



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Samuel 27:1-12

“The Frailty of the Man After God’s Own Heart”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading this morning is from 1 Samuel chapter 27 and we’ll read the entire twelve verses of the chapter.

“Now David said in his heart, ‘Now shall I perish some day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me any more in any part of Israel: So I shall escape out of his hand.’ Then David arose, and went over with the six hundred men who were with him to Achish, the son of Maach, king of Gath. So David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow. And it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath: so he sought him no more. Then David said to Achish, ‘If I have now found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?’ So Achish gave him Ziklag that day: therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. Now, the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was one full year and four months. And David and his men went up, and raided the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: For those nations were of the inhabitants of the land from of old, as

you go to Shur, even as far as the land of Egypt. Whenever David attacked the land, he left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish. Then Achish would say, ‘Where have you made a raid today?’ And David would say, ‘Against the southern area of Judah, or against the southern area of the Jerahmeelites, or against the southern area of the Kenites.’ [Now, if you read that of course carefully, you’ll note that not any of his raids were actually made against Israel or Judah, but they were made on the southern borders of the land.] David would save neither man nor woman alive, to bring news to Gath saying, ‘Lest they should inform on us, saying, Thus David did,’ and thus was his behavior all the time he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines. So Achish believed David, saying, ‘He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant for ever.’

May the Lord bless this reading of his word and let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has confirmed the covenant that Thou didst make with Abraham so many centuries ago in his death. And we thank Thee for the promises of the word of God that through our Lord and his mediation for us as our representative as the last Adam, we have eternal life. We thank Thee for those promises that Thou didst give and we thank Thee for the expansion of them that has been made down through the years. We thank Thee for the solid ground upon which the full giving of the promises shall ultimately come. And we rejoice, Lord, that by Thy grace, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Thou hast brought believers into the possession of those promises. And we thank Thee for the promise of eternal life and the gift of the Spirit, all related to the death, the burial, the resurrection that our Lord, Jesus Christ has accomplished.

We thank Thee for his place now at the right hand of the throne of God. And there he waits until his enemies shall be made his footstool, and we thank Thee for the words of the great apostle that we ourselves have been raised up together with him in our position and are seated with him at the right hand of the throne of God. What a marvelous position we have. And we thank Thee Lord for all that Thou hast accomplished. We thank Thee for the other blessings of the word of God; so many of them it would be impossible for us to speak of them. And we thank Thee for this beautiful day that Thou hast given to us. We thank Thee for the Church of Jesus Christ and for the blessings that are ours through the church that thou hast established.

We pray, Lord, for Believers Chapel, we pray for its leadership, we pray for its ministry. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt bless in its outreach and supply the needs that exist. We pray for the whole Church of Jesus Christ, regardless of the names under which the true believers minister. Bless them richly as they exalt our Lord, Jesus Christ. And, Father, we pray for our country, we pray for its leadership, and we ask that Thou wilt give wisdom, special wisdom in these critical days, and guidance and may we be preserved in the freedoms which we enjoy today.

We thank Thee for those who are with us today, for the members of Believers Chapel, the friends, the visitors, may Thy blessing be upon each one. And, Father, we thank Thee for those who have asked us to unite with them in petitions for them and for the trials through which they may be going. We pray for the sick, we pray for others who have other problems, and we ask, Lord, that Thou wilt give healing and that Thou wilt give answers to the prayers that have been requested, for those who are suffering especially under gird them with Thy strength and Thy healing as it should please Thee. And for those who are bereaving, we pray for them as well. Give encouragement and strength and supply the needs that exist.

Bless the ministry of the word of God in the moments that follow, bless as we sing together. May our singing and our thinking be harmonious with the word of God.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] You know, from time to time, I have made comment about John and Charles Wesley, marvelous hymns were written by the Wesley’s. We’ve just sung one. The Wesley’s are known theologically as supporters of evangelical Arminianism. And I think that’s a fair statement with regard to them, but if we think of Arminianism as it has historically been set forth, the Wesley’s do not really stand completely there. Let me illustrate the point. Arminians believe that the ultimate source of our salvation is the decision of our free wills. In other words, God is unable to act until we have acted in our free will. Now, the Wesley’s stood for evangelical Arminianism but you’ll notice from this hymn, that the hymn’s theology does not support that idea. That’s the reason that Jim Packer, who has spoken here a number of times, has contended that John Wesley was not really an Arminian. He was a confused Calvinist. [Laughter]

Now, let me show you why Mr. Packer, or Dr. Packer, believes that and why I think it’s true. Now, this hymn is surely in harmony with John’s theology, but he and Charles have put together, but notice the third stanza. “Now incline me to repent.” In other words, the repentance is not traced to ones free will, it’s traced to God’s work of inclining his will to repent. “Let me now my sins lament.” In the second stanza, “I have long withstood his grace, long provoked him to his face, God I would not hearken to his calls, grieved him by a thousand falls.” So when we believe that we respond because God has inclined us to repent, we believe in sovereign grace. We may not realize it, but that’s exactly what we do believe. And when we get down upon our knees and pray, and ask God to work in the hearts of men and bring them to Christ, we have become believers in sovereign grace. We do not pray to man’s free will. We do not pray to men. We pray that God would save men. So there’s no charge for that. [Laughter]

We’re turning now to 1 Samuel chapter 27 and the subject for today is “The Frailty of the Man After God’s Own Heart.” We commonly think of biblical heroes only as

models of excellence. That’s a mistake, of course, but we commonly do. I think that most of us, when we look to the Old Testament heroes, and make reference to them, we make reference to them frequently as models of excellence. And sometimes we refer to them only as models of excellence.

I’ve wondered, at times, why that is so. Perhaps it is traceable to Hebrews chapter 11, in which the Westminster Abbey of Faith, as that chapter has been called, all of the individuals who are brought forward from the Old Testament and most of the famous men are, they are praised for their faith. By faith, they did this. By faith, they did that. And one gains the impression, at least from that chapter, that all of these men are men that are only models of excellence. Some, when we think about the obvious way in which the Old Testament records their sins, go on to say, well Hebrews 11 is written after the time of the cross and since the time of the cross is the ground of man’s ultimate forgiveness, now God as he inspires men, inspires them to write of men as having been forgiven. And thus, Hebrews 11 is favorable and only favorable to the lives of these men. That theory does not hold because in the New Testament, we do have individuals who are referred to and who are criticized by Scripture for their lives after the time of the cross.

But this tendency to refer to Old Testament heroes only as models of excellence is true of men who live in New Testament times, almost always when we refer to Augustine, when we refer to Luther, or when we refer to Calvin, or when we refer to Wesley, generally speaking, we refer to them in a similarly kind of eulogy. Now, that’s rather striking because when you look at the word of God and see how plainly it records the high points and the low points of God’s men, it’s amazing that we generally take the other approach.

The facts are that God’s men and women generally reach their intended service, whether it be as a king, like David, or a servant like others, or as ministers of the word of God, as for example the apostles, these men reach their goals or reach their intended

service through the discipline of divine trials, incessant struggling and waiting. Oh, the temptation in the midst of struggles and trails to seek relief. And, generally, when we seek relief, we seek relief in human wisdom.

Someone has said, and I think truly, “Temptations gain power when we fail to consider that the promises of salvation and of blessing on our toil are ‘yea’ and ‘amen’ in Christ Jesus.” In other words, it’s only in Christ that the blessings and the promises are ours. And when we stray from faith, from the recognition of that fact, then we stray spiritually. I think we’ll see that in this incident in David’s life.

It’s a rather remarkable chapter. When I left this morning and went outside, two, three men were talking together. About five minutes later, and as I passed by to say hello to them, one of them said, “We were just standing here, wondering how in the world you got what you got out of that chapter.” [Laughter] And I said, “Well, earlier in the week, I was wondering the same thing.” Should I pass by chapter 27? But the word of God is like that. When we apply ourselves to it, it’s remarkable what is there and what becomes so plain if we ponder it and think through it.

Now, David, in the first four verses, seeks protection at Gath. He’s had a painful in struggle with evil, represented by King Saul and the attempts of Saul to kill him. And so, now, finally we read, “David said in his heart, Now I shall perish some day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to see me any more in any part of Israel: so I shall escape out of his hand.” Now, there’s some big flags right in the beginning. We read, “And David said in his heart.” That’s very interesting, isn’t it. “David said in his heart.” Now, mind you, he has just said in verse 10 of the preceding chapter, speaking to Saul, David said, “Furthermore, as the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him of his day or his day shall come to die. And he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go.” So, David speaks with reference

to Saul and he says, “As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him,” or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. And now he is, shortly later, saying, “Now I shall perish some day by the hand of Saul.”

The optimism of chapter 26 in verse 10 has faded. Why? Is there a secret departure in David’s heart? Has he, himself, done what you and I so often do? We forget to keep close relationships with the Lord? Is that why? Is it because he has lost the spirit of devotion, the warmth of the faith manifested earlier in his life? Has that gone? Well, you know, there is no seeking of the prophets. Nothing is said about that. In fact, there is no seeking of the Urim for guidance either. We simply read, he said “in his heart, now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul.” And that second statement, “Now I shall perish someday by the hands of Saul” his self-image is shattered. His self-esteem has vanished. There’s no one around to stroke him. And we are told that that’s what we must have, are we not?

This raises the question of self-esteem and Scripture. Unfortunately today, we are living in the day in which psychology has had entirely too much influence on evangelical Christianity. You hear evangelicals saying things like this. It’s important to like yourself. If you don’t like yourself, nobody else will. Or John or Mary or Frank’s problem is his poor self-concept. And, strikingly, you hear it from such diverse individuals as the postman or the post-lady, the taxi driver, the plumber, they’re all saying the same thing. It’s the good news. It’s the gospel according to psychology. Should we like ourselves? Well, that depends. Regardless of how we behave, should we like ourselves? Should we like ourselves when we are sinning against God? People will behave badly, says the Christian, because human nature is twisted. Liking yourself doesn’t remove the warp. You can like yourself and be pleased with yourself, but your nature is something that you have received as a result of the fall. Liking yourself doesn’t remove that warp. In psychological theory, and mind you I know there are some Christians who are psychologists and who have a difficult time integrating the two, almost always, it’s an

incomplete kind of integration. Psychological theory, that is, humanist psychological theory has no place for the Fall of man. There are no bad natural inclinations.

Christianity does say, we are of great worth. So does psychology. So then, should we accept psychology’s newer insights about self-love. God is the understanding therapist who only wants us to love ourselves for what we are.

T.S. Elliott has written somewhere of the image of Christ as “the wounded surgeon.” I like that expression, “The wounded surgeon, wounded by his suffering on the Cross, but nevertheless, the surgeon who is going to do something for us.” Mr. Elliott has written of him along those lines. “He operates on us because we don’t need a pat on the back but an operation, a heart transplant if you will.” If humanist psychology is right, then Christianity is not necessary. Let us not forget that.

We should have biblical self-regard for these reasons. We are God’s creation. It is said, after God created man and the creation, he found it good. We are part of God’s divine purpose of the ages, for that we can thank God. We are the objects of divine redemption. Not because worthy, not because we are worthy, let us not for one moment think that God loved us because we’re worthy. We’re unworthy. Why did he love us? He loved us sovereignly for this plain and simple reason because of his divine love and what he was going to do with us. What he was going to make us. That’s why he loves us. And it’s important for us to remember that. In other words, Christianity would have us feel good about ourselves, but not until there is something good to feel good about.

“Our Lord’s greatest wrath wasn’t directed,” someone has said, “at obvious sinners like Mary Magdalene, but at those who were convinced of their own worth, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and he never asked his disciples to have self-confidence. He never asked them to have self-esteem. He never asked them to pay attention to their self-image. He asked them only to have faith in him, trust in him.”

There is not the slightest hint in the New Testament that we should have faith in ourselves. I think you can see that when David says, “Now I shall perish someday,” that

the one thing that he has forgotten is the one thing that he has manifested to this point, his trust in the sovereign God.

Now, having said in his heart and having said, “Now I shall perish,” we read in the second verse, “Then David arose, and went over to Achish, the king of Gath.” Now pay attention to this. The evident state of David’s mind is out of harmony with God. Fear of coming danger, mistrust of God’s care, now mind you, this is the man who wrote in the psalms, “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear.” “The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid.” King Saul? Why surely not King Saul? He has the word of God he is going to be the ruler and that word has come to him through God’s inspired prophet. Discouragement? Yes, discouraged, very much like the children of Israel are said by Ezekiel when he gives us the great vision of the valley of dry bones, in which those who are the bones say, something to the effect that “Our bones are dry, our help is gone, we are lost.”

What are the influences that bring it back? Well, there are external and physical ones. Saul, of course, is one of the causes that has made him think and think wrongly, and think in his heart. There are mental and emotion reasons. Perplexity, perhaps some lack of sympathy from others. There are moral and spiritual reasons. In chapter 26, in verse 19 and 20, he has said, “Now therefore, please let my lord the king hear the words of your servant. If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let him accept an offering; but if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from sharing in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, ‘Go, serve other gods.’ So now, do not let my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord: For the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea, as when one hunts partridge in the mountains.” Affirming his faith in God’s deliverance of him, he speaks like that. Josephus once said something to the effect that “He advised with his friends,” but no one of the authors informs us that he advised with God.

Was he blameworthy? Well, what has he forgotten? Well, he’s forgotten the past deliverances that he has experienced back in chapter 17. We read these words in verse 37, “Moreover, David said, The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear, he will deliver me from the hand of the Philistines.” So, he has forgotten his past deliverances.

He’s forgotten the promises of God. He’s forgotten the promises that were made to him. Salvation is of the Lord. Or, to put it as Psalm 27 puts it in the 10th verse, “Also when my father and my mother forsake me, then will the Lord take me up.” And then, he has dishonored the name of God. The name of God is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and are safe. He’s not running into the Lord God. He’s thinking in his heart of the things that seem to be the rational things to do.

Now, it says here that “There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily go into the land of the Philistines.” He’s thought nothing could be better for him but, in reality, nothing could be worse. Guard against the causes of despondency, my Christian friends. Faith in the Lord God is the solution to our difficulties. Turn to the Lord in prayer. Take no hasty steps. Reside in the strength of the Lord God. Be strong in the might of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now, we read in the 4th verse something rather interesting, I think. “It was told Saul that David had fled to Gath.” His C.I.A. is working still. [Laughter] And so, it was told him that David had fled to Gath and so he sought him no more. Now, I want you to notice something here. We’re not to think from this that Saul has become a new man. “He sought him no more.” That’s true. But did Saul leave his sins? No, he didn’t leave his sins. The occasion of his sins, David, has left him. Saul still is his enemy, and we shall see that in the following pages. So, in effect, the reason that Saul seeks him no more is not because he’s decided to go for the Nobel Prize, but rather, he’s lost the occasion by which he may exercise his enmity and hatred toward David.

Now, Mr. Gorbachev, will you pardon the political words, you’ll notice I hardly ever say anything about politics. I count on the word of God letting you know about where I would stand. But I must confess that when Mr. Gorbachev was made by Time Magazine the Man of the Year, I looked at it and I saw the picture of Ronald Reagan, ‘cause he was the one who made Gorbachev what he became. He’s the author, it seems to me, of Perestroika. He strengthened our army and Mr. Gorbachev said, “There is no need to fight any longer, we cannot beat them, so we’ll go another way.” But now he’s been given the Nobel Peace Prize, seven hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Gorbachev, mind you, not Reagan, Mr. Gorbachev, not Mr. Bush, Gorbachev. Gorbachev, the man who sent men into Afghanistan, the man who’s strangling the Baltic States even today, the man who hasn’t done anything but has said he’s not going to do what he’s been doing any more. [Laughter] So now he’s the great Nobel Peace Prize winner because he’s decided that murder and pillage and destruction and all of the things that have been done, of which he was a part for so many years, are not going to be done any longer. I’m sorry. I do not find that very, very enlightening.

So, when Saul seeks David no more, it’s not because his heart’s changed. He doesn’t have the opportunity. But when the opportunity comes, David better be on guard. Well, David now, we’re talking about him, and we must not whitewash David. David, when he comes down to Philistia, he speaks to Achish and he says, “King Achish, if I have found favor in your eyes, give me a place in some town in the country that I may dwell in, because I have my wives and my men have their wives and it doesn’t seem right that your servant, David, should dwell in the royal city with you.” And Achish thought that was a good idea and so he gave him Ziklag. Now, Ziklag, actually, was a part of Judah in some of the places of the word of God. But, it’s right on the border and so, he gave him Ziklag and David and his men went to Ziklag. Now, mind you, he’s gone down to the Philistines and he’s living among them and one can see the sin and peril of expediency emerge. His basic loyalty is to Israel just as every true believer in Jesus Christ,

if he is a true believer, his basic loyalty is to the Lord. But the way in which he conducts his life is often contradictory. And sometimes he follows expediency. Sometimes he does the very thing that David does here. He’s not following his true convictions – his true heart, and so, he’s in Philistia where he shouldn’t be, in the godless Philistine country. With all the pressures there not to worship the Lord God of Israel and expediency and sin has taken over.

So, why did he do it? Well, he said, in his heart, in the beginning, he said, in his heart it is better for me to be down in Philistia. No! No! David. No, no. This is a self-chosen means of safety. It seemed perfectly nice, right to do it. Circumstances suggest it, do they not? Christian’s so often follow circumstances. Often they will say to me, “We want to find the will of God?” And then they will resurrect the circumstances that caused them to make a certain decision.

No, fundamentally, my Christian friend, we are interested in the will of God. Circumstances may or may not be in harmony with God’s will. This is a self-chosen means of safety. And what it involves is a forced shameful suppression of his true character. In Philistine country and in the court of Achish, he cannot be the disciple of the Lord God in Heaven; the one whom he truly in his heart knows is the true God.

And so it leads to that kind of thing. O, the futility, my Christian friend, of living with the irreligious, the unbelieving in the kind of society like the church. No Christian, in my mind, no Christian should ever be in fellowship in a church that has departed from the word of God. No Christian!

David might have said, we’ll I’ll have a chance to win the Philistines if I go down among them. I think he had enough sense to know that that was not going to work. But many of modern day Christians make the same mistake. They do things, put themselves under that which is contrary to the word of God in order, they say, to win some. I would just like for them to march the group of individuals that they have won in such circumstances. I assure you, at least from my experience, and the only thing I can say

about it, it’s a long time, almost fifty years, I’ve yet to see that really work as a principle. He’s with the unbelieving Philistines, the enemy, and the word of God is so plain. It tells us that we are to make no friends with the world.

Listen to the brother of our Lord, who in the 4th chapter and the 4th verse of his epistle has this to say with reference to the world. “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

The Apostle John, in the 2nd chapter and the 15th verse of his first epistle, says, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” That’s a lesson for the individual; it’s a lesson for the church.

John Gerstner, I think I’ve made reference to this previously, but John Gerstner has been in our Chapel for two series of meetings in months and years past. Dr. Gerstner is a remarkable man and a man that I’ve admired a great deal. Growing up as a Presbyterian and hearing Dr. Gerstner, I had some sympathies with him; but had some questions about some of the steps that he had taken. When I was young, not knowing much, I felt since my church was departing from the word of God that I should separate from them, which I did when I came to theological seminary here in Dallas. Dr. Gerstner took another path. And his contention was this, as he has explained it to me more than once. As long as my church officially holds to biblical doctrine, for him that meant the Westminster Confession of Faith, I will stay with them until they officially deny Christian doctrine. I will stay with them. Down through the years he’s had many of his friends, many of his students, like R. C. Sproul, one of his students, leave the church. They have advised him. They have pled with him through the years, but he has stuck to his principle.

When he was here, we at home discussed the question and I remember him sitting in our family room and giving me again his principle. And you can imagine I was astonished, not long ago, a few weeks back, it happened a little bit longer, I read a lengthy article in which Dr. Gerstner had officially left the P.C.U.S.A. And the reason that he gave publicly was, “It’s no longer a Christian church.” Now, what he meant by that was this. In the doctrine of the church, a church is a church only if the word of God is preached, and, secondly, the ordinances are carried out, observed, and, thirdly, if discipline is practiced. If we do not have the preaching of the word of God, if we do not have the ordinances if we do not have disciple, we do not have a church. It’s helpful to remember that because the church, the term is attached to a lot of things. The Mormon church, no, no, not a church, the word of God is not preached. The ordinances as understood in the word of God are not practiced. Discipline as set forth in the word of God is not carried out.

But Dr. Gerstner said that in the latest theological statement of his denomination, there was no clear statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. And in the light of these things, he had determined finally to leave and now, has sought and received acceptance and ordination into the Presbyterian Church of America. I think what is illustrated in that is a truth. And that is, that if a church does not stand for the truth of the word of God, it is not a church and no believing man should be in that church.

So, David, in Philistia, is in the wrong place for the wrong reasons. Now, notice what happens when a person begins saying in his heart, moving out, getting his guidance from himself, not from the word of God, not trusting in the Lord God, one sin always sins to another sin, which leads still to another, and generally, the path is downward.

Achish, I started to say bless his heart, [laughter] but said, only in the sense that we sometimes use the expression. Achish, bless his heart, thinks that David is fighting his battles. But the wily Judahite is frying his own fish in anticipation of the time when he will be king of Judah. So, he’s down there among the Philistines but his fundamental

commitment to God is not allowing him to truly be united to Achish and the Philistines. So what does he engage in? Deceit to start with.

What do we read about here? Well, we read that David and his men go out on raiding parties, and they come back, and Achish asks them what they’ve been doing. And they will say, “Not that we’ve been fighting the enemies of Israel” but we’ve been fighting in this particular territory. And he gives Achish the impression that he’s really fighting for him. But he’s not. He’s frying his own fish, as has been said. So, he tricks Achish again, a second time. This is the second time he’s tricked Achish. I guess we can conclude from that, that the unbelievers are not all that smart, really.

But it’s not something that one should be pleased with. What we have is a disreputable episode of deliberate butchery, although the Philistines are the mortal enemy. For what does David do, he goes down into these territories. And in order that no one may report back, no escapee might get back to Achish and say, look, David is a traitor. So he kills everybody, man, woman, and child, takes the properties that might be helpful for them and leaves a train of butchery, brutal butchery. This is the coming king of Israel. This is the anointed king. This is the man who stood up to Goliath and said, “You come at me with a sword, with a spear, with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord God of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth and that all the earth may know there is a God in Israel.”

But what kind of God would they gather from David’s God now? God of butchery? God of brutality? God of deceitfulness? “Then all the assembly shall know that the Lord God does not save with sword and spear.” Oh, David? Is that so? “For the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hands.” It’s a sad story. It starts, “David said in his heart.” What’s David’s chief fault? Lack of a proper self-concept? No! Something deeper than that, that’s shallow. David’s chief fault lies in his unbelief. He

failed at what is his strongest point. Listen to those words again, that he spoke to Goliath. That’s what you think of when you think of David. He, who wrote Psalm 27, verses 1 through 4, takes council with himself. Can you imagine it?

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me, to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident. One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord.”

Is that what you are beholding now, David? The beauty of the Lord? No, no. You’re looking out for number one. You’re looking out for yourself and those who are united with you.

You look back at the men of the Bible, and you find the same thing here and there in their lives. Noah, what a magnificent man of faith, stands up against the whole of the world, builds his ark, all the scorners and mockers come by. Can you imagine? Perhaps, never had rain, there’s going to be a flood? Building this great work. My goodness, that’s an occasion for a lot of fun. I can imagine. But it came. And Noah was saved and those who were with him in the ark. And then how did he fall? By intemperance. Can you imagine it? This great man of faith falling by intemperance. Moses? A great follower of the Lord. A great writer of the word of God. A great man, no question about it, a great man. How did he fall? Lost his temper. Lost his temper and as a result was not able to enter into the Promised Land. Hezekiah, another great man, a man of faith, a true man of faith, but then began to boast, and he, too, suffered. Simon Peter? We all know the story of Simon. No need to say anything about that.

Look, my Christian friends, it’s easy to decline. It’s easy. We may get our Ziklags to dwell in and it may seem to us to be the thing that we ought to do. But you can be sure, if it is something that you have devised in your heart and it does not come from God, it’s something in which and by which you shall suffer. The path leads to one sin after another and, finally, to presumptuous sins.

And, incidentally, this is something that I learned in my studies this week. Not a single one of David’s psalms can be referred to this period, not a single one. The old harp is over in the corner, evidently. Or else, it’s standing out there and he’s saying, I don’t feel like I can sing anything today. Just, it never comes to my mind, those old phrases that meant so much to me. They’re gone. I can even imagine him saying, Lord, why have they gone? Well, David, you’re not in the Lord’s path. So his unbelief that’s the fundamental cause. That’s the cause men are not saved. And it’s the cause of Christian’s failures as well. His unbelief led to unworthy actions. Better the caves, better the forests of Judea, than the prosperous life as a pirate and plunderer in an unbelieving society. Little prayer leads to self-guidance, pillage and slaughter and to deceitful lies. There’s a straight line between despondency caused by unbelief to dishonesty, to duplicity, and to deceit. The promises, I repeat, have their “yeah” and “amen” in Christ Jesus. Only in him! And those promises are ours, fundamentally, for our eternal salvation, only in what Christ has done and happiness and joy and a true sense of being in the will of God also come from “yeah” and “amen,” if I may add Paul’s words, in Christ Jesus.

O, my Christian friend, pay attention to the truth of the word of God.

John Bunyan has put it, as he usually does, in a very beautiful and interesting way. He wrote a book called, “The Holy War.” Many of you perhaps have read it. And in this book, he shows that when the town of man’s soul came into existence, that in the town of man’s soul, incredulity, or unbelief, was made the alderman, and then the lord mayor, of the town of man’s soul. When Emmanuel took the town, incredulity or unbelief was doomed to execution. But incredulity managed to break out of prison and lurked in

hiding places where he couldn’t be found. And when the Devil came to assault the town and to take the town over, well, old incredulity reappeared. As a matter of fact, old incredulity, Bunyan says, was made General of the Army. But after the assailing army was defeated and many of the officers and soldiers in it were put to death, unbelief still evaded capture. He did yet dwell in man’s soul, Bunyan says, though he “hid in dens and holes.”

How true. How true. In the most sanctified of Christians, by human standards, unbelief still dwells there, though it dwells in dens and holes, and that’s why you and I, if we are going to walk in a way that is pleasing to the Lord, and for our good, we can never do it if we do not walk in faith in his word. And, so far as I know, the only way in which I can find his will, the only way in which I can grow in faith, is through the word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. We don’t get down upon our knees and say, “O Lord, give me faith” when God has already said, “Look, faith comes from the word of God.” Sit and read your Bible. And you will discover that faith will come. And then you can get down upon your knees and thank God for what the word of God in the hands of the Holy Spirit has done in your life. Do not get those things reversed.

Matthew Henry said it so well. “Unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men, when without are fighting, within are fears. And it’s a hard matter to get over them.” Lord, increase our faith? That is our prayer. Lord, increase our faith as we read and ponder the Scriptures and ask the Holy Spirit to make them plain to us. And so, I say to you as Christians, if you follow the direction of your own heart or circumstances, invariably you will stumble. Follow the teaching of Holy Scripture. Ask God, as you read and ponder the word of God, to increase your faith and perception. And he’ll give you a happier Christian life.

If you are here, and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, that fundamental, that fundamental loyalty to him does not exist. That only comes when, by

God’s grace, we’ve been seen to be what we really are, sinners and God the Holy Spirit has inclined our hearts, as Mr. Wesley has said, “inclined our hearts to repent.”

My God, in his marvelous grace, incline your heart to repent. May you give him thanks for the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross, for you need the benefits of it. May you flee to him. May you enter the family of God and enjoy what God has provided for sinners, through his word and through his Spirit.

Let’s stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous lessons that are found in the word of God. Deliver us from saying in our own hearts and then following ways to which our own wisdom leads us. Lord, enable us by Thy grace to be submissive to the teaching of Scripture. Give us a love for the Bible, a love for the fellowship that we have with Thee through the Scriptures in the spirit. Enable us to be pleasing to Thee and live useful believing lives.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.