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*“The Refuge Of Godly Leadership”*

*1 SAMUEL 22:6-23*

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## At A Glance

1 Samuel 22 reveals two contrasting kings in one of Scripture's darkest chapters. Amid paranoia, betrayal, and bloodshed, God shows us what true leadership looks like. Saul uses power to protect himself. David uses strength to protect others.

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## A Lens To Listen By

According to 1 Samuel 22, godly leadership becomes a refuge for the vulnerable. Before we read our passage this morning, I want to give you a lens to listen through. This chapter is one of the darkest chapters in 1 Samuel. It's a chapter filled with paranoia, betrayal, and bloodshed. A king spirals. Eighty-five priests and all their families die. David admits he contributed to it. It's ugly.

But in the middle of all that darkness, God shows us something incredibly clear. This chapter puts two kings side by side. Two leaders. Two kinds of strength. Saul uses power to protect himself. David uses strength to protect others. Saul clings to authority. David becomes a refuge.

Saul takes life. David saves it. And that contrast isn't just about ancient history. It shows us what godly leadership looks like. What real strength looks like. And ultimately, it points us to Christ.

So as we read, listen for that contrast. Watch Saul. Watch David. And ask yourself: which kind of leader do you want to follow? Then ask, which kind of leader do you want to be?

## 1 Samuel 22:12-23

<sup>22</sup> **And David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house. <sup>23</sup> Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.”**

## With Spear In His Hand

**Verses 6-8 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. <sup>7</sup> 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, <sup>8</sup> that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse...**

That Saul had **his spear in his hand** is another reminder of the constant state of paranoia Saul lived in. He assumed all his servants were in alignment with his own son and **the son of Jesse**, a pejorative way of referring to David.

Like a cheap, corrupt politician, Saul appealed to the pleasures of this world as he tried to bribe these people he had given favorable positions to. He's manipulating them; even threatening them. If you'll be loyal to me, you'll have everything you want. It gets worse.

**...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."**

Imagine a leader saying the quiet part out loud. A grown man pouting that no one feels sorry for him. Pathetic. Yet, embarrassingly, not totally unlike us.

### Lying Doeg

**Verses 9-10 Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, <sup>10</sup> and he inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."**

Typically inquiring of the Lord in a situation like this has military connotations. There is no mention of Ahimelech inquiring of the Lord in chapter 21, which suggests Doeg is lying to incite Saul.

**Verses 11-13 Then the king sent to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king. <sup>12</sup> And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." <sup>13</sup> And Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?"**

Twice Saul uses the phrase **lie in wait**, again exposing his irrational paranoia. The irony is that Saul is the one lying in wait to kill David.

**Verses 14 Then Ahimelech answered the king, "And who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and captain over your bodyguard, and honored in your house? <sup>15</sup> Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? No! Let not the king impute anything to his servant or to all the house of my father, for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little."**

Does Ahimelech now affirm that he inquired of the Lord? Not necessarily, there's lots of reasons to believe otherwise. I still contend that Doeg lied to inflame Saul's paranoia. And Saul wasn't interested in truth anyway — he wanted blood.

### No Bottom To Saul's Depravity

**Verses 16-17 And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house." <sup>17</sup> And the king said to the guard who stood about him, "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and they knew that he fled and did not disclose it to me." But the servants of the king would not put out their hand to strike the priests of the LORD.**

Saul was an impulsive, impetuous man. What he felt he acted on without any regard for what was right or just. He continued to reveal himself as a godless leader, the antithesis of David.

This final act of apostasy shows just how far a person can descend in their sin. Do you think Saul imagined he would ever give such a command when he was anointed king? Surely not! Yet, one step of disregard for the Lord followed by another and another, distancing himself from God's covenant, ultimately being given over to his flesh as the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, there was literally no bottom to his depravity.

But the servants of Saul were a different story. They refused to **put out a hand** against the priests.

**Verses 18-19 Then the king said to Doeg, “You turn and strike the priests.” And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod. <sup>19</sup>And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword.**

Doeg, like Saul, was a man with no spine, no conviction, no regard for God. How dare he strike a man of God?! Let alone put all these priests of God and their families to death?!

Saul should have known better. He should have honored the Lord and repented. He should have turned to his men and told them to put Doeg to death. But he didn't because Saul was a wretched man, just like Doeg.

Nevertheless, in carrying out this evil act, Saul was in fact executing the Lord's judgement upon the house of Eli, prophesied through Samuel in chapter three. (cf. 1 Samuel 3:12-14) These priests were descendants of Eli. God had warned decades earlier that Eli's house would fall. This tragedy shows us something important: God's Word never fails.

All but one man of Ahitub's house was killed.

### With Me You Shall Be In Safekeeping

**Verses 20-23 But one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. <sup>21</sup>And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. <sup>22</sup>And David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house. <sup>23</sup>Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.”**

Once again following the Lord, David became a refuge for the desperate. A provider and protector of the vulnerable. A refuge in whom they found protection, safety, and peace.

We're beginning to see David's character surface once again. He is surrounded by supporters and even has both a prophet and a priest navigating in the wilderness with him. He took responsibility of his family. He owned his failures and the consequences. And now he accepts responsibility for the safety of other people.

### The Model of Godly Leadership

Behold the model of godly leadership. Whatever your view of leadership, if it's not first and foremost taking responsibility for your family, owning mistakes without making excuses, and using your power to provide for and protect the vulnerable, you're mistaken.

David is the quintessential godly leader of the Old Testament. He's the prefigured Christ. In his highs, we see who Christ is at all times. In his lows, we see what Christ died to redeem us from. This kind of leadership is neither blame-shifting nor self-promoting.

It is leadership the way God meant it to be. And it could not be put into starker contrast – you've got two kings, Saul and David. Two men. Two leaders. One is impulsive, abusive, and controlled by his own emotions. The other takes responsibility for himself and others.

The first thing this text teaches us is what leadership is not. Saul had power, position, and authority — but he used it to protect himself. He manipulated. He blamed. He demanded a pity party. And when he felt threatened, he destroyed people. That's not leadership. That's insecurity.

## Stop protecting yourself – protect your people

Any time we use our authority to defend our ego instead of serving others, we're leading like Saul. This is the father who rules by anger. A husband who protects his pride instead of his wife. A mother who manipulates with emotions. A boss who throws employees under the bus. That's Saul with a spear in his hand. Godly leaders don't weaponize authority.

Now let's compare David to Saul. David didn't say to Abiathar, "Well, that's Saul's fault." He says, <sup>22</sup>**I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house.** Talk about swallowing your pride! Can you imagine owning something as weighty as that? Then he says, <sup>23</sup>**Stay with me...With me you shall be in safekeeping.**

## Take responsibility – become the refuge

This may be the absolute highlight in David's life so far. It's tempting to highlight David on the battlefield with Goliath. That absolutely took courage. But the impulse to make that David's shining moment comes more from our own instinct to equate manhood with machismo.

The truth is, God is the hero of David's life, including the Goliath story. It's ironic, not alpha, that a puny David defeated a massive Goliath. While Goliath was a formidable foe, the fight against pride and selfishness is by far a greater one. What David did right here took even more courage and guts than slaying Goliath.

We've seen David in the pit. We've seen how low he could go. But right here we see peak leadership. David is the antithesis of Saul and the antithesis of our federal head, Adam. Saul abused his authority. Adam abdicated it. When things didn't work, Saul pouted like a baby and Adam blamed God for his wife. That's the stuff petulant boys do.

David, on the other hand, took responsibility for himself and for the vulnerable. That's *real* leadership. That's what godly leaders do. And where did it all originate? Not in David's strength or machismo. It originated in David's humility.

In his own strength David was a fool, and he and others suffered for it. Being macho and thinking he was going to take Goliath's sword into Goliath's hometown and take charge or who knows what, ended with him being totally shamed and people being killed. His machismo made him a liability. As it typically does.

But now that he's humbled himself before the Lord, the Lord made him a total asset. Like Paul later says, "*When I am weak, then I am strong.*" *2 Corinthians 12:10* Strength in God's kingdom isn't flexing — it's humble dependence that works its way out in selfless sacrifice.

Godly leadership is taking responsibility, owning your mistakes, and stepping between danger and the vulnerable. It's not flashy. It's not macho. It's protective. In your home. In your church. In your workplace. People should feel safer because you're there.

Bottom line: godly leaders become a refuge.

And church, this isn't about titles or positions. Leadership in God's kingdom is a posture. It's something every believer can live out. I see it all over this church. The mom who creates a home where her kids feel safe. The dad who steadfastly carries the weight of responsibility for his family. The wife who comes alongside her husband with calming wisdom and gentle strength.

The husband who steps between his family and danger. The grandmother who prays like a warrior. Elders who embrace the burden of shepherding. The foster parents who open their home to

vulnerable kids in our community. Men and women who disciple younger believers, bring meals, sit with the grieving, and speak hard truth when it's needed.

That's strength. That's godly leadership. That's refuge. People feel safer because you're there.

Now, I invite you to really consider why true strength was found in David's genuine humility before the Lord. I propose it is so that no one confuses him for the hero. It is so Christ gets the glory.

And honestly? This is one of the most freeing things about godly leadership. You don't have to posture. You don't have to impress. You just stay faithful, own your failures, endure suffering, love people, and cling to Christ.

Since we all fail at points 1 & 2 at times, let's move to our third and final point.

### Find your refuge in Christ

Even David failed again. We'll see it soon enough. The man who sheltered Abiathar will later stumble big time. Once again, he'll be the reason an innocent man dies. Which means this story isn't here to make a hero out of David. It's here to point beyond him.

No leader is perfect. No husband is perfect. No father is perfect. No mother is perfect. No pastor is perfect. And if your hope rests in any human leader — even a good one — you will eventually be disappointed. We all fail to provide refuge from time to time.

Which is why we don't ultimately need a *better* king. We need a *perfect* one. And we have one.

David sheltered one priest. Jesus shelters all who come to Him. David took responsibility for a tragedy he partly caused. Jesus took responsibility for sins He didn't commit. David said, "Stay with me and you'll be safe." Jesus says, "*Come to me...and I will give you rest.*" *Matthew 11:28*

David could offer temporary safety. Christ offers eternal refuge. So, before you try to become a refuge for others, you must first find refuge in Christ yourself. Because you can't give what you don't have. You can't protect others if you're still scrambling to protect yourself.

But when you know you're safe in Christ — when your future is secure, your sins are forgiven, your identity is settled — then you're finally free.

Free to stop posturing yourself.

Free to stop proving yourself.

Free to stop protecting yourself.

And free to spend your life protecting others.

That's godly leadership. That's strength under control. That's Christlike strength. So trust Him. Hide in Him. Follow Him. And then go become a refuge for someone else. Amen?