

"STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY"

1 Samuel 23:1-29

"Life is a journey for all of us, and that journey is not always easy. There are hard days and difficult nights and sometimes there are weeks and months and years where the road seems to lead from one hardship to another.... No one gets a free ride and no one is exempt from the troubles of the world.... Sometimes when we are discouraged, we can lose heart and feel like giving up (Ray Pritchard)."

We, like David, must learn to persevere under pressure. In tonight's study, we are going to focus on *strength for the journey*.

As a background to our study, I want to call to your attention what happened after David went to Nob. Ahimelech (the high priest) gave David and his men 5 loaves of the consecrated bread. David then went to the Philistine city of Gath where he wormed himself out of a dangerous situation by pretending to be insane. Leaving there, he went to the cave of Adullam.

David received terrible news. The high priest, Ahimelech had been murdered, at the command of King Saul. Along with him, eighty-five other priests and their families, perhaps as many as 200 people, had been killed by Doeg the Edomite. David was crushed by this news, and he felt as if he was responsible for this tragedy.

So, David is a fugitive. He leaves the Cave of Adullam and goes to Mizpah of Moab, then to the forest of Hereth. Saul is hot on his trail, and he wants him dead. David is weary and worn out. He desperately needs some encouragement and to be recharged spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

In our passage today we meet David at three different locations: at **Keilah**, at **Ziph** and at **Maon**. David faces a different obstacle at each location, and through David's experiences at each location we can learn something new about finding fresh strength in the Lord.

1. DAVID AT KEILAH (1-13)

Trust God's Promises

1 Samuel 23:1–6... Then they told David, saying, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are plundering the threshing floors." **2** So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and deliver Keilah." **3** But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?" **4** Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." **5** So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines; and he led away their livestock and struck them with a great slaughter. Thus David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah. **6** Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, *that* he came down *with* an ephod in his hand.

The city of Keilah was located about three miles south of Adullam. It was a walled city on the outskirts of Judah, and it was only about twelve miles from Gath, one of the Philistine capital cities. When David hears that the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, he asks God whether he should help the people of Keilah. God gives him the go-ahead, but his men are afraid at first. So, David asks the Lord again, and the Lord confirms his word to David: "I am going to give the Philistines into your hand."

God likes to confirm His word, especially when He directs us to do something hard or unusual. This time the Lord not only confirmed His previous command, but He also gave a promise with the confirmation: I will deliver the Philistines into your hand. So now David has a word from God. He has a promise from God.

By all outward appearance, this was a crazy thing to do. First, David had 400 men with thin resumes and bad credit reports (1 Samuel 22:2)— not exactly a crack army unit. Second, David had enough trouble with Saul. He didn't

need to pick a fight with the Philistines—*one enemy at a time is usually enough*. This was a dangerous course of action.

In response to God's word, David and his men boldly go up against the Philistines, and God grants them amazing success. It was *Saul's* job to protect Keilah, and it was Saul's job to fight the Philistines. But Saul wasn't doing his job, so the Lord called David to deliver this Jewish city. David is already acting like a king!

Here's a principle we need to learn, and we need to apply to our own lives.

***God strengthens us as we seek Him through the Word of God and prayer.**

David acted boldly because he trusted God's promise to him. As Christians we are also called to be bold. God has given us many precious promises in His word, and as Christians we have every reason to be bold and no reason to be afraid.

Psalm 118:6... The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?

Avoid Unnecessary Danger

1 Samuel 23:7–13... When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars." **8** So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. **9** Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." **10** Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. **11** "Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." **12** Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you." **13** Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

Saul finds out that David is in Keilah and notice how he misinterprets God's will here. His first thought is that God has handed David over to him. Saul sees an opportunity, and he goes all out here. He calls up all his forces to go against David and his six hundred men. When David learns of Saul's plot, what does he do? He inquires of God again. He tells Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." Now you're probably wondering, "What's an ephod?"

The ephod was a special garment worn by the high priest which contained two mysterious objects called the Urim and the Thummim. We don't know much about these objects, perhaps they were two jewels or two stones, but we do know that God allowed the priests to use these objects to ask questions to discern God's will.

Once again, notice the contrast between David and Saul. Saul relies on rumors and hearsay. David, on the other hand, relies on the Lord. David asks God two questions.

- **Is Saul coming down to Keilah?**
- **Will the people of Keilah deliver David to Saul?**

God says "yes" on both accounts. You might wonder why the people of Keilah would give David up right after David has just rescued them from the Philistines. They probably heard what Saul did to the city of Nob, and they are afraid of suffering the same fate. David inquires of the Lord, the Lord confirms to David that he is in danger, and David wisely withdraws.

What's the lesson we need to learn? We need to learn the value of trusting the promises of the Lord and the value of avoiding pointless danger.

Matthew 10:16... "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves."

I want you to see that David didn't barge ahead with what seemed to him to be the best approach. He waited on the Lord and sought His will before he did anything. We should do the same thing. David inquired of the Lord

through prophets and priests. God speaks to us today primarily through the Word of God and prayer. But the key is to ask God. Be bold in trusting God's promises and be wise in avoiding unnecessary danger.

***Find strength in God by seeking his will through the word of God and prayer.**

2. David at Ziph (14-18)

We also find strength in God by having faith in God and fellowship with believers. We see this in our next section with David in the Desert of Ziph.

Have Faith In God

1 Samuel 23:14... David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.

After withdrawing from Keilah, David and his men keep moving from place to place and eventually end up in the Desert of Ziph. Ziph was about sixteen miles south of Bethlehem, below the southern tip of the Dead Sea. It was a desert area with all sorts of caves and hiding places. God guided and protected David, but it wasn't comfortable or easy. David was hiding there, and Saul engaged him in a deadly game of hide-and-seek.

David became a man after God's heart in the shepherd's field, but he became a king in the wilderness.

Here's an important part of the narrative. Even though David was a man after God's heart and he was already anointed to be the next king of Israel, God allowed him to go through some really hard times. God kept David safe! There's a lesson for us to learn here. You need to have faith in God when you encounter tough times in your life. . .

James 1:2-4... Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, **3** knowing that the testing of your faith produces

endurance. **4** And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

German theologian Otto Dibelius, a leader of the anti-Nazi resistance movement in World War II made this statement . . .

"God does not lead his children around hardship but leads them straight through hardship. But he leads! And amidst the hardship, he is nearer to them than ever before."

God was testing David in the wilderness and preparing him for his future role as king.

Fellowship With Other Believers

You not only need to have faith in God. You also need to fellowship with other believers.

1 Samuel 23:15-18... Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. **16** And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God. **17** Thus he said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also." **18** So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house.

At this crucial time in David's life, his best friend Jonathan secretly went to David and encouraged him in God. Jonathan comes not just to encourage his friend, but to help David find strength in God. I like the way one person puts it: **"He put David's hand as it were into God's hand."**

Isolation in the Christian's life leads to desolation. None of us are meant to go it alone, and sometimes we need a little help from our friends. Jonathan helps David by reminding him of God's promise that David will be king. This is one of the best ways we can help each other find strength in God. We

remind each other of God's promises, especially when a believer is struggling or distressed. We take our friend's hand and put their hand in God's hand.

Hebrews 10:23–25... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; **24** and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **25** not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

This is the last recorded meeting between David and Jonathan. When David was at a low point, Jonathan risked his own life to help his friend find strength in God.

3. David at Maon (19-29)

So far, we have looked at David at Keilah and David at Ziph. Now we come to David at Maon . . .

- At Keilah we learned that *we find strength in God by seeking God's will through the word of God and prayer.*
- At Ziph we learned that *we find strength in God by having faith in God and by having fellowship with other believers.*
- At Maon *we find strength in God by trusting God's providential care.*

Be Alert, The Enemy Seeks To Destroy You.

1 Samuel 23:19–23... Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? **20** "Now then, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to do so; and our part *shall be* to surrender him into the king's hand." **21** Saul said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. **22** "Go now, make more sure, and investigate and see his place where his haunt is, *and* who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning. **23** "So look, and learn about all the hiding places where he hides himself and return to me with certainty, and I

will go with you; and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah."

The Ziphites sold David out. Saul asks them to provide more intelligence so he can track him down and kill him. The Bible says that we as believers have a fiendish enemy that we have to be aware of at all times.

1 Peter 5:8–9... Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

In other words, what you are going through is not unique to you. We have a common enemy, and many of your brothers and sisters in Christ are also under attack.

Be At Peace, God Is In Control.

1 Samuel 23:24–29... Then they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. **25** When Saul and his men went to seek *him*, they told David, and he came down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard *it*, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon. **26** Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain; and David was hurrying to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them. **27** But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." **28** So Saul returned from pursuing David and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they called that place the Rock of Escape. **29** David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of Engedi.

David was in the Desert of Maon about five miles south of Ziph when Saul and his men entered the desert in hot pursuit. Saul and his men are going along one side of the mountain, while David and his men are going along the other side. These two forces are on a collision course, and David is about to be captured.

This is the closest Saul has gotten to David yet. And then just as Saul and his forces are closing in on David, a messenger suddenly arrives with news that the Philistines are attacking. Saul breaks off his pursuit of David and goes to meet the Philistines. As a result, this place got a new name which means "Rock of Escape." After such a close call, David escapes safely to En-Gedi where he will find both water and shelter.

Was it a coincidence that the messenger arrived just before Saul and his forces would have captured David and his men? Of course not. This was God's hand of providence. God's hand of providence delivered David from the hand of the Philistines at Keilah and from the hand of Saul at Maon.
When you're in God's hands, you're in good hands!

David later wrote about this incident in the Psalms. [READ PSALM 54](#). The strangers in this psalm are the Ziphites who betrayed David to Saul. David cries out to God for help, and then he pauses. That's what that word "Selah" means there in verse three. It's a place to pause and reflect. David pauses and reflects on how God saved him from Saul.

CONCLUSION

When you are stressed or facing difficult times, you need to find strength in God. God is omnipotent. God is all powerful. When you find strength in God, you will find plenty of strength to face the challenges and tasks of each day. When you try to find strength outside of God, you are only setting yourself up for failure.

So, seek God's will through the word of God and prayer. Have faith in God and fellowship with other believers. Trust God's providential care. When life hits you hard, find strength in God through Jesus Christ our Lord.