

March 12/13, 2016

A Time to Run
Courage to Lead Series
1 Samuel 19:1-24
Pastor Bryan Clark

I think one of the ways you could look at life is there are kind of two tracks through life. One track is what has actually been; the other track would be what could have been. And of course those two tracks go on into the future—what will be, and what could have been. The difference between those is made up of the choices we make day after day after day. That's what we want to talk about this morning. In our text this morning, Saul really has his last chance to make choices related to his relationship with David that will dramatically affect both Saul, David, and the kingdom for a decade to come.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 19. Like in chapter 18, in chapter 19 David is what we refer to in a Hebrew narrative as a flat character. What that means is we don't learn about David's thoughts; we don't learn about David's emotions. Basically, even as a main character he is developed as a character through the eyes of everyone else—through the eyes of Saul, Saul's son Jonathan, Saul's daughter and David's wife Michal, and through Samuel. That will begin to change in chapter 20. So we pick it up in verse one:

Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death. But Jonathan, Saul's son, greatly delighted in David. So Jonathan told David saying, "Saul my father is seeking to put you to death. Now therefore, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself. I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you; if I find out anything, then I will tell you." (*NASB, 1 Sam 19:1-3)

So just a quick review—last week in chapter 18, Saul wants David dead. David is receiving the attention; he's receiving the applause; he has won the hearts of the nation. That all is a big threat to Saul, so Saul wants David dead. But he knows that the nation loves David, so it's not going to go well for him if he just goes out and kills David. So he's going to try and do it indirectly. So he puts him in charge of the elite forces, sends him out—David wins—puts him in charge of the ordinary forces—David goes out; David wins. Then he makes an arrangement to kill Philistines for his oldest daughter. He reneges on that; a new arrangement in order to marry Michal, his next daughter. David goes out, defeats the Philistines—David wins. So David gets the girl; David gets the praise. That is so threatening to Saul, he declares David "*Public Enemy Number 1*". A dramatic change then in chapter 19 is Saul is no longer trying to kill David indirectly. It is not a secret anymore. He is wanting David killed directly so he says to Jonathan his son and to his soldiers, 'I want David dead.'

Now there are several points in the text where we see again how deluded Saul has become. Jonathan loves David; they are fellow warriors; they are comrades. There's just no way Jonathan is going to go out and kill David, but Saul has become so deluded he just doesn't really make much sense anymore. That's what he tells Jonathan. Jonathan goes out, warns David, comes up with a plan. "You go to such-and-such a place; you hide there. I'll go out there with my dad; we'll have a conversation. If I feel like it's safe, I'll wave you in." Verse 4:

Then Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, “Do not let the king sin against his servant David, since he has not sinned against you, and since his deeds *have been* very beneficial to you. For he took his life in his hand and struck the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel; and you saw it and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood, by putting David to death without a cause?” Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul vowed, “As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death.” Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these words. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as formerly. (Vs. 4-7)

So Jonathan goes out with his dad and makes a very courageous, impassioned appeal that David has done nothing wrong. This would be a sin to kill David. David has actually been very faithful and loyal. He has benefitted the kingdom. He risked his own life. He went out; he killed the giant; he delivered Israel; all Israel rejoiced; even Saul himself rejoiced. Jonathan says it strongly: **Why then will you sin against innocent blood by putting David to death without a cause?** Saul responds by listening to David and vows, “I will not kill David.”

But here’s the question to wrestle with: Jonathan makes a strong moral argument. It’s very well thought through; it’s very well reasoned. He’s right. But the question is: Is Saul at a point where he can be reasoned with? Is Saul at a place where he can understand a strong moral argument, genuinely be convicted, and make a vow to not kill David? Or is Saul so deluded; is Saul now so unreasonable; has Saul become so obsessed with killing David that he’s willing to say whatever is necessary to get another chance at David? This is not an insignificant question. Jonathan loves David. He has reasoned with his father. He believes his father is listening and telling the truth when he vows, “I will not kill David.” Based on that, he invites David back into the presence of Saul, the king. What is at stake here is David’s very life.

One of the things we have to wrestle with in life is: Can you reason with unreasonable people? I have this conversation with people on a fairly regular basis. There are people that become so dysfunctional, they become so unreasonable, they’ve traveled so far down this path that you cannot just simply reason with them and think everything is going to work out. Sometimes you have to accept that people have reached a point where logic and reason isn’t necessarily going to fix everything. And when that’s the case you have to back up and rethink how you’re approaching the situation. In Jonathan’s case, he believes his dad is telling the truth, and he calls David back into the presence of the king. Whether or not Saul is at a point where he can be reasoned with, we’ll see in just a moment.

The other thing that’s helpful, at this point in the text, is to just stop and ponder for a moment. Saul has made bad decision after bad decision, and that has defined his life as king. But it’s not too late to somehow reconcile and restore a relationship with David. But this is the last chance for that. One can only imagine what could have been had Saul somehow reconciled with David. If Saul would have acknowledged: *I’ve been a bad king; I haven’t trusted God. God’s going to raise up a new king. But clearly the Lord is with David. David is winning great victories and if I at this point will trust David and trust God...* then what might the remainder of the years as king have been like? Saul has over ten years left as king. One can only imagine if he would have celebrated and embraced David, they easily could have been ten years of peace and prosperity in the land. If he would have celebrated and applauded David, Saul too would have won the hearts of the people. The whole story could have been different but this is Saul’s last chance to do that. Verse 8:

When there was war again, David went out and fought with the Philistines, and defeated them with great slaughter, so that they fled before him. Now there was an evil spirit from the LORD on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing *the harp* with his *hand*. Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night. (Vs. 8-10)

So whatever happens with the Philistines, David has to go out and fight again. David went to great victory. One can assume the people were applauding again. *Saul has killed his thousands; David has killed his ten thousands.* And all of this is so threatening to Saul, he can't take it. So once again, he takes his spear; he hurls it at David, and seeks to kill him.

At the end of that paragraph, it says **David fled and escaped that night.** That phrase will show up multiple times in this chapter. It's an important phrase because it tells you this is the beginning of kind of the next season of Saul's reign as king, and the relationship between Saul and David. This is the beginning of David's life as a fugitive, and for the next decade David will live as a fugitive. As of this moment, David will never again appear in the court of Saul. Whatever could have been is now over, and Saul has made his choice.

Then Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, in order to put him to death in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be put to death." So Michal let David down through a window, and he went out and fled and escaped. (There's our phrase.)

Michal took the household idol and laid it on the bed, and put a *quilt* of goats' *hair* at its head, and covered it with clothes. When Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick." Then Saul sent messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him to me on his bed, that I may put him to death." When the messengers entered, behold, the household idol was on the bed with the quilt of goats' *hair* at its head. So Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like this and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" And Michal said to Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go! Why should I put you to death?'" (Vs. 11-17)

In this case, it's not enough that David has fled the court of Saul. In the past that was adequate, but Saul is now publicly seeking to kill David, so Saul sends soldiers to track David, to surround his house when he comes out in the morning to kill him. Somehow Michal gets word of this and she tells David, "You can't stay. In the morning they will kill you. You've got to go." So with some sort of a rope, she lowers David out the window and he escapes.

A lot of these houses in the ancient world were actually on the city wall. Seems likely that was the case, so he was simply lowered on the outside of the wall, and would have escaped. Michal then takes a household idol, puts it on the pillow to look like a head with some hair, puts some stuff in there for a body. When the soldiers come for David—"Can't see him; he's sick." The soldiers go back to Saul, "David's sick." Saul says, "Then bring bed and all and I will kill him." So they go back, get bed and all. They figure out: David's not here; it's a trick; he's escaped. And again in one of those moments that reflect how deluded Saul has become, he seems genuinely perplexed that his daughter actually helped her husband, whom she loves, escape being put to death by her crazy father, the king.

That's a bit of a paraphrase, but basically Saul doesn't know what to do with that. Why in the world would you do that? At this point, Michal is saving her own neck, and so she makes her own story up. Because David said if I don't help him, he would kill me. Of course, she's making that part up, but now she fears her own father, the king.

Now there's no question Michal lied and deceived. The text doesn't say that's a good thing to do; it doesn't say that's a bad thing to do. It really doesn't cast judgment; it simply is what happened. There's no reason really to believe Michal was real spiritually sensitive. Just the fact that she had a household idol in her home kind of speaks volumes, but she loved David. She loved her husband, and she was determined to do what was necessary to protect him from Saul. So David escapes. Verse 18:

Now David fled and escaped and came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and stayed in Naioth. It was told Saul, saying, "Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah." Then Saul sent messengers to take David, but when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing *and* presiding over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul; and they also prophesied. When it was told Saul he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. So Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. (Vs. 18-21)

So David escapes and goes to Ramah—this makes sense—about ten miles away, and finds Samuel and tells Samuel what's going on. Wouldn't you love to have been a fly on the wall to listen to that conversation—David and Samuel exchanging Saul stories? Saul has lost it, so David is now fleeing for his life as a fugitive. Samuel takes David up to Naioth—nobody's quite sure where. It seems most likely it was like a campground on the outskirts or a little ways from Ramah, where the prophets lived. Maybe it seemed like a safe place to stash David in order for him to get a little rest.

The prophets are prophesying. Just like earlier in the Samuel story, it's really hard to figure out what does that mean? In previous chapters this word **prophecy** was translated *Saul was raving*. So it's really hard to figure out. You have to kind of suspend your definition of prophecy. It's some sort of weird trance, some sort of a state that came upon people, empowered by the Spirit of God. So Saul sends soldiers and when they get to Naioth, the Spirit of God comes upon them and they prophesy. Basically, they are incapacitated. Saul sends more; they're incapacitated...sends a third group; they're incapacitated.

What you have is Saul engaging his human army and God engaging the Spirit's power. It's the spiritual army where God is protecting David. God doesn't need a lot of soldiers. The Spirit of God was adequate to incapacitate the soldiers and protect David. So now Saul determines, "I'll go myself!"

Then he himself went to Ramah, and came as far as the large well that is in Secu; and he asked and said, "Where are Samuel and David?" And *someone* said, "Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah." He proceeded there to Naioth in Ramah, and the Spirit of God came upon him also, so that he went along prophesying continually until he came to Naioth in Ramah. He also stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Therefore they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (Vs. 22-24)

Now one detail is in chapter 15. We were told that when Samuel left Saul, he would not see him again until the day that he died. So it raises the question then: How do we explain this? I think the most logical explanation is how do we define *see Saul*? In other words, an ultra-literal interpretation would be he literally never visually saw him again. But that seems highly unlikely. They are only ten miles apart. Saul had to travel with his army up and down this road in order to go to battle. The chance that Samuel looked out the landscape and saw Saul is highly likely. It seems more likely the text is saying Samuel never again *saw Saul* as a prophet, in his official capacity, prophet to king. That would explain then this text because he's not seeing him in an official capacity, prophet to king, but he does literally see him.

So Saul stops at the well. "Anybody seen David and Samuel?" "Yes, they're at Naioth." On his way, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him and he prophesies. Whatever this is, he does it on the way. When he gets there, he falls into some sort of an incapacitating trancelike state. He strips off his clothing and he is in this state before them, naked for twenty-four hours.

One of the interesting things about this part of the text is there are numerous similarities to chapter 10—the first time Saul went to Ramah. As a matter of fact, the very last statement, **"Is Saul also among the prophets?"** is identical to what was said in chapter 10. It would be a Hebrew narrative technique that forces comparison. The writer wants us to go back in our minds to chapter 10. That was the first time that Saul arrived at Ramah. It's the first time he met Samuel. It was when he was told he would be the first king of Israel. Samuel told him that, "The Spirit of God will come upon you, will empower you, will give you what you need, will change you into another man, and will give you everything necessary for you to be a great king."

One of the signs of that promise is that Saul would supernaturally prophesy among the prophets. And if you remember the people said, **"Is Saul prophesying among the prophets?"** But it was a moment filled with hope...a moment filled with wonder...a moment filled with possibility! What could this story be like if Saul trusted God...if Saul was changed into a new man...if Saul was empowered by the Spirit of God? He had every possibility to go from ordinary Saul to a great king in Israel!

So the last time we had a Saul in Ramah story, it was filled with hope and possibility. Now here we are. This story has not been a story filled with hope and trust and faith and greatness. It's been a story of disobedience, a story of pride, a story of fear and insecurity and paranoia—a story now obsessed with putting to death God's next anointed king.

So here we are with Saul in Ramah, and he is both literally and figuratively stripped naked before the people. There is this moment where, "This is what has become of your king? He is shamefully naked before you." It's kind of this moment where, "Israel, this is your king!" It's a sad, pitiful moment in the story.

This really begins what is the last phase of the Saul/David story. This is the beginning of David's life as a fugitive and Saul now becoming obsessed with one thing—and that is putting David to death. Whatever could have been won't be, and this will just be a sad, pitiful end to the reign of King Saul.

As we wrap this up this morning, it seems to me there are two primary characters that we can identify with. One is Saul. One can only imagine the possibilities of what could have been, had Saul made different choices. Saul could have been a great king in Israel. Samuel promised; God

promised through Samuel, “I’ll give you everything you need. You just have to trust Me.” But Saul’s reign as king was a series of one bad decision after another. Whatever could have been would never be, and Saul’s story was a sad, pitiful story of failure as a king.

Even in this chapter, after all that has transpired, there was still this one last moment where Saul could have listened to Jonathan. Jonathan was right; he was reasonable, and David could have greatly benefitted Saul. The last decade of Saul’s reign could have been dramatically different. But Saul chose otherwise, and the next ten years will be miserable for Saul, for the kingdom, and for David.

It is a reminder that whatever is in the past is in the past. So you sit here this morning and you say, “Okay, there’s my story; this is what has been. This is what could have been.” That can be positive or negative, depending on the choices you’ve made. If you’ve made really good choices, then you say, “My story’s been a good story. But I could have made bad choices and it could have been a heartbreaking story.” So you say this morning, “I’m glad I’ve made good choices; I want to keep doing that.” You could also be sitting there this morning saying, “You know, I could have made good choices. I made bad choices, and what has been has been painful. And I know now it didn’t have to be that way.” Okay, that’s true. But the past is past. You can’t go back; you can’t change that. There’s nothing gained by dwelling on that. But we can learn from it. It’s never too late to make good choices, and the choices you make today and tomorrow and the next day will define what will be over the next ten years.

So if you want a story that’s pleasing to God, if you want a story that you can look back on and say, “This has been God’s story in my life,” look back and say, “I’m thankful I didn’t waste my life. I lived my life for the things that matter. This has been a good story that God has written in my life.” If that’s what you want, you have to make good decisions. Good decisions today, good decisions tomorrow, good decisions the next day. It’s never too late to start making really good decisions. But just know that whatever decisions you make, they will define what will be over the next ten years of your story.

The other principle character in this story is David. When you know the end of the David story, it’s very easy to dismiss these moments as being somewhat insignificant. But there’s no way at this point in the story any of this could have made any sense to David. David had to have been absolutely miserable and confused. All he’s done is trust God. He’s sought to be loyal to Saul; he’s a man after God’s own heart; he’s tried to do the right thing. He has done the right thing. God has blessed him, and the reward for that is his life has now become miserable as a fugitive.

Even though he’s a flat character in Samuel, if you want to know what David was thinking and what he was feeling in this story, all you have to do is read Psalm 59. It’s the psalm David wrote reflecting on what he was thinking and feeling when he was going through this story in chapter 19.

David could not have possibly understood what God was up to. I mean David didn’t ask to be king. Samuel comes along and anoints him. David has the courage and the faith to defeat Goliath. David is told he’s going to be the next king; he never could have imagined it would be like this—that God would take him through God’s boot camp, God’s school of leadership. And for over a decade David’s life will be miserable as a fugitive, in order to forge in David a character, a godly character that would serve him well as king. That would give him what was necessary for him to become the greatest king in the history of Israel. There’s no way in this moment of the story any of that could have made any sense to David.

Maybe you sit here this morning, and you say, “I kind of feel like David. I’m just trying to do the right thing. I’m trying to obey God, but it just seems like everything falls apart. Life seems so unfair. I can’t make sense of what’s going on, and it feels like the more I trust God, the more I try to do right, the more things fall apart! And I don’t understand why it has to be this way, and where is God in all this?”

Sometimes, all you can do is trust God. God may be taking you through His boot camp. God may be taking you through His school of leadership to forge in you a character that is necessary before He calls you to something significant. Right now it may not make any sense to you and all you can do is keep trusting. Keep seeking to do the right thing, and trust that God is up to something in order for God to use you greatly. God often has to take you through His school of leadership to forge within you a godly character that will serve you well when God gives you the call to be a world changer.

Our Father, we celebrate this morning that You are faithful. You’re faithful when life makes sense, and You’re faithful when nothing makes sense. God, give us the courage to trust You in those difficult moments in life, when we’re trying to do the right thing and it just seems like nothing much is going right for us. And, God, like Saul, God, may we learn the lesson of Saul; may we make right choices that we might trust You, that our story might be defined by faith and courage. God, give us the faith to trust You day by day in the choices we make. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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A Time to Run ***Courage to Lead Series***

I Samuel 19:1-24

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Think back 5-10 years ago about decisions you made. How have they affected your story today for good or for bad? Was the impact of those decisions back then clear to you at the time? In other words, could you see at the time how much those decisions would affect the pathway of your life?
2. Since the past is past there is nothing to be gained by dwelling on the past but we can learn from the past. Seeing how my decisions from the past affected my life 10 years later, what are the decisions I'm considering right now that might affect the next 10 years?
3. Our text brings up what some refer to as "situational ethics." For example, is it always a sin to lie or deceive or is this behavior permissible under certain circumstances? Should Corrie Ten Boom have lied about hiding Jews from Hitler or should she have told the truth and turned the Jews over to the Nazi's? If she lied, is that lie a sin in that situation?

Bible Study

1. Read I Samuel 19:1-7. Jonathan makes a reasonable argument to his father the king. David has not sinned against him and has actually benefitted Saul greatly. He even states that killing David would be to shed innocent blood without a cause. This is a key moment for Saul. What Jonathan is saying is true. Take some time to simply imagine what the rest of Saul's reign as king might have been like had he listened to the voice of Jonathan.
2. Read I Samuel 19:8-10. Once again David was successful in battle and that seems to have set off Saul's desire to kill David again. While Jonathan's intentions were good he basically put David in harm's way again. How do you know when people will listen to reason and you can move forward or when someone like Saul has become so deluded that he/she is beyond reason? Can you reason with someone who is unreasonable? Then what do you do?
3. Read I Samuel 19:11-18. Read Psalm 59 as to how David felt through this ordeal. Can you think of times when you kept trying to do the right thing and it seemed like you were continually attacked because of it? What did you do? How did you feel?
4. Michal clearly lied about David and deceived the messengers to save David's life. The text remains neutral about whether she was right or wrong to do this. It simply records that this is

what she did. Situational ethics is really the discussion around whether behavior such as Michal's is right or wrong in certain circumstances. There have long been various positions on situational ethics with thoughtful people on every side. However, to keep this discussion practical Pastor Clark gave some points to consider when making such difficult decisions. Discuss these points.

- Right is always right and wrong is always wrong because right and wrong are not tied ultimately to someone's rules but to the very character of God which does not change.
 - There are times when the right thing to do is unclear because there are multiple factors involved. For example hiding Jews from the Nazi's. Is it right to lie? Is it right to turn innocent Jews over to the Nazi's to be tortured and killed?
 - One needs to examine his/her motive in such circumstances. Am I simply excusing bad behavior or am I really seeking to do the right thing? For example, am I doing something in business that's unethical simply because it's accepted in the industry or am I genuinely trying to do the right thing?
 - The more one cultivates an internal compass (the heart of discipleship is much more this than simply having someone tell you what the rules are) the more equipped he/she is to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and respond accordingly.
5. Read I Samuel 19:18-24. The similarities to Saul's first visit to Ramah force the reader to make comparisons. Read I Samuel 10:1-16. These two chapters create some bookends to the Saul story. What could have been and what has actually transpired. How did Saul get from the promise and hope of chapter 10 to the pitiful scene in chapter 19?

Application

1. What are the top 3 things you've learned from the Saul story so far? How do we avoid taking the Saul path as leaders and followers of Christ?
2. David continues to make right choices but his life has become miserable. What can we learn from the David story so far? Is there any way David could have known what God was up to? Do you think this part of David's life was necessary training for him to be a great king?
3. What are the top 2 or 3 decisions you are facing these days? What are some practical things you can do to make sure you make the right decisions?

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