

## **God is Still in Charge**

### *Courage To Lead Series*

#### **1 Samuel 29:1-11**

Pastor Bryan Clark

People all around the world have different views about who God is. Different religions, different people but, at the end of the day, God, capital “G” *is* God. We don’t make God; God made us. He is who He is, regardless of what some religion says...some politician...some preacher...some celebrity. At the end of the day, part of what defines God is He is God. He is who He is. He is in charge. He is sovereign, and He ultimately wins. Now this big sovereign theology of God has great comfort. It’s the basis by which we as believers believe, at the end of the day, God wins; God triumphs; God keeps His promises. God will deliver us to the new heaven and the new earth, everything that our souls long for. That’s all part of a big God theology. But it comes with some struggles. If God is so big, if God is sovereign, if God is so strong, what do you do with evil in the world, what do you do with pain and suffering, what do you do with this tragedy in my life? It does create difficult discussions, lots of questions without answers. But it’s also helpful to think of it this way: Okay, what if God wasn’t big and sovereign? So what if evil and suffering in the world was just random? What if it has no meaning and purpose? What if life is just like the lottery and you chose a bad lottery ticket and your life is filled with tragedy? I’m sorry about that. It has no meaning and purpose; that’s just the way it goes. How was that more comforting? How was that better? If, at the end of the day, at least we can know that even though we don’t have answers for our pain and our struggles, at the end of the day there is meaning and purpose. God is still in charge. God is somehow working out His promise. It’s also true that there is both good and bad to this big God theology in the sense that if I’m like Saul and I’m determined to rebel against God, I’m determined to be my own God, I’m determined to do it my own way, at the end of the day, I can’t win. You simply can’t fight God and win. This came up last week when Saul called Samuel back from the dead and Samuel actually said to Saul, “You have made God your adversary.” You cannot fight God and win. On the good side is the reminder that not only on my good days—in my good seasons when I’m on track and doing everything well—but also in those times when I am acting out of my self-sufficiency—I’m acting out of my own strength—when I end up making a huge mess of things, God doesn’t abandon me. God is still there, silently, quietly, orchestrating events for my goodness, in order to work out this mess and somehow superintend a way out.

That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Samuel, Chapter 29. If you are visiting with us, we have been working our way through 1 Samuel. We are getting right to the end of the book. These last chapters get a little bit confusing because they are not in chronological order. So, for example, the events in Chapter 29 that we talk about today actually preceded the events of Chapter 28 that we talked about last week. The reason for that is the writers aren’t always interested in just recording history day by day. They are interested in developing theology through the retelling of history. So, sometimes the chapters are reorganized in order to develop theological themes. I think in this case the writer’s inviting us to draw comparisons between Saul and David here at the end of the book.

Last we saw David—the first two verses of Chapter 28 and in the story of Chapter 27—David was acting out of his self-sufficiency. I think David was well-intended. I think David’s confused; I think he’s hurt. I think he’s struggling in the wilderness but I think he has a heart for God; he wants to do the right thing. He’s a warrior; he’s a leader; he’s taking charge. But he’s doing it himself in his

own strength. Now he's got himself in a big mess. He has departed from the land of Israel; he's in the land of the Philistines. He's been there almost a year and a half. He's won the favor of king Achish and now the Philistines are going to war against the Israelites, and Achish wants David and his men to fight with him against the Israelites. Not only David and his men are involved, but they have families—most scholars guess between fifteen hundred and three thousand people back home at Ziklag. So if David chooses to fight against the Israelites with the Philistines, this will be the battle where Saul and his sons will die. And how does, then, David step up to be the king of Israel when he fought with the Philistines against his own people? But if he chooses to turn on Achish and the Philistines, it's most likely, then, the family members back at Ziklag will all be slaughtered. So it seems like there is virtually no way out for David. That's where we left him. We pick it up in Chapter 29, verse 1:

**Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, while the Israelites were camping by the spring which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines were proceeding on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were proceeding on in the rear with Achish. Then the commanders of the Philistines said, “What *are* these Hebrews *doing here*?” And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, “Is this not David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or *rather* these years, and I have found no fault in him from the day he deserted *to me* to this day?” But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him, and the commanders of the Philistines said to him, “Make the man go back, that he may return to his place where you have assigned him, and do not let him go down to battle with us, or in the battle he may become an adversary to us. For with what could this *man* make himself acceptable to his lord? *Would it not be with the heads of these men?*” (\*NASB, 1 Samuel 29:1-4)**

So David is with Achish and they are all moving to Aphek in order to gather. Then they'll go about another forty miles further north to the valley of Jezreel, where the battle will take place. Aphek was kind of a gathering ground. It may be a little bit familiar if you go all the way back to the third chapter. It was when the Philistines and the Israelites were at war with one another. Eli and his sons were still alive; Israel was losing. Eli's sons got the bright idea of taking the ark of the covenant into battle. Israel is defeated; the ark is captured. It's one of the real dark moments in 1 Samuel. All of that happened at Aphek. So now here they are gathering there.

It makes sense that Achish and David and the troops are bringing up the rear. There are five major Philistine cities, all of them on the coastal plains. Gath would have been the farthest to the south. Ziklag is south of that yet. So they are basically the last ones to arrive. There were five Philistine lords or kings leading the five major cities. The commanders would be the generals. The commanders see David and his men, and they don't want them there. Achish stands up for David: “David's transferred his loyalty; David now is with us.” He clearly stands up and defends David. But the commanders will have none of it. They just don't trust David. They want David and his men sent home. There is this reminder that it is possible that in the midst of the battle that David and these Israelites could turn on them. There's also this reminder that there's probably no better way for David to gain the favor of Saul again than by coming back to Saul with the heads of these Philistines. So David's up to something. They don't trust him. They are angry with Achish and they want David sent back.

The reference to David coming with **the heads** of the Philistines certainly takes us as readers back to the story of David and Goliath. Goliath was from Gath; he was their champion. David was a young shepherd boy. He trusted God; God gave him a great victory. It's been one of the highlights

in the David story. So David has done this before—when he cut off the head of Goliath and that was his trophy. So they are referencing back that, “We don’t want this guy fighting among us.” The idea that the text is hinting back to the David and Goliath story is reinforced then in verse 5:

**Is this not David, of whom they sing in the dances, saying,  
‘Saul has slain his thousands,  
And David his ten thousands’?”**

This is the third time the lyrics of this song have come up in the Samuel text. The first time was Chapter 18 after David had defeated Goliath. The people fell in love with him. David trusted God; God was giving David one victory after another. If you remember, Saul put him in charge of the special forces. He was defeating the Philistines; he was winning victory after victory after victory. We would say so far in the David story, that’s probably been the highlight for David in terms of his victories in Israel. But all of that so threatened Saul—that David was a better warrior, that David was a better leader; the people were falling in love with David. Then these women started singing this song about *Saul killing a thousand, David killing his ten thousands*. Even though that was a great moment for David, it was the beginning of his nightmare. It’s really helpful to get into David’s head, to remember David had done nothing other than trust God. As a shepherd boy he defeated Goliath. He was defeating the Philistines; he was trusting God with remarkable faith, and his reward for that was his life has turned into a nightmare—and it started with the lyrics of this song. Saul determined that David would take the throne, so David must die.

The second time the lyrics of this song were uttered was again among the Philistines, before Achish, when David all by himself left and went to Gath, thought maybe he could hide out there early in his fleeing from Saul. But the commander saw him; they recognized David; they quoted this song, and they were fearful of David being among them. That’s when David thought if Achish recognizes him, then he’ll kill him. So David pretended to be insane, was apparently quite convincing—was drooling down his beard—and basically Achish said, “You know, the guy’s crazy. I don’t need another crazy man in the city.” It wasn’t exactly David’s finest hour.

So now we’re almost a decade later. Again David is in the land of the Philistines. David again is acting out of his self-sufficiency. David again has got himself in a mess with Achish, and again the lyrics of the song come up—that this is David of whom they sang. I think the reason for the song coming up in both of these Philistine events is to remind the reader, as well as reminding David, that when he trusted God, God did amazing things. He was just a little shepherd boy, and he toppled the great giant. The whole basis for the lyrics of the song was David was trusting God; God was giving him great victories. But now David is acting in his own strength, in his own self-sufficiency; now he’s made a mess of things. So, again, the lyrics remind us what God can do when David trusts Him. Verse 6:

**Then Achish called David and said to him, “As the LORD lives, you *have been* upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the army are pleasing in my sight; for I have not found evil in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, you are not pleasing in the sight of the lords. Now therefore return and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.” (Vs. 6-7)**

So Achish immediately comes to David’s defense. Now previously in the chapter when Achish defended David to the commanders, there’s probably something within us that’s a little uncomfortable with that because we know David hasn’t actually been operating as a man of integrity. He has told Achish that he’s been going out from Ziklag to attack cities in Judah. Achish

even said David's made himself odious to Saul and the Israelites. This is why he's convinced there's no way David would go back to Israel. But David has been lying. David has actually been attacking the allies of the Philistines down in Southern Judah, basically cleaning up that area, so when he becomes king, that will be dealt with. But he reports back to Achish and lies through his teeth again and again and again. In order to protect his lies, to make sure nobody gives him away, he's had to kill men and women who could possibly be witnesses to tell Achish otherwise. So David hasn't really been conducting himself with integrity. He hasn't really been loyal to Achish. Achish is just deceived. So now we have kind of this uncomfortable feeling in our gut because this is now getting really messed up.

Notice when Achish called David and said to him, **"As the LORD lives, you have been upright..."** LORD, capital L-O-R-D, is the Hebrew Yahweh. This is extremely unusual that a Philistine pagan king is actually offering an oath in the name of Yahweh. What's going on here? Is it possible that because Achish now has been so influenced by David and his strength and his integrity and his loyalty that he actually has some belief in David's God Yahweh? It's hard to know. We could say at the very least, he, as a Philistine, has a high respect for Israel's God, for David's God Yahweh, so he actually offers an oath in the name of Yahweh. The oath has to do with David's integrity. He's specifically referring to David **going out and coming in**. We've talked about how that's Hebrew language for going to war. He's specifically referring to David's integrity in the battles he's fought. So again, as readers, we have this uncomfortable feeling because we know that's not true. We know David hasn't had integrity. We know that he's lying. We know that he's deceiving Achish. Now Achish seems to have some level of respect for David's God, and this is all just getting more and more messed up. David responds in verse 8:

**David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day when I came before you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"**

So David responds, "What have I done that the commanders, the generals won't let me go with you to fight against Israel?" This is the fourth time that David has uttered these words, "What have I done?" But this is the first time that they don't ring true. The first time that David uttered these words was to Eliab, his brother. Remember when David, the shepherd boy, came up to the front lines, listened to Goliath utter his threats, wondered: who is this Philistine windbag and why doesn't somebody deal with him? Eliab, his brother, went off on David, and accused him of all kinds of things that weren't true, and David said, "What have I done? I'm just asking a question." He was completely innocent in that moment, and had a high level of integrity. The second time was with Jonathan, when Saul was trying to kill David, and David said to Jonathan, "What have I done? I've been loyal, I've been faithful. What have I done?" Again, David was right. He had operated with the highest degree of integrity. Third time was with Saul himself after the cave incident, "What have I done that you're try to kill me? I've been loyal to you in every way." And Saul affirmed that. Those three times, David was operating with the highest degree of integrity. But this fourth time it's very different. David is acting; David is playing some sort of a game. What has he done? Actually quite a bit! He has deceived Achish; he's lied to Achish; he's killed the witnesses. Just because he says, "What have I done?" doesn't mean he's innocent. It's like people today that say, "I'll let my integrity speak for itself." It's like, "Sometimes it does! And you don't have any. Just because you say that line, doesn't mean suddenly you have integrity." In this case, we are just getting uncomfortable. David's getting himself in such a mess and he just keeps digging. It seems there's no good way out. It's going to involve the lives of thousands of people, including people's view of Yahweh, his God.

The last line, verse 8, is discussed by a lot by commentators when David says, “...**that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king...**” So what is he actually saying? If you just take the plain reading of the text, David is saying that Achish is his king, that he wants to go with Achish, his king, to fight the enemy, and the enemy is Israel. But there are some commentators that just can’t go with that. So they say, “Well, David’s actually really talking about God as his king, and he’s going to fight the Philistines.” Others say, “Well, he’s actually kind of being sneaky with a double meaning, and he’s actually referring to Saul as his king, and the enemies are the Philistines.” But there’s no moral way out of that because, in order to do that, he has to betray the trust of Achish, whom he’s lied to. It’s just a mess every way you look at it. I think just the normal straight reading of the text is correct. It’s another lie. He’s pretending to be loyal to be Achish. He’s pretending that he wants to go. He’s pretending when he gets there, he will kill Israelites. It’s hard to imagine that’s David’s intention. I think probably the most likely is when he gets there, he’ll turn on Achish, but that has its own moral issues to wrestle with. What I think the point of the text is, is: David is in a mess and he’s deeper and deeper in the mess. It seems there’s just no way out.

**But Achish replied to David, “I know that you are pleasing in my sight, like an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He must not go up with us to the battle.’ Now then arise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who have come with you, and as soon as you have arisen early in the morning and have light, depart.” So David arose early, he and his men, to depart in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel. (Vs. 9-11)**

Basically, I think, at this point Achish actually fears for David and his men. The commanders are not going to let them go. They are angry; they are not going to put up with it. “At first light, David, gather your men and go home before something bad happens.” So David ends up going home. You could see the sovereignty of God working through the Philistine generals and creating a way where David could get out of this mess, back home, family safe, before the Philistine army goes up to Jezreel. Then the events in Chapter 28 happen when Saul sees them, and then Chapters 30 and 31 basically are happening simultaneously. We’ll get to those in the next couple of weeks.

It’s interesting to see the sovereignty of God as David, through his self-sufficiency, got himself into a mess, where it seemed like there’s no way out. Yet God orchestrates events in such a way that David is able to get back home safely. The families are not killed, and the army moves forward. David has no idea, at this point in the story, that part of what God is sovereignly up to is: David desperately needs to get back to Ziklag as quickly as possible because there’s something there he very seriously needs to attend to. What is that? We’ll find out next week.

As we begin to look at these two stories—the David story and the Saul story—what makes them so different is not that Saul messed up and David didn’t. It’s not that Saul sinned and David didn’t. It’s that, at the core, Saul was rebelling against God. The text told us early on: Saul did not have a heart for God. He did not want to obey God. He didn’t want to do it God’s way. He wanted to do it his own way. He wanted to function as his own god. As Samuel told him in last week’s text, “You can’t fight God and win. You’ve made God your adversary.” The David story is very different. The very basis by which David was chosen is: David has a heart for God. David wants to walk in obedience. David wants to be God’s king. David wants to do this right. But David has a lot to learn. You might say, “You know, if David had a heart for God, he surely messed up a lot.” And I would say, “Exactly!” ...which is why he needed a decade in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*. If David understood all this stuff, if David always did everything right, if David understood this perfectly, he didn’t need ten years in the wilderness. The whole point is: David needed ten years in the

wilderness through pain and suffering and struggles and disappointments and heartaches to refine, to formulate, to grow his character, in order to prepare him for his assignment. It is true that David will become the greatest king in the history of Israel. But that would not have been possible had he not spent ten years in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*. He had to learn about brokenness; he had to learn about surrender; he had to learn about God's part and his part. He had to learn to be a great leader, he has to be a great follower. There're so many lessons that David had to learn in order that he would be a great king in Israel.

When you read through the Scriptures, this is a familiar pattern. The great leaders spent time in the wilderness, whether you are talking about Abraham, whether you are talking about Moses, whether you are talking about Joseph, whether you are talking about David, whether you are talking about Elijah, whether you are talking about Paul, whether you are talking about Peter, that is God's training ground to grow us, to refine us. Peter talks about: the fires burn away the impurities; they refine us and they grow us and they change us. The problem is we don't like that. We just want to believe somehow I can be ready without time in the wilderness.

This is especially true of us as American Christians. Historically through the world, and even in most places in the world today, there was a strong sense that life is hard. It is filled with pain and suffering. That's part of the story; it will always be part of the story because we live in a sin-cursed world. There was an understanding that pain and suffering made us stronger, made us better. There was a whole theology that God uses these to burn away the impurities and to grow us, to make us more like Him. But in America, life has become so easy by the standards of history, it is so sanitized, it is so happy, it's so pleasant, it's so quiet, that this has dramatically affected our theology. Where else could anyone come up with a theology that the gospel is about health, wealth and prosperity except in a place like modern America, where we think that's what God wants for you? If you are a good Christian, if you are a good boy, if you are a good girl, then everything's supposed to work out. That's the deal. So we as Americans kind of form our theology around that, and what happens is we have no basis to process pain and suffering. It's an interruption in the plan. "This isn't the way it's supposed to be. I was supposed to be a good boy. You were supposed to make everything work out, and that was the deal." And God says, "There is no deal!" God didn't make that deal. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures couldn't be clearer: from the beginning, this is going to be hard; it's going to be filled with struggles and trials and pain and suffering. That's what the road will look like. There's nowhere where the Scriptures say, "Let's make a deal! You be a good preacher and everything will work out. No pain and suffering, everything will make sense." There has to be an understanding when that's my theology, I'm not really pursuing God; I'm pursuing the best deal. That's a very selfish pursuit. We set ourselves up for pain and disappointment when we think *I'm being really good; I'm following the rules; I'm doing what I'm supposed to; now God betrayed me; God let me down*. We are saying, "God, You didn't keep Your end of the deal." And God says, "What deal? I didn't make that deal."

Really trusting God is a choice of your will. You decide: *I'm going to choose to trust God. I'm going to choose to believe God is who He says He is*. For me and my own personal story, that is something I settled years ago after years and years of struggling with this. *I choose to believe God is who He says He is. I do trust Him with all my heart. I believe He's good, and He's faithful, and He's kind, and He's loving, and He's just. I believe that. I believe it on my best days and I believe it on my worst days. Some days it's easy to believe, and some days it takes everything I have to believe*. But it's a choice of my will. I choose to believe. And God meets me in that belief and He reminds me again and again that He's good, and He's faithful, and that He's loving, and He's kind.

If your theology is: I want a ride on the love boat; I just want to follow the rules and I want God to make sure that everything works out—it's smooth sailing—you are setting yourself up for devastation and hurt. It's just not going to be like that in a sin-cursed world. There has to be a sense in which this is not a deal. I just *choose* to trust God, and I need Him to meet me in my hour of sorrow and need and question and disappointment, and remind me again and again who He is.

Next week we are going to talk more about this as we wrap up the David story, but here's what I would give you just to process this week: What is your theology? If your theology is I want to ride on the love boat; I want to do what God asks me to do and, in return, I want smooth sailing, you need to understand, first of all, you are setting yourself up for disappointment, which then turns to anger and bitterness, which is a good way to waste a life. The other way to view it is to understand I have been put here on purpose, for a purpose; God has assigned me a mission. Everything my soul longs for is yet to come in the new heaven and the new earth. Right now this is a battleground. This isn't a playground; this isn't heaven. This is war. I've been given an assignment and I want to live my life for the things that matter. I have one shot to invest myself in things that will still matter a hundred thousand years from now, and I don't want to miss that. But in order to be prepared to fulfill my assignment, it is likely I will have to spend times in the *Wilderness School of Leadership*. God has to change me; He has to grow me; He has to break me; He has to refine me; He has to do what is necessary to prepare me to fill my assignment.

If you are going to be serious about this Jesus thing, if you are going to be serious about being a Christ-follower, if you are going to be serious about saying, "I want my life to matter," you have to understand pain and suffering is a part of the story that's necessary to prepare you, to refine you, to grow you, to strengthen you, to do something great that will matter forever.

What you think about these theologies will, in large part, determine how well you handle the most difficult moments of life.

*Our Father, this morning we celebrate that You love us. Lord, for some in the room this morning, those are easy words to hear. For others, they are just really hard because sometimes the circumstances of life are just so hurtful and so confusing. God, give us the courage and faith and strength we need to trust You in the worst days and to believe, somehow, there's a plan and a purpose, and that the days that our souls long for are yet to come in the new heaven and the new earth. God made it possible through the death, burial and resurrection of His own Son. God, give us the faith to trust You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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## **God is Still in Charge**

### *Courage to Lead Series*

I Samuel 29:1-11

Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. Do you think most American Christians are more passionate about fulfilling the purpose for which they were created or living the American dream? Why?
2. Depending on how you answered question #1, how does pain and suffering fit into the picture? Is it a necessary part of our training or an unfair interruption of our pursuit of happiness?

### **Bible Study**

1. These chapters do not necessarily fall into chronological order. The events of chapter 29 actually precede the events of chapter 28. So David goes with Achish to Aphek to gather to fight Saul. David goes home and the Philistines go to Jezreel. Saul sees them at Jezreel and chapter 28 takes place. The writer is more concerned with theological themes than exact chronological order of events. Review the situation from 28:1-2. How did David get in this situation?
2. Read I Samuel 29:1-5. What is the point of conflict regarding David? What does Achish say about David and what do we know to be true of David's behavior? Both times the lyrics of the song are repeated it's by Philistines at a time when David has himself in a mess (21:11, 29:5). How might the lyrics of the song send a message to us as the readers? What did David seem to forget both times he got into a mess with the Philistines?
3. Read I Samuel 29:6-11. Why do you think Achish swore an oath in the name of Israel's God (LORD or YHWH)? What does he believe to be true of David? Is he right? Was David right or wrong in lying to Achish and deceiving him? Why?
4. David had uttered the words, "what have I done?" before Eliab in 17:29, Jonathan 20:1 and Saul 26:18. How are those words different in this text? Is he so innocent in this story?

5. What do you think David means by his statement in 29:8? Is he referring to Achish as his lord/king and Israel as the enemy or secretly meaning Saul is his lord/king and Achish is the enemy? Is David acting with integrity or deceit? Why?
6. How does God use the Philistines to get David out of a mess he's made? The battle David was released from was the one that would end Saul and Jonathan's life. How might that have effected David's reign as king had he been part of the Philistine army in that battle?
7. How do you see God at work in this story despite David's poor choices? What is the relationship between God's sovereignty and the choices we make? Why did God "rescue" David but not Saul? What was the fundamental difference between the two of them?

### **Application**

1. Is God asking for perfection from His leaders? If not, what does He ultimately want from us?
2. Is it fair to expect that God will always bail us out when we make bad choices? Why or why not?
3. What part does pain and suffering play in our stories? Is it an interruption of our dream to be happy or a necessary part of preparing us to fulfill our calling?