Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue a sermon series titled, □ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. Our text for today is □ 1 Samuel 19:1-24.

From this text, we are going to learn some important lessons on various issues.

- We are going to learn something about the dynamics of abusive relationships that may apply to situations you face.

- We are going to learn something about Christian ethics, considering whether it is ever okay to lie and deceive.

- We are also going to learn something about how to get through the darkest of days, when your life seems threatened by things that make no sense.

You may recall that, leading up to our text for today, King Saul is insanely jealous of David and has been trying to kill him in various ways.

- Saul has tried to spear David.

- Saul has sent David to the battlefield in hopes that he would be killed by the Philistines.

- And Saul has required of David a bride-price of 100 Philistine foreskins for his daughter’s hand in marriage, hoping that David would die trying to come up with them.

Not only have all of Saul's attempts to get rid of David failed miserably, they have had the opposite effect of multiplying David's success and reputation.

Along the way, David has seemed remarkably oblivious to the ongoing threat from Saul.

Our text begins in □ 1 Samuel 19:1 with yet another attempt on David's life. It says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:1 And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David.

Saul's previous attempts to kill David have been covert, perhaps to avoid the ire of the people of Israel who love David. But now, in desperation, Saul abandons all pretense. Saul orders all his agents to kill David.

Saul's son, Jonathan is among the agents receiving the order. But, as you may recall, Jonathan and David have become close friends. Here in verse 19, it says Jonathan □ "delighted much in David."

This puts Jonathan in a moral dilemma. To whom will he be loyal, his father or his friend?

Jonathan chooses not to obey his father; instead, he acts on behalf of his friend. Jonathan tells David about Saul's plan to kill him and hatches a plan of his own to intercede, with the goal of talking Saul out of his aggression and bringing reconciliation between Saul and David. The plan unfolds in □ verses 2 through 7.

ESV 1 Samuel 19:2 And Jonathan told David, “Saul my father seeks to kill you. Therefore be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:3 “And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything I will tell you.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:4 And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:5 “For he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine [Goliath], and the LORD worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:6 And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, “As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

We can glean a number of things from this passage.

First, if David was oblivious before, he is not now. Jonathan tells him plainly, “Saul my father seeks to kill you.” There is now no mistaking Saul’s intentions leading to this point.

Second, Jonathan is able to talk Saul down. Apparently, Saul sees the waywardness of his abusive ways and promises to change. He swears

he won't do it again, even invoking the name of Lord. He says of David, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death."

But Saul has demonstrated clearly and repeatedly that he doesn't keep promises. You may recall from the immediately preceding context how Saul kept reneging on promises and changing the conditions for what would be required for his daughters' hand in marriage—first Merab and then Michal.

Third, on the basis of Saul's apparent change of heart, Jonathan brings David and Saul back together, with David in Saul's presence as before, playing music and fighting battles for him.

This is typical of abusive relationships. After repeated instances of abuse, the abuser seems to see the light through the well-meaning intervention of a third party. The abuser promises never to abuse again. And the ever-gullible victim returns to the abuser, assuming the same role as before.

Everybody's happy.

Until the next trigger.

The trigger comes in □ verse 8, which says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:8 And there was war again. And David went out and fought with the Philistines and struck them with a great blow, so that they fled before him.

Remember, Saul is insanely jealous of David and afraid that he is going to one day take his throne, and this is the smoldering ember within Saul that has never been extinguished—the ember of jealousy and fear that

is fanned into flame by yet another great victory by David. □ Verses 9 and 10 explain,

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:9 Then a harmful spirit from the LORD came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lyre.
>
> □ ESV 1 Samuel 19:10 And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.

So much for the I-swear-to-God promises of an abuser. David finally does what he probably should have done earlier: he escapes and does not return to the abuse. It seems that he finally gets it. He realizes a radical change is necessary or he will die. Nothing within Saul has fundamentally changed.

If you find yourself in an abusive relationship, I urge you to get some help. I realize that the first step can sometimes be the scariest. You can reach out to me or my wife, Cathy as an initial step. You can also get some help by contacting one of our local ministry partners, Hope Women's Center.

Back in our text, the scene now shifts to David's house, where David has fled and Saul's agents follow in pursuit. The story unfolds in verses □ 11 through 17.

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:11 Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch him, that he might kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, told him, "If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed."

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:12 So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled away and escaped.

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:13 Michal took an image and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goats' hair at its head and covered it with the clothes. 14 And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick."

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:15 Then Saul sent the messengers to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him."

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:16 And when the messengers came in, behold, the image was in the bed, with the pillow of goats' hair at its head.

□ ESV 1 Samuel 19:17 Saul said to Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me, 'Let me go. Why should I kill you?'"

Michal tries to protect her husband. Which heightens the conflict. First, Saul's son Jonathan, and now Saul's daughter, Michal, try to shield David from their murderous father.

Talk about family drama!

Michal warns David to escape. Then she deceives Saul's agents by putting an idol or mannequin in David's bed to make it look like he is sleeping there. And she lies twice. First, she says of David, "He is sick." Then, she tells Saul that she was forced to do all this because David threatened her life.

One interesting thing here is that both Jonathan and Michal lie and deceive and disobey the orders of a government authority. And the text seems to cast them in a positive light.

How can this be when Scripture teaches us that dishonesty, duplicity, and disobedience of government authority are immoral? Is it okay for the people of God to lie and deceive and disobey authorities?

The answer is: Of course, it is. That's how you get ahead in politics and the pastorate!

Just kidding.

Indeed, it may be how some get ahead, but it is *not* okay to lie, deceive, and disobey.

But there are exceptions.

Thirteenth-century philosopher and theologian, □ Thomas Acquinas distinguished three classes of lies. Sixteenth-century theologian Martin Luther labelled these three classes as the humorous, the harmful, and the helpful.[1]

First, humorous lies are those told in jest that no one takes seriously. Like when I said it's okay to be immoral because that's how you get ahead in politics and the pastorate. You knew I was joking. Humorous lies are not sinful.

Second, harmful lies are malicious untruths told to harm others or to manipulate for selfish gain. Harmful lies are sinful.

Third, helpful lies are morally justified under certain circumstances where there is an unavoidable moral conflict. In such moral conflicts, we are responsible to choose the greater good or higher duty. This is

[1] Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 286.

called □ graded absolutism.[2] It posits that there are certain moral absolutes or imperatives, but some of these absolutes are graded as more important than others.

In our text, Jonathan and Michal are faced with two moral imperatives in an unavoidable conflict: □ save an innocent life or tell the truth. In this case, to keep one of the imperatives is to violate the other. They choose the greater good of saving the innocent life of David over telling the truth. In the categories of Aquinas, theirs are helpful lies that are morally justified.

Graded absolutism applies to all biblical imperatives, not just lying. For example, □ two absolutes from Scripture are to obey God and to obey governmental authorities. But what happens if there is a situation where these two imperatives are in conflict such that to obey one is to disobey the other?

The apostle Peter faced such a conflict. The Lord had told him to preach. But the government told him to stop preaching. It was an unavoidable conflict. Peter rightly deemed it more important to obey God, so he chose to keep on preaching in defiance of the government. There was no sin in that choice because Peter chose the greater good or higher duty.

Our text concludes with a circumstance that is both bizarre and sadly humorous. It begins in □ verse 18.

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:18 Now David fled and escaped, and he came to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and lived at Naioth.

[2] Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 113-132.

You may recall that Samuel is the prophet who anointed David. Samuel is in Ramah, a city only two or three miles from David's home from which he fled. "Naioth" is probably a term describing an encampment outside the city. Apparently, Saul stayed in Naioth with a company of prophets under his charge.

□ Verses 19 and 20 continue.

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:19 And it was told Saul, "Behold, David is at Naioth *(nay-oth)* in Ramah."
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> ESV 1 Samuel 19:20 Then Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

This is bizarre. The messengers sent by Saul to take David approach Naioth. As they approach, they see Samuel and his fellow prophets prophesying. Then Spirit of God comes upon Saul's agents such that they prophesy as well.

We don't know for sure what is involved in the prophesying here. But it may include uttering words of prayer and praise to God, along with admonition and rebuke toward each other.[3] Some scholars speculate that the messengers are also in a prophetic trance or an ecstatic state. We don't know but the specifics don't matter. The point is they are prevented from taking David. They are so caught with prophesying that they abandon their pursuit.

The power of God temporarily turns Saul's agents in God's prophets to protect David. A band of tough guys—Saul's Seal Team—approaches on

[3] The ESV Study Bible.

a mission to take out David and is completely disarmed without anybody lifting a finger.

And this happens not just once, but three times. □ Verse 21 explains,

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:21 When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied.

This is comical. But it gets better.

You can imagine Saul's anger ratcheting up with each iteration of his athletic commandos being turned into prophetic milquetoasts. Finally, he's had it. He takes things into his own hands. Verses □ 22 through 24 tell the story.

> ESV 1 Samuel 19:22 Then he himself went to Ramah and came to the great well that is in Secu. And he asked, "Where are Samuel and David?" And one said, "Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah."
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> □ ESV 1 Samuel 19:23 And he went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah.
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> □ ESV 1 Samuel 19:24 And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

God makes a mockery of Saul's efforts to kill David.[4] The stripping of Saul's royal garments is humiliating. It may also symbolize God's rejection of Saul as king. The most powerful man in Israel cannot take

[4] Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, Vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 210.

one young man named David; instead, he can only lie naked—an incapacitated, involuntary mouthpiece for God—while David escapes.

Think of what all this must have been like for David. In retrospect, we see the humor in it. But to David, in real time, there is nothing funny about it.

It finally sinks in that Saul is out to kill him and it's not going to stop. David realizes that he must run for his life. Run from his home. Run from his family. Run from his people. Run from the king of his country.

And for what? What has he done to deserve this? What purpose does this serve?

In every circumstance, he meets a threat. There are dangers at every turn.

And yet, in every threatening circumstance, the Lord meets David to protect him in various ways.

Did you know that David wrote a song about the specific circumstances in our text? We have good evidence for it. In the superscription of □ Psalm 59, it says this:

> ESV Psalm 59:1 . . . A Miktam of David, when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him.

The precise meaning of the term, "Miktam" is uncertain. It seems to be some type of genre classification, indicating a certain kind of song. But the rest of the superscription clearly indicates that David wrote this psalm as he reflects back on the time when Saul's agents came after him at his house.

In the □ first three verses of the song, David prays to God.

> ESV Psalm 59:1 . . . Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; protect me from those who rise up against me; 2 deliver me from those who work evil, and save me from bloodthirsty men.
>
> □ ESV Psalm 59:3 For behold, they lie in wait for my life; fierce men stir up strife against me. For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD, 4 for no fault of mine, they run and make ready. Awake, come to meet me, and see!

In verse 4, David's cry to the Lord, □ "come to meet me" is poignant. The original Hebrew word for "meet" is *qará*. The idea is "come to me, be with me, come alongside me, meet me in this dark place."

Later in □ verse 10, a similar idea is expressed, not as a request, but as a confident expectation. David says,

> ESV Psalm 59:10 My God in his steadfast love will meet me . . .

Here, the Hebrew word for "meet" is *qidém*. Different word, much the same meaning. To come together. But there may be an added nuance here. In this form,[5] the word *qidém* can sometimes convey the idea of coming together with one person, in this case God, in the front, leading the way.[6] This would certainly fit.

A shepherd leading his sheep through a frighteningly dark valley is a word picture that carries the idea. This shepherding word picture is also conveyed in another psalm of David with which you may be more familiar. It's the one where David says to God,

[5] In the piel stem.
[6] HALOT.

> ESV Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me . . .

Back in Psalm 59:10, notice what motivates God, the good Shepherd, to come to be with us in the darkest hour: □ his steadfast love. "Steadfast love" is a translation of a single Hebrew word, *hesed*, which is so rich in meaning it is difficult to translate into English. It is an unfailing kind of love, kindness, or goodness, often used in connection with faithfulness to a promise.[7] God's promise to his people, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" comes to mind.[8]

So, what is the big idea of our text?

I decided to take the big idea straight from the words of the main character of the text, in his poetic commentary on the circumstances of the text, recorded in Psalm 59:10: □ My God in his steadfast love will meet me.

The application is simple. Not always easy, but simple.

When faced with hardship that makes no sense, when in a dark night of the soul, call to mind this truth: My God in his steadfast love will meet me.

Notice what this does not say.

It does not say my God will make all my troubles go away.

It does not say my God will make me comfortable.

It does not say my God will remove all the Sauls from my life.

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[7] Logos, sense.

[8] Joshua 1:5; Psalm 37:25; 2 Corinthians 4:9; Hebrews 13:5.

Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God does not always spare me from the furnace. But he will meet me there.

Two thousand years ago, God met us in a remarkable way. He came in the person of Jesus to die in our place and on our behalf in payment for all our sins. When we were in a place of hopelessness and darkness, alienated from God, he came to meet us there. He came to meet us so that anyone who believes in Jesus can be saved from eternal separation from God. He came to meet us in his steadfast love.

Today, he still meets us where we are, as our loving Shepherd.

We commemorate God in the person of Jesus coming to meet us on the cross through communion.

In a moment, I am going to pray. Afterward, a song will be played. I encourage you to take your time and listen to the song as it relates to Jesus meeting us where we are. If you would like to listen to the lyrics all the way through the song before coming forward, that's fine. We have time.

Whenever you are ready, either during or after the song, you may come up to either one of the identically prepared tables to partake of the elements.

The bread represents Christ's body given for us on the cross in payment for our sin. The cup represents Christ's blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

As we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim our faith in the person and work of Jesus, the one who meet us where we are.

If, for any reason, you would like me to serve you the elements where you are seated, that would be my privilege. When the time comes, simply raise your hand, and I will find my way to you.

If, for any reason, you are not quite ready to take communion this morning, that's fine. Feel free to sit this one out.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you that, in our darkest hours, you meet us in your steadfast love. Amen.