keep a mental Rolodex of what I want to say, and when it’s only a few verses that mental Rolodex is manageable. With two chapters it’s a little bit of a challenge. The reason we need to look at two chapters is because the story that we’re looking at today is two chapters long. Also, today is the last day that I will actually be preaching 1 Samuel for this year. Next fall I’ll probably pick it up in September or so. Starting in verse 6 of chapter 22 of 1 Samuel.

⁶ Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. ⁷ And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, “Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, ⁸ that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day.” (ESV)

Most of you know that before I came on staff at the church I worked with Eli Lilly. I was a neuroscience sales rep. I worked with psychiatrists between Renton and Vancouver and all the way out to Port Angeles. I sold two drugs. One was a schizophrenia drug that was the third biggest drug in the world at the time. That ought to surprise or shock you that the third biggest drug is a schizophrenia drug. The other thing was an antidepressant, which I know you’ve seen in commercials. I see them all the time. “Depression hurts.” The benefit that I got from changing from working with neuroscience to being a pastor was pretty big because I had to know the symptoms of all these different mental illnesses. So I’ve been able to sort of help some folks. They come in and that say, “I’m feeling a, b, c and d.” And what do you know? It clicks and I’m able to help them out. The downside to knowing those symptoms is that you see them in folks, frankly, and they don’t come to you for help.

I was reading through 1 Samuel this week, preparing for the text. I always keep away from diagnosing Bible characters with mental illness. A lot of it is just sin. A lot of it is demons. But as I was reading through this, I thought, “I’ve heard this before.” What are these symptoms? Hyper-vigilance, where you’re constantly on the lookout. That’s one of them. How about someone who views everything that happens through the eyes of conspiracy? Everything that’s done they view through a filter of mal-intent. Everyone’s out to get them. Of course they do think everyone is conspiring against them. They tend to be incredibly jealous. They tend to also manifest aggression toward those who they think are out to get them. You guys are thinking the same thing I was. “That’s paranoid personality disorder.” As I read through this text I couldn’t help but think, “That is what Saul has.” I was trying to keep away from that but when I got to this point I had to admit to myself, “Tommy, he’s just crazy.” Or maybe he’s not. You see, all of us at some level are crazy. Paranoid Personality Disorder is a real disorder in the DSM-IV [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition] for psychiatrists. Do you know what the treatment is? There isn’t one. Do you know what hope there is, humanly speaking? There is none. Well, there is a little bit of hope because as with every disorder (I know, having several of them myself) they’re only considered to be a disorder if they impair your function socially or if they impair your performance at work. In other words, you can be mentally ill and as long as it doesn’t affect your work or your family I guess you’re okay. That always struck me as odd.

Saul’s manifestation of these paranoidias has begun to affect his work, certainly. Today they really come to full fruition in the murder of the priests of Nob. Saul has gone over the deep end. I have to cover two chapters today, so I’m going to pull out a few Gospel principles that we see in this whole text. What’s the hope for someone like Saul? It makes sense that the only hope for someone like Saul, who’s paranoid, who thinks everyone’s out to get him, is security in knowing that someone is always protecting him, that someone is there always to cover his back, that there is someone who promises never to fail him or forsake him. “Saul, all the world can be arrayed against you but I will never fail you or forsake you, and I’m the only one that matters at the end of the day.” Saul had that promise. He could have embraced that promise but he rejected it. And having rejected that promise from God, he then was left to himself so he either sort of sucks it up or he becomes paranoid, but he didn’t have a lot of options.

We’re going to look at least three Gospel principles this morning as we consider this text. The first one is that in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of religious people the Gospel is foolishness or folly. Remember, the whole purpose of this Book of 1 Samuel was to make the case that Israel needs a king, and not just any king, but a king like David. Israel said instead, “We want a king, God, but we don’t want a king like David. We want a king like the other nations.” A king like the other nations is a king who has all the external qualities that you’d think a king should have. Saul had them. He was big. He was a mighty warrior although he did have a cowardly streak, it would seem. We also know that he was spiritually dull. He wasn’t a very good shepherd. Yet when you looked at Saul you’d say, “That’s the guy who has all the qualifications to be the king.”

Who would you look at and see none of the qualifications to be the king? Or at least not as qualified as Saul? Maybe you'd go to a family that had eight sons, because after seven they stopped counting in Israel. Seven was the perfect number and anything eight or after was just extra. David was number eight. God chose the youngest son, number eight, who would have been completely outside of consideration, who was a shepherd which would have been odious in the eyes of many people. He said, "That one is going to be my king." The very last person that you would ever expect. The way God runs things is upside down and backwards. "The first will be last and the last will be first." David's qualifications are completely contained in his calling. That's what makes him qualified.

What makes you and me qualified? Is it because we're the best? Why did God initiate with us? Why did he initiate with you? Because you're such good people? Because I'm so good? I know I'm not. The Gospel's upside down and backwards because the Gospel says that God seeks out the very worst of sinners. If God wants to get something done you would think He'd seek out all the best people. That's what we'd do, right? You want to get something done, you seek out the best people. When God wants to get something done, he seeks out the worst people. Who do you think He brings to support His fugitive king? David is a fugitive now. Saul is trying to kill him. David's on the lamb, and who do you think God would send to David in order to buttress him, in order to make sure he makes it to the end? If I was God and I wanted David to be king and David was fleeing I would send to David the very brightest and the best and certainly the people with the best attitudes. I'd say, "David, here are the ones. These guys will take care of you." But we see in the text that God doesn't work that way. Notice who flocks around David in chapter 22.

² *And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them. . . (ESV)*

So as David is fleeing through the wilderness, the people that God sends to help him, the people that flock around the fugitive king are the outsiders, not the insiders. The people who flock around the fugitive king are those who are disconsolate, those who are outcast, not the ones who are on the inside. You find people on the inside around the person who seems like they would do the best job based on outward appearance. Yet remember what God said in 1 Samuel 16:7, "Don't judge on outward appearance." Where David gathered the disconsolate and the outcast, whom did Saul gather? Cronies. That's it. We know that Saul only gathered cronies and not the people on the outside because of what he says to them.

⁷ *And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds,*

In other words, when Saul addresses these people when he feels that there's a conspiracy afoot, he addresses his inner court, he doesn't say, "Men of Israel" because there weren't people from all the tribes of Israel there. He says, "Men of Benjamin" because the only people that Saul had close to him were those who were like him and those in his family. The reason that they were with Saul was not because of his humility or his calling, but because of what he could do for them. It was pure politics. Every administration, whether it's Republican or Democrat, is sort of like Saul providing the most pork barrel for their districts, if you will. So basically he's saying, "If David comes in are you still going to get all that pork? You're not." Saul doesn't care about gathering those from the outside and bringing them in. What Saul cares about is his continuing his power.

As we move on from the Gospel being folly, another interesting thing is God's true king looks insane but is really wise, and the rejected king tries to look wise and dignified but he's really crazy. Earlier in the story as David is fleeing to Gath you read that the people in the land say, "Is this not the king of Israel?" He's endorsed by people outside of Israel. He's been endorsed by Jonathan, he's been endorsed by Michal, he's been endorsed by the priesthood. Now he's going through Gath and the king of Gath says, "Isn't this the king of the land?" David wants to avoid engaging or getting in trouble so what does David do?

^{21:13} *So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. ¹⁴ Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? ¹⁵ Do I lack madmen -*

(I love that line. There are enough crazy people around me.)

- that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" (ESV)

On one hand you have David who's acting insane but in reality he's the true king. How do you see Saul acting, who in reality is insane? At the beginning it said,

⁶ *Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. (ESV)*

In other words, Saul has all the outward appearance of being completely sane and completely in charge. He's sitting under this tree where they would sit to judge and he's got his spear in his hand and he looks good. But at the end of the day, who do you want to be with if the Gospel's true? If you don't believe the Gospel I'd say go with the person with the most money and the most girls and have as much fun as you can now. But if the Gospel is true, do you want to go with the king who seems to be sane but in reality doesn't know what's going on, or the king who would fain insanity, who would do something crazy in order to actually win people over? Isn't that what Jesus did? Jesus, this fugitive king? Jesus, the fugitive king, seeks and draws to Himself the worst sinners. Remember what God said about the Gospel in I Corinthians chapter one?

1:27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (ESV)

The first Gospel principle is that the Gospel is foolish. You see that through the whole Old Testament. You see it in the New Testament. The second Gospel principle we see in here is that God is sovereign over all things. Another way to put that is that even though the drama around you looks evil and bad, God is still the author. He's the One Who wrote the play; He's the One who directs the play. Another way to put that is God is just as active in providence as He is in miracles. Most of us think, "Is God active in my life?" Most of us would probably think, "Neh, maybe. Maybe not." When you get a windfall check, maybe an aunt that you never heard of sends you a check for a lot of money and you think, "Praise the Lord. God has blessed me. Now, He has not done anything for the past thirty years but in this miracle, in this one event He has blessed me and shown up." We tend to believe that, but in reality what we learn through the whole Bible is that God is just as active in providence as He is in miracles. He's active behind every molecule of air, behind every single thing that happens, and that ought to give you encouragement because what's going on around you doesn't catch Him by surprise.

If you look at this story it's pretty horrifying. David is fleeing from Saul because Saul is trying to kill him. David goes to Ahimelech the priest and says, "Can you give me some food and a weapon?" Ahimelech says, "Sure." He gives him the stuff. David flees. Saul finds out that he has been to Nob where Ahimelech lives. Saul goes there and calls Ahimelech and says, "Did you help David?" Ahimelech is completely innocent. He says, "Sure I did. I always help him. Why wouldn't I help him this time?" Saul turns to his men and says, "Kill him and all the priests here." There were 85 of them, I believe. Saul's guards wouldn't kill Ahimelech and the rest of the priests. But now it gets interesting because in chapter 21 there was this odd verse that popped out. David was asking for food and a weapon and in the middle of the verse pops up this thing that says,

21:7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen. (ESV)

It just so happens that as David's sneaking away he happens by Ahimelech, the priest at Nob. And Doeg just happens to be there. Doeg tells Saul Ahimelech did help David. When Saul tells his men to kill the priests, the men say, "No." He tells Doeg the Edomite to do it and Doeg does. Not only does Doeg kill the priests but he also kills every man, woman, and child in the whole city. That should strike you as odd because the reason that Saul got rejected before is because he failed to do that with Israel's enemy.

The question is, "Where is God in all of this? Who is responsible for this?" This story is horrifying, yet it shouldn't surprise you. God told us it was going to happen. Let me read 1 Samuel 2 about what happened there. If you remember, Eli was the priest and he had sons who were very wicked. So God rejects Eli's house and tells Eli,

2:31 . . . I will cut off your strength and the strength of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. 32 Then in distress you will look with envious eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed on Israel, and there shall not be an old man in your house forever. 33 The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to grieve his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men. (ESV)

So God told them it was going to happen. "All but one is going to die of your household." This is the event. We know that one, Abiathar, gets away. So the question is, "Who is responsible for this act?" Is it Saul, Doeg, or is it God? It's an uncomfortable question, isn't it? Here's the right answer to that question. The answer is, "Yes." In other words, as you look through the scriptures you see that what man intends for evil God intends for good. What Doeg and Saul intended for evil, they are completely and utterly responsible for. But God intended it to fulfill His promise, and that should give you hope as well. As you look around you in the world, if you're like me and you read the paper all the time, you feel like the world is just going crazy around you. Whether it's your own country or whether it's the Middle East or whether it's Europe. No matter what's going on you wonder, "Where is God in all of this?" The answer to that question is, "He is in all of it." That should give you great hope, but it should also give you a great sense of peace.

I preached last week that we need to be driven by Jesus and not by what political party we are. That stuff is important. It's important to vote, it's important to be engaged in the political process. But at the end of the day no matter who the President is or no matter who the President of the European Union is, at the end of the day you have to ask yourself this question, "Do I believe that God is really the author of this play and that it's not a tragedy, but in fact it's a comedy? In the end the good guy wins. Do I believe that?" I'll be honest with you. As a pastor if someone asked me, "Do you think most of your people believe that?" I would say, "Absolutely not," partly because I don't always. But the question is, "Will you believe that?" Do you believe that? Do you believe in all of the things going on in your life that somehow God is working together for your good? If you don't believe that it makes life pretty hard.

There's a phrase that my kids hear in my house all the time. What I'm constantly saying is, "Nothing is easy." I'm not saying it to them, I just say it to myself all the time. "Honey, can you hang up a picture for me?" "Sure. How long could that take? One minute. It's easy." You know the first nail you hit into the wall, the whole thing comes down. Four days later you're outside slab jacking the foundation of the house because you tried to hang up a picture. Nothing is easy. That leads to the next point.

The third Gospel principle that I wanted to point out to you this morning is that if you're not home you're in the wilderness. There is only one of three places you can exist as human beings according to the Bible. You either exist in slavery (in bondage to your sin), or you exist in heaven with Jesus. If you're not in one of those two places, you're right here in the middle, the wilderness. When you look at the pattern of David's life, on one hand if you read the Bible out of context you'd say, "Man, that's rough. God called this kid who's sitting out being a shepherd, minding his own business and God says, 'Here's what I'm going to do for you. I'm going to make you king and what that means is that everyone is going to want to kill you and you're going to have to flee into the wilderness. Eventually I'm going to make you not only the king but your house is going to endure forever. Eventually everything's going to be golden, but between the first event and the last event you're going to have this time in the wilderness.'" If you read the Bible, every one of God's people follows that pattern in their lives. What does it mean to be an Israelite? It means you are delivered from Egypt into the Promised Land. But where do you exist for forty years in the meantime? In the wilderness. If you're David you flee from Saul and you're going to eventually become king (you know that) but where do you live in the meantime? In the wilderness. If you're a Christian now and you've trusted Jesus to deliver you from your sins and you're not yet in heaven, where does that mean you live now? You live in the wilderness. The sooner that we come to grips with that, the easier life is because much of our time and much of our misery revolves around the fact that we really don't believe that we live in the wilderness. What we really believe is that we need to be as comfortable as we can now. We need to be as comfortably financially, physically. We need to be comfortable politically whether you're Republican or Democrat. Everything needs to be comfortable and satisfying now. Anything that breaks the mold of your comfort or my comfort, that's what makes us feel a little bit like we're in the wilderness. That's why so many people struggle with changes that happen in church. You look around the world and say, "Okay, the world's a wilderness. It's crazy out there but this little place right in here, this is my safe spot. This is where I get to come and be sane. This is where I get to come and escape all the craziness that's out in the world around me." Yet what does the Gospel call you to do? The Gospel says that if the world around you is changing, if the world around you is crazy, you must change your church to figure out how to embrace them because you and I are in the wilderness and our job is to bring as many people home with us as we can. It's not to have a safe spot in the middle of the wilderness. It's not to have a place where we can drink coffee in the middle of the wilderness until all of the storms blow over. The purpose of our existence is to glorify God and to enjoy Him. The purpose of the church is the gathering and the perfecting of the saints. We must gather people to ourselves. If that makes you uncomfortable, think about the Gospel. Where were you? God at some point gathered you, and He calls us to walk through the wilderness. I love the last verse in chapter 22 because Abiathar the priest has escaped. He's escaped and he's gone and told David that Saul has killed everyone. What does David say? The last thing he says to him,

²³ *Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.* (ESV)

You see, it's not just Israel, it's not just David, it's not just the church that lives in the wilderness. Jesus Himself went to the wilderness. After His baptism Jesus went to the wilderness for forty days, and the beauty of the Gospel is that when Jesus went to the wilderness He was completely and utterly obedient in the wilderness where you and I are not obedient in the wilderness. Israel wasn't, David wasn't. Jesus was. And if we're willing to trust Jesus He says, "I've already accomplished the wilderness for you. Trust me and I promise you I will keep you safe. Trust me and I promise you I will get you through it". Think about that.