
“God’s Mercy, New Every Morning”

1 SAMUEL 29:1-11

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AT A GLANCE

In this sermon from 1 Samuel 29, we explore how God’s mercy pursues His people even in their foolishness, how compromise gradually hardens the heart, and how the Lord sometimes rescues us from disasters we don’t even realize we’re heading toward. No matter how far you’ve drifted, God’s mercies are still new every morning.

ON THE CLIFF’S EDGE

I want you to imagine standing on the edge of one of the worst decisions of your life. You know it’s wrong. You know it could devastate your life, your family, your reputation. But you’re in too deep now. You’ve convinced yourself this is the only path forward. Fear has cornered you, and compromise feels...necessary.

Then God steps in and destroys the plan. The meeting gets canceled. The secret gets exposed. The opportunity disappears. The door slams shut. And at first, you’re frustrated because you were fully committed to that path.

But what if that interruption was mercy? What if God, in His mercy, stopped you from walking off a cliff you were determined to jump from? If you’ve ever been there, then you can relate to David in this passage. David is moments away from crossing a line he may never have recovered from.

He is about to march with the Philistines against his own people. And in one of the strangest twists in the entire book of 1 Samuel, God uses pagan Philistine commanders to stop him.

The passage leaves us asking two questions:

What would have happened had David actually gone into that battle?

And how many disasters has God mercifully kept me from — perhaps without me ever realizing it?

How many rescues have I even resisted?

This passage reminds us that even when fear drives us, compromise ensnares us, and foolishness blinds us, the mercy of God still pursues us. His mercies are new every morning.

ENEMY TROOP STAGING

Verse 1 Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel.

At the beginning of chapter 28 we read that Saul gathered all Israel and they encamped at Gilboa. (verse 4) Aphek is south of there and north of Ziklag, David’s homebase for the past 16 months. The movement of the Philistines, along with David, was northward from Ziklag/Gath to Aphek then east to Shunem. In chapter 28, they’re already at Shunem.

We're now backtracking in the story and shifting from Saul back to David. The last we read of David is Achish told him he was going to be his bodyguard for life and fight for the Philistines. Something David seemed shockingly enthusiastic to do.

So Chronologically, it would read, *“David said to Achish, ‘Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.’ And Achish said to David, ‘Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.’”* 1 Samuel 28:2 then here

Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek.

Then, David was sent home from Aphek to Ziklag. (29:11)

Then the Philistines arrived in Shunam. (28:4)

Which caused Saul to become fearful and seek out the medium of Endor (28:8-25)

Finally, on the next day, Saul was killed at the battle of Mount Gilboa (31:1-13) while David was rescuing his wives from the Amalekites and returning to Ziklag. (30:1-26)

So we're in the middle of this story now. Enemy troops are moving into place. David is with them.

LOCKED AND LOADED

Verse 2 As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, he's the king of Gath. There were five major Philistine cities in alliance, each with its own king.

Verse 3 the commanders of the Philistines said, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”

That's a legitimate question. Remember why Achish was ok with this. He believed David had been making raids on his own people and was a usurper to Saul's throne. Neither was true. He was raiding among the Philistine cities and killing everyone to cover his tracks. This went on for 16 months. (cf. 27:11) But Achish was somehow blind to this. Keep that in mind.

Let's see how Achish responds: **And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, “Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day.”**

What a ruse David was putting on. You have to believe Achish was also a little gullible, not to mention negligent. Was he not checking on his people? Sixteen months passes by and he's lost entire cities and doesn't know it!

NOT SO EASILY DUPED

Achish may be gullible, but the other commanders are anything but. **Verses 4-5 But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, “Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? ⁵Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’”**

The commanders ask Achish the same question he asked them, **Is this not David?** Like, you've heard of this guy, right? You've heard how he and Saul killed their **thousands and ten thousands**, right? Like, people made up songs and dances about this guy specifically for how he killed our people! How could you be so naïve?

They're asking reasonable questions and drawing reasonable conclusions; unlike Achish who was blinded by greed, or David who was blinded by fear. The truth is David was an **adversary** to the Philistines, and he should be. He should take the **heads of the men** there. That he isn't at this point is a tragedy.

RELEASED

Thankfully, the will of the commanders prevails and Achish goes to relay the news to David. **Verses 6-7 Then Achish called David and said to him, “As the LORD lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. ⁷So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.”**

This reminds me of when I have to go tell the kids they can't eat candy all night and watch movies because their momma said it's time to go to bed. It'd go something like, "I personally think you *should* be able to eat as much junk as you want and binge watch all the movies but your mom says no. You better go to bed and don't mention anything I just said to her. We don't want to start something."

But the irony is thick here! Achish could have found plenty wrong in David had he not been enamored with having him as a resource to fuel his selfish gain. Achish seems to have been motivated by one thing: greed.

After all, he was more than happy to play into David's ruse as he delivered load after load of tribute, brought from the ransacked cities of his own people. But he seems to have gleefully turned a blind eye.

Here's a lesson: greed and selfishness tend to blind you to what is painfully obvious to everyone else!

RESISTING RELIEF?

Now the story takes a bizarre turn because David actually refutes Achish and seems distraught that he is being dismissed. **Verse 8 And David said to Achish, “But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”**

It's debated whether David was genuinely distraught or if he was acting here. He seems to me to be distraught. A benevolent interpretation says that maybe he was planning to spoil the attack from the inside. But from the narrators' perspective, and thereby the Holy Spirit's intent to communicate to us, it appears David was on the brink of attacking his own people and was narrowly prevented by the sovereign hand of the Lord.

The truth is, regardless of what David planned to do in that battle, just stepping foot in Israelite territory on the Philistine side would have severely jeopardized his reputation among his own people. What he did not know that we do, is that it would only be a matter of days before he inherited the throne.

But here we have the two supposed heroes of Israel standing on opposite sides of the battle lines: you've got Saul turning to a witch and eventually falling on his sword and put to death by an Amalekite, and David about to turn his sword on his own people, prevented only by the hand of God, using Philistine commanders, and then killing Amalekites for taking his wives he left behind on his way to kill Israelites! Who would have put that on their bingo card?

EARLY IN THE MORNING

Let's finish this bizarre story... **Verses 9-11 And Achish answered David and said, “I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle.’ ¹⁰Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light.” ¹¹So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel.**

Crisis averted, not because David did the right thing; but in spite of David's foolishness. The kings of Philistine have served as David's saviors. Why? How? *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."* Proverbs 21:1

Pressure and fear have stacked up against David and he was about to make the biggest mistake of his life – be complicit in the killing of king Saul. Not only would this violate his clearly articulated convictions and lead to immense internal conflict, but it would violate the moral law of God and set David on the throne as a usurper.

Beyond giving David a "providential alibi" in Saul's death, to quote Robert Bergen, this divine intervention turned David and his men back to Ziklag where they discovered the Amalekite raid and all their missing wives and children. They returned just in time to track them down and rescue them. The crisis may have been averted, but only narrowly so and only because the Lord kept David from continuing on his path.

Does it not break your heart to see where David is now? To watch a young man fall from such heights of faith and convictions and end up in the gutters of fear and compromise. The young boy stood courageously before a giant with nothing but a sling and a stone in the name of the God of Israel. Now a young man, he cowers among his enemies ready to stand against his own people.

How did he get here? It was all because of one decision to flee 16 months earlier when *"David said in his heart, 'Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul.'" 1 Samuel 27:1* He let fear rewrite his story.

NEW MORNING MERCIES

What becomes apparent through this story is the pursuit of God's mercy, which knows no boundaries. It followed him into Philistine territory. It followed him through all of his ill-adventures in the territory of Ziklag. It even followed David to the staging area of Aphek. But it would allow him to go no further.

You can probably relate. You've made decisions, put yourself in precarious spots, acted in fear, made agreements you shouldn't have, crossed lines. And you wonder, will God abandon you in Aphek? Will He allow you to rot in the prison of your own decisions?

What God did for David He does not guarantee to do for you. He does not promise to spare you of the consequences for your sin. You very well may go to prison. You very well may lose your spouse. Or your kidney. Or your life savings when you act like a fool.

You cannot count on the Lord getting you out of whatever mess you make when you take matters into your own hands, let fear drive you, and compromise your convictions.

But one thing is true: God's mercy is new every morning.

Why did God not allow David to march into battle, slaughter his own people, and kill Saul? Mercy. God's mercy kept David from going any further. This story teaches us that our foolishness is no match for God's faithfulness.

Even when we think we've ransacked our lives, made a living hell out of it, turned it into something irredeemable, the story of David reminds us: God's mercies are new every morning. Sometimes, even when we resist our own rescue.

A TALE OF TWO "HEROES"

If you recall the end of chapter 28, Saul and his men ate at the table of demons with the witch of Endor and then departed at night. (28:25) How does chapter 29 end? Not at night, but early in the morning. If the former was more than a timestamp and represents a spiritual condition of God's condemnation, how much more so does the latter convey God's redemption?

If the darkness of Saul's night foreshadowed his demise the very next day, what does that say about the dawning of the sun for David?

Perhaps this story came flooding into his memory as David reflected over his life and he wrote, *"Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning."* Psalm 30:5 How many times and how many ways did David experience God's new morning mercies? This story is certainly one!

This reminds me of a similar encouragement written in the wake of God's judgment of Judah centuries later, *"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."* Lamentations 3:22-23

TEARS OF REGRET IN THE NIGHT

What both verses reveal is you sometimes fail to truly appreciate God's new morning mercies until you've found yourself weeping tears of regret in the night. It is in the midst of our worst decisions that we most appreciate God's mercies.

Whether He is providentially preventing us from sure destruction and we finally see the cliff's edge we were headed for or providentially picking us up from the cliff's bottom as we wonder how we got there, one thing is for sure: God's new morning mercies are most treasured after the darkness of our night.

So to everyone who looks on their life and wonders if God's mercies have run out on your life, if you have exhausted His mercy because you would have given up on someone like you long ago if you were Him, rest assured - God's mercies are inexhaustible.

David walked away from Aphek in the morning, not because he was wise, not because he was clean, not because he had finally found the courage to do the right thing — but because God was merciful.

MERCY IN THE FLESH

And if you are in Christ, that mercy has not run out on you. You may have gone to Gath. You may have lived in compromise. You may have told yourself a story that fear wrote for you. You may have walked right up to the edge of a decision that would have wrecked your soul. But here is the good news: God's mercy can meet you even there.

But do not mistake His mercy for permission. If God has put a Philistine commander, a closed door, a hard word, a painful consequence, or a providential interruption in your path — do not resent it. Receive it. It may be the mercy of God stopping you from going one step further.

Come home. Leave Aphek. Return from Gath. Stop negotiating with fear. Stop making peace with compromise. Stop calling survival what God calls unbelief.

And look to the greater David, Jesus Christ, who never compromised, never cowered, never lifted His hand in sinful self-preservation, and yet went willingly into the darkness of judgment for sinners like us.

David was spared in the morning because of mercy. Jesus rose in the morning because mercy had triumphed. And because He lives, there is mercy for every sinner who comes to Him.

"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Church, joy comes with the morning.

So come to Christ. Come out of the night and come into mercy.