

Title: In the presence of my enemies
Text: 1 Samuel 29
Theme: Sovereign Mercy
Series: 1 Samuel
Prop Stmt: God remembers our frame and often rescues us when we cannot rescue ourselves.

The 23rd Psalm is the most well-known Psalm and therefore can suffer from over-exposure. But the fact that I know how the Psalm reads does not guarantee that I really take to heart what it says. Every line of the 23rd Psalm is a bank vault of treasure. Depending on what is going on in your life right now, there is a portion of this Psalm that speaks to it. Consider the 5th verse. *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* David is describing his life (our lives) like that of a sheep. Sheep have virtually no ability to defend themselves. They can run, but most of their predators are much faster. So, here is a lamb surrounded by enemies and has every reason to be terrified. Enemies is plural. There is one sheep and there are multiple enemies. We could imagine that the enemies are prepared to fight over who gets to feast on the sheep. Things appear to be very dire for the sheep when the shepherd shows up and is not too concerned with the enemies. He is concerned with the lamb. He wants to take care of the lamb and make sure the lamb has something to eat and the shepherd goes to great pains to provide something good for the lamb. He prepares a table in the presence of my enemies. He prepares a table, then he prepares me for the meal. He anoints my head with oil. That could mean that he is dressing some wounds, or getting him cleaned and ready for a delightful meal. And the meal? Well, the shepherd brings more than enough. My cup overflows!

Now, wait just a second. There are some obvious questions that we, or in particular, the shepherd could ask, right? What are you doing here? How did you get here? Why didn't you stay with me? Why did you go wondering off from the flock? You know that this is dangerous and that these enemies were going to eat you. How on earth did you think that this was going to turn out? There were plenty of situations in David's life where he was in the presence of his enemies and had every reason to be terrified. This situation had to be either at the top of the list or very close to it.

Read Text:

1. Trapped by our own “wisdom” (1-10)

The author of 1 Samuel takes us back a little bit in time. In chapter 28, the Philistines had marched out of their land and into the land of Israel and were encamped in the city of Shunem, where they were prepared to wage war against Saul and the army of Israel. We looked at the visit that Saul paid to the medium of En-dor on the night before the battle. Now, in chapter 29, we go back a little bit in time and get caught up with what is going on with David and his men. If you will recall, David gave up hope (27.1) and he left Israel and lived in the land of the Philistines and gave the impression to Achish, the king of the Philistine city of Gath, that David was now a sworn enemy of Israel and was loyal to Achish. David not only aligned himself with

the enemy of God's people, but he removed himself from the very means that God established for him and anyone else to be rightly related to God. David was cut off from the Tabernacle. He could not obey the law. This is a really big problem. There are many times when David faces a difficult situation where he seeks the Lord for wisdom. There is no record of that here. David has earned the trust of Achish the king of Gath. Achish trusts David so much that he makes David and (presumably his men) responsible to guard the life of Achish now that the Philistines have declared a fresh war on Israel. The last we knew was what we read in 28.1-2. (read) Now David is trapped. He is trapped by his own wisdom and he is getting drawn into an impossible situation.

I suspect that this sort of thing has happened to almost every one of us. It happened to me all the time growing up. I would tell a lie, or not tell the entire story, then would have to lie to cover up that, then lie again and again and pretty soon the entire thing would cave in. I could never get away with anything, it seemed, and I look back on that now as a good thing. What about you? Are you lying about something in order to cover something up? You know that the truth will come out. Sooner or later the truth will come out.

David made a convenient and pragmatic decision. He gave up believing that God would protect him from Saul. Instead of trusting in the Lord with all his heart, and waiting on God to do what God had promised, David leaned on his own understanding and now, he was stuck. He was in the presence of his enemies and they outnumbered him and his men by the thousands and they were armed to the teeth. How many times have we, like David been...

A. Caught in a web of our own making. (1-2)

We can empathize with David. In the moment, we panic. In the moment, we give up. In the moment, we cave in. And while we live life in the moment, life is way more than the moment. In the moment we are tempted to make decisions based on our glands or emotions. But, what are we doing right now? We are studying the life of David. We see this moment in David's life AND we can look back at David's integrity in the cave when he spared Saul's life and in the campsite of Saul's army when he spared it again. We can look even further back to David's victory over Goliath and his infectious faith, confidence and conviction. Remember what he said all by himself in that valley between two armies and standing alone before Goliath? *"This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."* (17.46-47)

What happened to that David? Oh beloved, here is wisdom. We are all, by God's grace, capable of being that David and we are all, by our own devices, capable of being this David. In the moment, you may, like David think that you have a reason to give up, cave in and "go to the other side." My faithfulness is of no use anyway. But your life and this life and life is way more than this moment. There is so much more to your life than this moment. You and I can see that about David's life. We want to scream at him and wake him up from this stupor and say, "David don't do this! You are about to throw away everything that you did. You can't fight against your

own people. What about all those things that you said? Did you mean them? I know you did. You said it. You meant it. You were willing to die for it. What are you doing here? We see that in David. Can you see that in yourself? Think back to when you professed faith in Christ and then publicly declared your allegiance to him in baptism. Think of when you shared the gospel with others, sacrificed that others could hear about Christ. Think about some of the mission trips you went on, the prayers that prayed, the truths that you taught others. Think about the times you turned the other cheek when someone was being hateful to you. Was that a game?

The armies of the Philistines have assembled in Aphek which is the staging ground for this campaign. The troops are passing in review, like a military parade. This excites the home crowd and they are cheering and sending the boys off with fanfare AND with all sorts of sacrifices to their gods! There were many sacred (and very pagan) rituals that were followed before battles since these battles were ultimately seen as a battle between the god(s) of the Philistines (Dagon) and the God of Israel. All this time, David had been pretending to be something that he really wasn't, and now it caught up to him. The kid who was ready to die because of his trust in God, was now selling out his faith in order to save his life. David turned to the Philistines for his rescue and now he needs to be rescued from the Philistines. Anything you trust in, other than Christ, for your safety will end up being something you need to be saved from.

What are we supposed to believe about David? What are we supposed to believe about you? Whose side are you really on? When we are trapped in a web of our own making we will end up facing questions we cannot answer.

B. Facing questions, we cannot answer. (3)

You may be convinced that what you are doing is okay. There may be others around you who are fooled (like Achish) and go along with it. But, the commanders of the Philistines have enough sense to realize that something is really off. This makes no sense. The details matter here and I find this rather fascinating. The lords of the Philistines refers to the kings of the Philistine federation. The Philistines were a people who were organized by 5 city-state regions. Each city had its own king. Achish was the king of Gath. There was a king of Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath and Gaza. (Yes, you heard that right. The ancient city of Gaza was a problem for Israel 3,000 years ago, like the same Gaza strip region is today.) Achish was one of the 5 kings. I would guess that he was the youngest of the kings. Over 40 years later when David has died and David's son Solomon is king of Israel, Achish is still the king in Gath. The kings are the lords and the commanders are the military leaders of the armed forces. So, as each king is leading his soldiers in formation at the staging ground, the commanders see David and his men and have more sense than either Achish or David at the moment. What are these Hebrews doing here?

Achish is quick to defend David. David has been that convincing. Achish really believes that David is on his side. Now, we know that Achish believed that David had been making raids on Israelite cities and villages, when all along he was raiding the villages and settlements of Israel's enemies down in the Negev region. Achish assumed that David had converted to the Philistines and staked his name to it. *"I have found no fault in him to this day."* (3b)

Achish is completely fooled. The commanders don't buy it for a second and get angry with Achish and accuse him of being naïve and endangering the entire battle. They are also successful in getting the other kings to agree with them. These military commanders show no respect to a king and order him to order David and his men to leave. This scene is so tense! First of all, Achish is believing a lie and defending it. That makes you cringe, doesn't it? Secondly, David is going along with it. Thirdly, David and his men (roughly 600) are in the presence of their enemies. They are surrounded and woefully outnumbered by the thousands and thousands and thousands of Philistine soldiers, who, could have, in that moment, taken David and his men prisoner, or killed them. I have no doubt that not long after this, these same commanders wondered why they didn't do that.

C. People believe things about us that aren't true. (4-10)

Is David foe or friend? What is the truth? What about you? You want the promise of eternal life with God and a life of pleasure where you do your own thing. You want forgiveness of sin so your conscience is soothed and you want the approval of your world so you indulge in shady practices. You know you need God, but practically you put all of your trust and security in your money. You show up in church and people see one side, but what are you – really? What is the real David? Who is right; Achish or the commanders? The commanders have the big picture view. Some of them may have even fought against him and they know what he is capable of. They remind Achish of the songs that were sung about him in Israel and point out the fact that while David is out of favor with Saul, in their minds he could come back into favor very quickly by helping turn the tide of battle. Achish sees in the moment. His experience of David is that David was loyal and would never go against the king.

Ironically, there is a sense in which Achish is right about David. All this time, he has not gone against his king. He has never attacked Saul, nor Israel. But he has let Achish believe a lie and now Achish is defending David in a very public way that will shortly prove to be wrong. In this moment, it is hard to know what David really believes? Would he have actually gone into battle? He seems to act like he would have. He defends himself before Achish. Is that because David doesn't want to act too relieved and give away his true loyalties, or has David become so bitter that he is looking for an opportunity to now fight against Saul? We are never told! But, look at verse 8. Is this similar to the kind of speech David gave in 28.2 a case where he is technically telling the truth, but Achish does not understand the true intent behind the words? I think it is possible. At the same time, the only character in this chapter who talks about God is Achish, the pagan Philistine king! He invokes the LORD's name in an oath like statement in v.6 and now refers to David as being as blameless as an angel of God (v.9)!

But this account is not about Achish as much as it is about David and the mercy of God. God loves David and you too much to let either one of you stay on the fence. You cannot stay in the middle. God knows that, and you need to know it, although in the moment, you may not. You cannot have it both ways. You have to choose or God will choose for you. In this case, God

knew that in his heart of hearts David believed in him. So, God did for David, what David could not do for himself. God pulled off an incredible rescue operation.

2. Rescued by the mercy of a Sovereign God

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor in Germany during W.W.II who was a rarity. He spoke publicly against Hitler and was an active part of the resistance. So many religious leaders looked the other way, Dietrich did not. He was arrested, charged with sedition and executed days before allied forces liberated the prison where he was held. In the days before his death, Bonhoeffer wrote a poem in which he wrestles with this question that we are asking of David and of ourselves. Are we the person that others think we are, or are we the frail and insecure person that we all too often know ourselves to be?

“Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a Squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
freely and friendly and clearly,
as through it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing
My throat, yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? This or the Other?
Am I one person to-day and to-morrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptible woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me like a beaten army

Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely question of mine,
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine."

God knew that while David's faith faltered, and it faltered a lot, it did not die and God will not abandon his own. In saving David from the Philistines, he saved David from David. David was in the presence of his enemies and surrounded by them. He was saved NOT by his righteousness, NOT by his strength, NOT by his cunning, NOT by his wisdom, NOT by his wealth. David was rescued by the undeserved mercy of a Sovereign God who wanted David to know and lovingly demanded David to know that God and God alone saves.

Once again, there it is. Here is a preview of Christ in the OT. You and I cannot save ourselves from the mess that we have made of our lives. We cannot find a way to earn or achieve or deserve our forgiveness. We need to be rescued. And, here is the good news, there is a good and merciful God who alone can and will save you from your sin, because he sent Christ, to be your perfect substitute. When Pilate said of Christ, "I find no fault in him" unlike Achish's statement about David, this was really true of Christ. It's not that Pilate did not know the entire story. It was true. Christ had no fault. And yet, while God rescued David, he did not rescue his own Son. David was guilty and he was rescued and Christ was innocent and he wasn't. Christ was condemned in your place. He was condemned so you wouldn't have to be. And you don't have to be, and you won't be when you trust in the only One who paid it all.

Psalm 118.8-9 says, *"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes."*