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Vagabond: Stuck in the Glory Days I Samuel 21:8-22; 1a

David had it all. Holy Spirit-anointed, Slayer of Goliath, husband of the King's daughter, friend of the King's son, leader of the King's armies. He had the world by the tail! In fact, everyone was singing a special David-song. "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands!"

Last week, one of our friends said to me, "Wow...so archaeologists **really** discovered the music for David's song?" Yes... and it lives on today as the Conga Line song. My wife said, "Those people believe you. You'd better come clean with them." So... I'm sorry. I was kidding. I made that up. David's song was not the Conga Line song. (But it is kind of catchy, don't you think?)

But the rest is true! David was a hero, loved by all, sung about, danced for, honored and adored... **by everyone... except for King Saul.** Saul was being poisoned by his jealousy and envy and paranoia about David...the truest subject a king could ever have. What a pity!

So, David ran away. Do you remember his first stop? Nob. The City of Priests. Not a bad choice, right? David needed guidance, direction and comfort in his life. He needed to know God's will and be reassured of his presence, right? So he went to Ahimelech, the High Priest. For prayer and guidance. Except...David never asks for prayer or guidance. What he does ask for might surprise you. **David—the anointed one of Israel—is in a nosedive...and it just got steeper.**

"Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon..." David fled so quickly he didn't have time to grab a weapon to protect himself. But Ahimelech replies, "What...does this look like an armory? This is a tabernacle. We don't keep weapons in the tabernacle. **Wait...there is one sword.** In fact, you might recognize it." Ahimelech walks over to a corner of the tent, pushes the ephod aside, and pulls out the sword of Goliath. The very sword that Goliath had used to threaten David. The very sword that David used to cut off the giant's head after he killed him.

This may be the coolest sermon prop ever! It was a custom job from the famous Gig Harbor sword-making firm, Eric Peavy and sons! Cool, huh? This is built to scale. This sword was a trophy of one of David's greatest moments: when he slew Goliath, the champion of the Philistines. After that, the Philistines were routed and Saul's army

was jubilant! This sword was kept here, in the holy Tabernacle, as a trophy to remind them of God's faithfulness.

So David takes the sword and some bread and dashes for his next destination. And it is the strangest destination you could imagine, isn't it? Of all the villages, towns, hamlets, bergs David might have chosen...he heads for **Gath**. Now...what do we know about Gath? **It was Goliath's hometown!** It was one of the major cities of the Philistines; the arch-enemies of Israel. For ANY Israelite to walk into Gath would have been foolhardy to say the least. **But for David...**the slayer of thousands of Philistines...the slayer of their hometown hero, Goliath...for **him** to walk into Gath. What word would you use to describe that? Yes! **Insane!**

It would be hard enough for David to sneak into Gath without being recognized. He was famous. In fact, even the Philistines knew David's song, didn't they? "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: **"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?"** Do you remember the song, "This is the song that has no end. And it goes on and on my friend...?" I'll bet David reached a point where he hated his song!

So, when even your enemies know your theme song, it's not easy to sneak into their town. But there's one more little hint that might have given David away as he snuck into Gath. What? Yes! The sword! Goliath's sword. Tell me...how do you sneak around with this thing in your belt? Maybe by covering it up? Right... no one will see that. **If anyone in Gath didn't already know who David was, I'll bet this sword was something of a giveaway, don't you think?** It would be like sneaking into Green Bay this week, stealing the Lombardi Trophy, and then taking it to a Green Bay pawn shop...wearing something like this. [*Pastor Jim in Steelers' jersey*] They just might notice you!

So here's the big question: **What in the world was David thinking?** Israel's not a very big country. Those who travel with me in November will be amazed just how quickly we can drive from one end of it to the other! Still, if you were on the run, there are lots of places you might hide in Israel besides Gath...the hometown of the champion that you famously killed in battle. What was David thinking?

Here's one possibility. There is a proverb that says, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Who was David most scared of? Saul. Why? **Because he was trying to kill him, of course.** But it was more complicated than that. To David, Saul never stopped being the anointed king of Israel. Ever. Even when David had two chances to kill Saul, he wouldn't do it. Because he still considered Saul the anointed one of God. **And you don't mess with the Lord's anointed.** So if you're not going to fight Saul, where better to hide from Saul than in the heart of enemy territory? And when you were in Gath, you were in the left ventricle of the Philistines! Maybe David thought it would be a great hiding place.

Or maybe David was on a suicide mission. So despairing that he thought he'd waltz right into enemy territory, pick a fight and die in a blaze of glory. I could name two men I know who, in the last year, were so downcast that not only had they decided to

take their own lives; they had picked the date and, in one case, written the letter. Thank God the Holy Spirit intervened...but maybe David thought that a glorious death would be the easiest way out.

But there is one other possibility. **Think about David's state of mind.** He has gone from being a somebody... to being a vagabond on the run. He had been important, honored, deferred to. He had prestige and power. **Now he had nothing.** There are some in this room who know what David was going through. This recession has knocked you off your perch. I know men who have gone from being leaders in their company to the unemployment line. And it's not just the money that's the issue. For men especially, it is the sense of a loss of purpose and significance. There is a longing for the glory days. The good old days. To turn back the clock to the way it used to be. To the days when I was...somebody!

David became a "somebody" on the day that he killed Goliath and routed the Philistines. **I wonder**...did he march into Gath with Goliath's sword thinking he would re-live those glory days? Maybe they would fear him again. Or maybe they would kill him. But at least he would be a somebody... again. **Maybe David stopped believing in God's future for him.** So... maybe he could return to the past! Back to the glory days. He had a trophy from back then. Now...just march into Goliath's town with Goliath's sword and...well... something magical will happen. He'll get the glory back.

How'd that work out for him? Not too well, did it? Whatever his thinking, the minute David got into Gath and was outed, he realized this was a really bad idea. Suddenly, he didn't feel so brave. In fact, when he was brought before Achish the king, what did he do? He pretended he was crazy! Started drooling from his mouth. Scratching gibberish on the walls. Suddenly, he didn't look like the fearsome warrior or the King of Israel. Suddenly, David looked like a pathetic, deranged soul. When Achish saw him, he wasn't intimidated; he was disgusted. In fact, he has one of the funniest lines in the Bible, don't you think? **"Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me?"**

David is spiraling out of control. First he lied to the high priest. Now he feigns insanity. Where is the courageous, anointed hero-king? Nowhere to be found. Now, he is a pathetic, desperate man fighting to save his life. **It works.** Achish doesn't even waste a bullet on him. He kicks the crazy drooler out of town. And by the time David hunkers down in the cave of Adullam, he is at rock bottom. As low as he could be. Whatever he hoped to **regain** when he marched into Gath **with the trophy of his glorious past**, now Goliath's sword lay on the cave floor, mocking him.

What are your trophies? What are the emblems that represent your glory days? A letterman's jacket? A combat medal? A picture with a celebrity friend? A diploma? I asked myself that question. What are my trophies? Maybe these. This is my doctoral certificate from St. Andrews University in Scotland from 1988. It wasn't quite big enough as it was so I had it matted so that it covers an entire wall. Very humble of me, don't you think? Here's another one. A picture of me with my children on the day that we opened the doors of this sanctuary. **I will never forget that day; that was**

a glory day for me. Or this...this is my black belt from the days I practiced karate. You know, this thing used to hang half way down to the floor. I tried putting it on last year and it looked like I had a bow tie on my belly. It's one of the reasons I decided I had to get back into shape...it wasn't very glorious any more.

So what are your trophies? What were your glory days? **Is there anything wrong with trophies?** Anything wrong with remembering the great days of our past? Absolutely not. Our past anchors us! Our past informs us. Our past made us who we are today. Both our glory days and our deepest failures are the tools that God uses to shape us into the person that sits in this pew. One of the oft-repeated words in the Old Testament is "**remember!**" Listen to some of these verses: "**Remember** that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm...(and) You will have these tassels to look at and so you will **remember** all the commands of the Lord... (and) **Remember** how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years..." 125 times!

In fact, the very last words of the Old Testament start like this: "**Remember** the law of my servant Moses..." The theme for our high school Mexico trip is "Ebenezer." Do you remember what "Ebenezer" was? It was a stone of remembrance set up by Samuel as a memorial to the Lord's faithfulness. Samuel wanted the people never to forget that the "Lord helped" them. I am going on this Mexico trip with our kids because I want to be a part of creating memories for them about how God used them to serve His world. I want those memories, too. And I want my son to have those memories.

So memories...trophies can be a great thing if they stiffen our spines and strengthen our resolve and help us to move into God's future with confidence born of remembering God's faithfulness in the past. **But trophies are pathetic if they become an excuse for living in the past as if God were done with us;** as if we had decided that our best days...our glory days... are all behind us and God couldn't possibly have anything great still in store.

The last three years of my own life have been a season when I had to decide whether I believed that God's best still lay ahead for me and for our church...or if I would always be looking over my shoulder for my best days. Frankly, it was a soul-searching season for me. This picture with my kids represents a time when I was the young hotshot pastor with boundless confidence verging on arrogance. We were the hottest game in town. Now...there are other younger hotshot pastors, 5 or six new churches, other "games" in town.

Three years ago, I began to ask the Lord, "Do we go back and try to recreate what we did in the past ...or are you going to do a new thing in a new way?" I became convinced of the latter. I love where we are right now as a church and where we are going. I love our maturity. I love the fact that our hearts are turned more outwards. I love that we gave away \$120,000 last year to help people in our region, most of whom will never darken our doors. I love Celebrate Recovery. I love the growth of LifeGroups. I love what God is doing in my **own** LifeGroup. **I love that God is**

reshaping me to lead our church into a future that matters more than our past. I love that!

But how do we do it? How do we avoid the temptation to live in the past? To long for the Glory Days...especially when things get tough? How do we avoid clinging desperately to our trophies? **Well...there's a huge hint in our story.** Did you see it? Do you remember where Goliath's sword was hidden? Behind the ephod. Do you know what the Ephod was? It was the vest worn by the High Priest when he prayed. It had stones representing every tribe of Israel and two other stones that helped discern God's will. **In a way that we do not understand, when the priest wore the Ephod, it helped him to hear what God wanted him to do.**

Did you notice what Ahimelech did with the Ephod? He pushed it aside to get to the sword. He pushed away what would have been most useful...the garment that might help him discern God's guidance for David...**so that he might lay hold of that which was almost useless: a trophy from the past that David could probably barely carry, much less swing!** Notice... David went to the High Priest of Almighty God...**and never asked for prayer!** He chose a trophy from his past rather than God's guidance for his future. And it would lead to years of struggle and pain before he got things right. **How often do we resort to what we know from our past rather than fall on our face before God for His guidance into our future?**

One of my favorite verses in the New Testament is Luke 9:62. Jesus said this: **"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."** Once you put your hand to the plow...look forward, not back. If you try looking back, you'll be plowing a zigzag line! And listen to Paul's description of his life in Christ: **"One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."** He said this at the end of his very full life. For Paul, the prize was still ahead of him. The gospel of Jesus is mostly about looking ahead. Mostly about believing that God's Spirit is still at work in you; still has a plan for you; still has glorious days ahead for you. This is true for us as individuals. This is true for us as Chapel Hill Church.

I love it that 69 high school kids are heading for Mexico. It could change their lives! But here's what concerns me, young people. I have watched kids who turn this trip into a trophy. They go south, build houses, have an encounter with God, come home... and disappear until the next year when they get to go to Mexico again. Mexico becomes their spiritual trophy. It's like Goliath's sword. They pull it out, point to it, polish it up...it becomes their Glory Days. But they push the ephod aside. They don't seek God's continued guidance. They don't stay in church. They don't seem to care about God's plan for their future. They live in the spiritual past. They tell the same spiritual story over and over again because they don't have any new stories. It was bad for David. It will be bad for you, too. It is bad for every person who calls Jesus "Lord"... but doesn't believe that their present or their future really belongs to Him.

So as we dedicate our missionaries to Mexico, let us pray that this will be only the next step in a glorious, faithful journey of trusting in Jesus. Of believing in him,

following him, being used by him to change this world...not just for one week in Mexico...but for the rest of your lives. And may we who are praying for them...pray the same things for ourselves. No living in the past! Hand to the plow, eyes forward, ephod strapped on...straining to hear God's voice as he calls us to the great future that lies ahead.

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. David pushed aside the ephod to get Goliath's sword? What do you learn from that decision?
2. Why do you think David went to Gath, Goliath's hometown? In what way do you live in your own past glories? What does this text suggest to you?