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## *Vagabond: Why Are You Alone?* I Samuel 21:1-9

Last week we watched as David, the teenage shepherd boy, knelt to be anointed by the prophet Samuel in I Samuel 16. Five chapters later, a lot of water has gone over the dam. After his victory over Goliath, David is showered with glory. He marries Saul's daughter, Michal. He becomes the dearest of friends with Saul's son, Jonathan. He becomes one of Saul's generals and leads his armies from one victory to another. Everything he sets his hand to, David does well. In fact, they even wrote a top ten best-selling song about him. They sang it and danced in the streets: "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands."

David was a remarkable blessing to King Saul. His harp playing was the only thing that could soothe Saul when he experienced his frequent emotional breakdowns. Saul's daughter loved David, his son loved David, his soldiers loved David, his people loved David and were singing songs to him in the streets. And most of all, it was clear that God loved David and that David loved God back. What a gift to Saul to have such a talented, popular, loyal servant as this man! It was like Saul had gained another son. He couldn't have been happier...right?

I want you to follow the progression of Saul's bitterness as we find it just in chapter 18 alone: 7: "As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him." ...v. 9: "...Saul kept a jealous eye on David." ...v. 12: "Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with David but had left Saul."...v. 28 "When Saul realized that the Lord was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days."

Never had there been a more loyal servant than David was to Saul. And never was a king more paranoid and suspicious of someone than Saul was of David. He tried sending David to the front lines, hoping that the enemy would kill him. That failed. Three times he tried to pin David to the wall with his own spear. That failed. He even ordered his own son, Jonathan, to kill David. But Jonathan loved David as a brother and not only wouldn't strike him down, he warned David of Saul's intention. In 20:41, we read one of the most poignant goodbyes in the Bible: "David got up from the south side of the stone [where he was hiding] and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most."

So...David...the greatest of generals...the comforter of the king...the husband of the princess...the best friend of the crown prince...David loved by the multitudes, about whom songs were sung and dances danced...**David was now a vagabond**... running for his life from the man who should have fallen down and thanked God for the gift of a subject so faithful and true. For the next few weeks, we are on the lam with David, the vagabond. First stop? Nob. (1-9)

When David began the run for his life, his first stop was Nob, the city of priests. Nob was located near the present day Mt. of Olives. From there, you could look across the valley and see the hilltop where, one day, Solomon would build his great temple. That would become the center of worship of Yahweh. But there was no temple yet. Only a tent called the "tabernacle." That tent was pitched in a little bump in the road called Nob. Ahimelech, the High Priest, lived there. So did 85 other priests. This is where God was worshipped, where sacrifices were made, where God could be sought.

In other words, David's first stop on his run for his life was where? The church! So...what do you think of his first instinct? Pretty good, right? Life was closing in on him. Friends were betraying him. He was afraid and unclear about what he should do next. He needed help. He needed protection. He needed sanctuary. He needed guidance. And so, he turned to the church.

I met a woman this week. She is brand new to our church... just showed up last week. And she is so broken. She has had a really tough life, but everything she has experienced pales compared to what happened two years ago today. She lost her vibrant 30 year old daughter—the mother of 2 beautiful children—to pancreatic cancer. She is on a search for peace and hope. She wants to sing again. She used to sing. So she is turning to our church for help and for a new song.

That's exactly what David did. He fled to Nob, the place of worship, the city of priests and he appeared suddenly before Ahimilech. Ahimilech was thrilled to see him, wasn't he? He ran to him, embraced him and said, "Come on, let's grab a \$5 foot long at Sub and catch up on what's been happening in your life." Is that what happened? Not quite. What did Ahimilech do when he saw David? He trembled!

Why? Ahimelech was the High Priest of Israel. It's not like he'd never dealt with VIPs before. It was his job to seek the Lord's will on behalf of the leaders of his nation. But when David slunk into town, Ahimelech was terrified. Why? I think the answer can be found in his two questions...which are really one question. What was it? **"Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"**

This wasn't a petty tribal chieftain come calling. This was David, the famous warrior of Saul... the slayer of Goliath, the slayer of ten thousand of Israel's enemies! Everywhere this man went, people sang songs about him. He never went anywhere without an entourage and fanfare. For David to slink into Nob by himself would be like Barack Obama sneaking up the back stairs to my office all alone, asking for prayer. I would ask the same question, I'm sure: "Mr. President...what are you doing here alone? Where's your Secret Service detail?" I might even tremble! Because I would

know... something's up! Something's wrong here. Something's rotten in Denmark. This doesn't make any sense.

So how does David respond to Ahimelech's question? He lies! **"Shhhh...the king sent me on a secret mission! I'm not supposed to tell anyone about it. My men are waiting for me at a rendezvous point."**

How weird! David is in trouble. He's running for his life. His first—good—instinct is to turn to the High Priest...turn to the church for help. But then, he **lies** about what is going on in his life that drove him to the church in the first place. Why didn't David say, "The king is trying to kill me? Everyone, including his son, knows that I am loyal to Saul, but he is trying to kill me and I don't know what to do. Please help me. Please pray for me. Please guide me."

How weird it is that David would turn to the church in his time of desperation...and then not tell the truth about what is going on in his life. **Weird?** It happens all the time! People show up here because their lives are a mess and they know they need God's help to figure a way out of that mess. But then...when they are in a place where they really **could** get help...really could experience God's love...really could find a way to turn their lives around...they don't tell the truth. They put on a mask. They put on a show. They pretend that everything is just fine. And they don't get the help they desperately need.

You don't get the help you desperately need! And you never **will** get the help you need unless you tell the truth. Oh, you might get some band aids put on your "owies". Like David... some bread, a sword. You might get communication tips. Some parenting tips. Some prayer tips. Some Bible tips. Enough to help you survive... but not live. Because you will not tell the truth: "This thing in my life is trying to kill me!" And you will never get the help you most desperately need. Ask anyone at C.R. **The way back to life begins with telling the truth, not covering up!**

**What happened to David?** Why was he on the run? Why was he lying to save his skin? **Was he afraid of dying?** Wait a second! What happened to the mighty man of valor? What happened to the heart of the shepherd boy who stood before Goliath when nobody else was willing to? Who fought this nine foot giant when everyone else was trembling like Ahimelech? Remember David's words to Goliath? **"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied...this battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."** What happened to the Spirit-empowered, anointed one of God who ran toward his giant with nothing but a slingshot...and killed him dead? Was that so long ago? Had he forgotten how God had protected him? All he needed to do was look at Goliath's sword. It was right there in the tabernacle! The reminder of what God had done through him.

David had faced death many times since then...courageously. **So what** if Saul wanted to kill him? **So what** if he wanted to stick him with his spear? Couldn't God protect

him from that, too, if he wanted to? And if he didn't want to...couldn't David trust God even in death? **What happened to David?**

I asked this question of several folks this week. Sheila Mischke had the sharpest answer: "He sinned! He was in sin. He forgot who he was became fearful and started running away... because he stopped believing that God could protect him...even from Saul." What do you think about that answer?

Let me add one more idea. I think we find part of the answer in Ahimelech's question: **"Why are you alone?"** David had one of the closest friendships you will find in the Bible. With whom? Jonathan! Saul's son. The crown prince. We read about their emotional farewell. **But** how would things have been different if David had said, "I need you right now, Jonathan. It would be dangerous for me to face this danger without the friendship and guidance of my dearest friend. So, even though you are suggesting I run, I would rather take my chances trusting God with you by my side." Or what if Jonathan had said, "You are not running away alone. If you must run, I will run with you! We will face this together." Imagine the difference it would have made if Jonathan was standing next to David when he started to lie to the High Priest. "Wait a second...that's not true! Tell him the truth, David. My crazy father is trying to kill you and we need God's help."

Instead, David abandoned his closest friend and chose to face his darkest time alone. **But** he still had a chance. He could have told Ahimelech the truth! "I am running for my life, I need your protection and guidance. I need your prayers." But he lied. And all he got was some bread and a sword. And as we will see in a few weeks, **the massacre of every priest in that town...** all because he lied. **All because he was alone.**

In Genesis 2, we read the story of creation. Over six days God creates everything. And every time he creates something, he pronounces the same word. What is it? "Good! That is very good." Then, for the first time, God says something is **not** good. What was not good? "That man should be alone!" God has not changed his opinion on the matter. And our lives...and our inactive membership rolls...and society are littered with the remains of those who try to live life alone.

I have always believed this. I have always believed that it was not good for **me** to be alone. I am afraid of it, in fact, because I know too many pastors who have thrown their lives away, their marriages, their ministries, their kids... because they began to lie to themselves and to others and to God. And they had no one to hold them to the truth. No one to stand with them as they faced the truth. So, since I have been a pastor—and before that—I have always had men that I shared my life with, so that I would not be alone. I want you to meet some of those men. You hear me talk about them. These are some of the guys from my Friday morning LifeGroup. There are a few more but these are the only ones who are willing to be seen with me in public.

One of the richest parts of my personal spiritual life is the relationship I have with these men. We have learned the power of gathering around God's Word in humility, of speaking the truth to each other, of learning to accept each other right where we are,

of being loyal to one another and protecting confidentiality. We meet every week. We laugh and tease and share what is going on in our lives. Then we read a passage of scripture together and reflect upon what that part of the Bible is saying to us. We pray for one another ...and this is important...we check in with each throughout the week to see how God is answering our prayers.

Recently, we have begun to reap the rewards of having met together for so long. We have been dealing with some important issues: job loss, marriage struggles, legal issues, fat bellies... We are challenging each other to be better men. This accountability can be very simple. At one meeting, Greg pushed a plate of cookies away from me just as I was reaching for one because we are committed to losing weight.

But this accountability can also be very powerful. While I was in my hotel room in Oxford two weeks ago, I read a string of e mails from our LifeGroup. That morning their Bible study on Saul's suicide led to a time of powerful sharing in which some of them shared of moments when they had despaired of life. I was so glad I wasn't there...not because I wouldn't have loved to have been a part of it. But because as I read these e mails going back and forth, men ministering to each other, I realized I didn't have to be there. This was their group and they were taking care of each other. It was awesome.

How many of you read my e-bulletin this week about the 341 Chapel Hill folks who have slipped through the cracks? What happened? At one point, they were standing up here, making membership vows, excited about their future in this church family. Now...they are slipping away. There are all kinds of reasons that might happen. They don't like the preaching. They don't think we provide enough programs around here. (That's not very likely, is it?) They feel like the church failed them in a time of need. They got distracted by other stuff.

But you know what I think the primary reason is that folks slip away? From the church, and often from God? **They are alone.** They never develop the kind of relationships that help them tell the truth about their lives; that help them tell the truth to God and to themselves. They never develop the kind of relationships that challenge them to go deeper and to serve more sacrificially and to become the person that God intends for them to be. Instead...they are alone.

If you are in a LifeGroup such as I have described would you raise your hand? If you are not in such a group, we are trying something new this morning. LifeGroup Connect Sunday. If you are not in a LifeGroup...and you are convinced that it is not good for you to be alone, there will never be a better opportunity for you to find out more about it than this morning. Or maybe you are in a group but there isn't much spiritual about it; it's more of a fellowship group. But you'd like to learn how to amp things up spiritually. We can help with that, too. I would invite all of you to make your way to the Gathering Place after this service, find out what is going on...and figure out whether it is time for you to stop walking this life alone.

## **SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- **Read** the passage out loud.
- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **Pray together:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **Dig deeper**
  1. What was Ahimelech's first question to David? Why? Why did he "tremble?" Why did David lie?
  2. What is God's opinion of "aloneness" for us? (Hint-Genesis 2:18) Even when we have people around us, we can still be alone. How would you define biblical companionship? Do you have it?