Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we resume a sermon series titled, ▶ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through 1 Samuel. First Samuel is an ancient historical narrative of the people of Israel about a thousand years before Christ.

The text we are studying today is ▶ 1 Samuel 21:10-15. From this text, we are going to learn how to tell ourselves the truth when it feels like, through no fault of our own, everyone and everything is against us, and no one understands us. There are times in life when you feel completely alone, completely overmatched, completely misjudged, and completely abandoned by God. It can be terrifying and feel hopeless. And the fear and hopelessness invite us to do foolish things we never thought we would do.

We are going to discover how to engage in healthy, truthful self-talk—to talk ourselves down from such fear and hopelessness and to gain perspective.

Let me give you a brief review of the historical context.

If there was ever a nation spiritually and morally adrift, it was the nation of Israel at the beginning of First Samuel.

God had chosen the people of Israel to be his people, and he had done great things for them, including giving them the Promised Land. But once they settled in the Land, they allowed their children to be raised and taught under the influence of surrounding pagan cultures. As such, the succeeding generation did not follow the Lord.

A series of judges ruled ancient Israel for a period of about 300 years, from around 1390 B.C. to about 1050 B.C. And, as recorded in the book of Judges, the nation of Israel was in the dumper spiritually and morally.

Over and over again, the people of Israel turned their backs on the God of the Bible. God raised up judges to bring the people back, but they inevitably fell away again and again.

Once a God-fearing nation, there was then in Israel no widely recognized authority for determining what was true or right. So, most people operated according to their own truth. They did what was right in their own eyes, without regard to any authority higher than themselves. They were in moral and spiritual free fall.

The people of Israel cried out for a king to rule them instead of God so they could be like the surrounding pagan countries. God gave them what they asked for.

As you may recall, God directed a godly man named Samuel, a Jewish priest and prophet, to appoint Saul to be the very first king of Israel. Only Saul doesn't work out so well. Saul trusts in himself more than God. Saul does not have a heart for the Lord. So, God rejects Saul as king over Israel.

But Saul is not immediately removed from office; he is a lame duck who will still serve for some years, but Saul's royal lineage will end with him. His successor will not be his son, but instead will hail from a different family.

At this point, God directs the prophet Samuel to anoint the man who will succeed Saul as Israel's second king. Samuel anoints a boy named David, the youngest of eight sons of Jesse.

As Samuel anoints young David, it seems that no one but Samuel knows that David will one day be king because, at that time, Samuel does not announce the reason for the anointing.[1] It is likely that everybody except

[1] Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 80-82; David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 2007), 423.

Samuel assumes that David is being anointed for some special-but-unknown purpose.[2] It is an honor, but a mysterious one.

After his anointing, young David slays the Philistine giant named Goliath. And David would go on to become a great warrior, leading the Israelites to victory in a series of battles against the Philistines.

Along the way, David marries Saul's daughter, Michal, and becomes the closest of friends with Saul's son, Jonathan.

David is now a member of Saul's royal family.

All this made David a national hero. And it made King Saul insanely jealous. Saul knows that God has rejected him as king, and he fears that David may be the man who is going to replace him. So, Saul repeatedly tries to kill David before he can take his throne. David is now on the run from Saul, who is out to kill him.

Our text beings in ▶ 1 Samuel 21:10, where it says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 21:10 And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath.

Here is a ▶ map showing David's flight. He travels from Nob, a city squarely within Saul's kingdom of Israel, shaded in purple. And he goes to Gath, just outside Saul's kingdom and within the land of Philistia. It is a journey of about 23 miles.[3]

Philistia is the land of the Philistines, the enemies of Israel. And Gath happens to be the hometown of Goliath. So, David shows up in Gath, by

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[2] Edersheim, *Bible History*, 82.
[3] David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 2007), 536.

himself, with nothing but Goliath's sword in hand, which he brought from Nob. And he approaches Achish, the king of Gath.

Why on earth does David choose Gath as a refuge?

The text does not say. Some scholars speculate that David may not have wanted to run too far from his hometown of Bethlehem.[4]

Later in the text, Achish says something to suggest that David may have offered himself to Achish as an anonymous mercenary, a soldier for hire.[5]

How could David, a hero of Israel, offer himself in service to an archenemy?

Let's think for a moment about what David has gone through at this point.

David had experienced one devastating, inexplicable loss after another.

- He lost his job as a soldier for his country.
- He lost his wife, Michal.
- He lost his godly counselor, Samuel.
- He lost his best friend, Jonathan.

Every earthly source of support had been stripped from him. And now he was alone, running from king Saul, who was determined to kill him.

And for what? What had David done to deserve all this?

Nothing. Nothing at all.

Where is God in all this? Where is the God who directed Samuel to anoint David for some special purpose? Is this the special purpose? To lose

[4] Tsumura, 535.
[5] Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 527; Tsumura, 535.

everything? To be hunted like a criminal? To be murdered by one's own king?

Situations like this can make you crazy. They can tempt you to do things you thought you'd never do. They can tempt you to take things into your own hands because circumstances suggest that God has ditched you and doesn't care.

In his desperation, David seems to adopt the old adage, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

If David was hoping to go unrecognized, he grossly underestimates his own fame. ▶ Verse 11 says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 21:11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?"

The Philistine servants recognize David right away. They are even familiar with the lyrics of the song sung years ago by the Israelites while dancing in celebration of David's defeat of their man Goliath.

It is interesting that servants would call David ▶ "the king." They likely know that, formally, Saul is still the king of Israel.[6] And yet they call David "the king of the land," conveying an elevated status of power.

This would have struck an ironic chord with David. You see, as recorded in 1 Samuel 20:13-15, Jonathan had recently told David that one day he would become king, replacing his father, Saul. In that moment, David likely connected the prospect of becoming king with the anointing he had received much earlier from Samuel.

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[6] Arnold, 311.

But right now, in our text, David is anything but a king. And he likely sees no plausible path to ever becoming king. He is as fugitive exiled from his own country.

And the perception of the Philistines that David is "the king of the land" only puts a bigger target on David's back. The dangerous position David had gotten himself into begins to dawn on him. ▶ Verse 12 says,

> ESV 1 Samuel 21:12 And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

The phrase ▶ "much afraid" describes the experience of fear to the highest degree.[7] David is terrified.

Which may make you wonder: Is this the same guy who courageously faced Goliath with nothing but a sling and five smooth stones? Is this the warrior who valiantly led his troops into battle?

How could David not foresee this outcome as a distinct possibility before running into the hands of the Philistines like this?

As dull as David seems in this moment, he gets an idea that would save him. ▶ Verse 13 explains,

> ESV 1 Samuel 21:13 So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard.

In that day and culture, the beard was an important symbol of manhood. Any mistreatment of one's beard through pulling or cutting or spitting

[7] Holladay, William Lee, and Ludwig Köhler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), hereinafter referred to as HALOT.

was considered a humiliating insult.[8] In fact, in another part of Scripture, messing with a man's beard was a justification for war.[9] Drooling on one's own beard was so disgraceful that only a madman would do it.

So, on top of all the other losses David experienced, he likely loses his self-respect.[10] In fact, in the opinion of one scholar, David "was probably at his lowest ebb."[11]

In the ancient pagan world, the presence of an insane person was commonly regarded with suspicion as a possible sign from the gods that something bad was about to happen.[12] There was a reluctance to harm an insane person lest the gods behind the insanity be offended. This may have worked in David's favor.

Nevertheless, pretending to be insane still seems like a hail-Mary pass not likely to work, and David probably knew the odds were stacked against him.

But, by the grace of God, it works.

Remarkably, David is released unharmed. Achish passes on a golden opportunity to immobilize a hero of his enemy. ▶ Verses 14 and 15 explain,

> ESV 1 Samuel 21:14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? 15 Do I lack

[8] Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, Vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 224.
[9] 2 Samuel 10:4-8.
[10] Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 66.
[11] Baldwin, Joyce G., *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 149,
[12] Merrill, Eugene H., "1 Samuel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 451; Tsumura, 537.

madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

In this context, the phrase, ▶ "come into my house" likely means to become a mercenary, which corroborates the idea that David's original intent was to try to get on with Achish as a soldier for hire.[13]

Having worked through our text, we are left to wonder what David must have been thinking and feeling in the aftermath of this incident.

There must have been a feeling of relief from being spared. I believe David recognizes that it was God who orchestrated his improbable salvation, just as he had done against Goliath.

But then, I imagine there must have been a feeling of shame and humiliation over what he had done.

Leading up to this incident, it felt like, through no fault of his own, everyone and everything was against David and no one understood him. He felt completely alone, completely overmatched, completely misjudged, completely abandoned by God.

And the fear and hopelessness he experienced invited him to do some foolish things he never thought we would do—like run to the enemy of God's people and humiliate himself.

And now, he is at rock bottom.

And this should be an encouragement to us all.

Elsewhere in Scripture, David is described as a man after God's own heart. This means that your life can be messy and broken and peppered with

[13] Tsumura, 537.

foolishness, just like David. And you can still be a person after God's own heart, just like David.

But how does he recover from this?

How do ***we*** recover?

Our circumstances may be different in detail, but they are similar in essence.

Life serves up bewildering hardship. You can't tie it to anything you have done. It seems so unfair. You experience one loss after another.

For a while, you try to deal with as best you can. But the losses just keep mounting. Until finally, you reach a breaking point. God does not seem to care, so you take things into your own hands.

In desperation and hopelessness, you run—you seek relief in some godless things you never thought you would do. Porn. Materialism. Substance abuse. Overeating. Sleeping around. Microdosing. Fraud. Manipulation. Entertainment overload. Workaholism.

You discover in the end they don't work. And you are left feeling burned out, ashamed, humiliated, and worthless.

How do you recover?

God gives us a glimpse.

God inspires David to write a couple of songs about all this. The lyrics reflect a man who has come to his senses. The lyrics are a part of his recovery. The songs are God's way for David and us to engage in some

healthy, truthful self-talk—to talk ourselves down from fear and hopelessness and shame to gain perspective, with God's help.

The first song is ▶ Psalm 56. The superscription to the psalm links it to our text. It says,

> ESV Psalm 56:1 . . . *A Miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath. . . .*

We don't know for sure what the term, *Miktam* means. It may describe the genre of this song. But the song is clearly written by David. And it is written in connection with the story we just covered.

In ▶ Psalm 56:1, David begins the song with a simple plea.

> ESV Psalm 56:1 Be gracious to me, O God . . .

Simple words. Words I've read many times. But they come alive when I know the story behind them.

On Friday morning, while I was swimming, a song that I have heard many times came up on my playlist. But this time, it seemed to me to capture the heart of David behind his plea, "Be gracious to me, O God." And my own heart resonated. Perhaps yours will, too. Listen to this short clip.

God, don't give up on me yet
I know I'm not Your best bet
But I'm trying
Don't give up on me yet

And God, don't leave me here alone
I know I need to grow, still
And I'm trying

But don't leave me here alone

I know I've come so far
But got so far to go
And with these brand-new scars
And this broken heart
It's hard to really know
If there's a reason
And if I'll ever see it
But I wanna believe it
So don't give up on me yet
Please[14]

David says, "Be gracious to me, Oh God." It is your grace that covers my shame, my foolishness, my brokenness, and gives me right standing before you.

In ▶ Psalm 56:8, David says to God,

> ESV Psalm 56:8 You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

I have loved this verse for years but never really connected it to its historical context.

David had every earthly reason to believe that God didn't care about what he was going through. His circumstances suggested that God was unconcerned and uninvolved.

But the truth is God could not be more attentive. When David says, "you have kept count of my tossings," he means that God is aware of and keeps

[14] "Yet," written and performed by Maverick City Music, Chandler Moore, Naomi Raine, Ashley Hess, and The King Will Come, released in 2023.

track of every single hardship. The word “tossings” is a translation of an original Hebrew word that describes the changeable circumstances of life that bring misery.[15] Like a compassionate accountant, God records in his book every single pain; each one has its own entry.

Even more vivid and minute is the word picture David uses when he says to God, “You have . . . put my tears in your bottle.” Every tear that has rolled down your cheek, God has captured in his bottle.

The suggestion is that God has not only counted every tossing and every tear, but he has also felt every one of them right along with you.

A similar idea is found in the second song connected to our text. It is ▶ Psalm 34. The superscription for this psalm says,

> ESV Psalm 34:1 *Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.*

This is a reference to David pretending to be insane before Achish. The Hebrew phrase translated ▶ “changed his behavior” is the exact same phrase from our text and appears nowhere else in Scripture. And the name, “Abimelech” is a title or alternative name for Achish.[16]

In Psalm 34:18, ▶ David says,

> ESV Psalm 34:18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

This is yet another verse I have loved for years but never connected to its historical context.

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[15] HALOT.
[16] *The ESV Study Bible*, 978.

When life circumstances break your heart and crush your spirit, it can seem like God is detached and distant.

But the truth is the Lord is near. You may not feel it, but you can claim it. Because it is true.

The nearness of God is good. But there is more.

In ▶ Psalm 56:9, David says,

> ESV Psalm 56:9 . . . This I know, that God is for me.

David is saying, "God is on my side. He has my back. He is my Shepherd. He seeks my wellbeing.

In ▶ Psalm 34:10, David says much the same thing.

> ESV Psalm 34:10 . . . those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Because God is for you, when you seek him, your wellbeing is assured. You will lack no good thing. You will not miss out on anything worthwhile. God wants what is best for you, so when you seek him, he provides it.

Keep in mind, these words were penned by a guy who had lost just about everything through no fault of his own, and then he lapsed, did something foolish, and humiliated himself.

Here is the big idea: ▶ The Lord is near me and for me.

This is true even though I don't deserve it.

This is true even when my circumstances are overwhelming.

This is true even when all seems hopeless and senseless.

This is true even when it doesn't feel true.

I need to be reminded again and again. The Lord is near me and for me.

Would you pray with me?

Lord, thank you that, regardless of my circumstances and failings, you are near me and for me. Amen.

The Lord knew that you and I would need reminding when he instituted communion two thousand years ago.

Communion is an opportunity to reflect on just how much the Lord is near us and for us.

There are two identically prepared tables up front, which offer the bread and the cup. The bread represents Christ's body given for you and me on the cross in payment for our sins. The cup represents his blood shed for our forgiveness.

Based the payment Christ made for us on the cross, he offers us the free gift of everlasting life, which includes forgiveness and adoption into God's forever family and eternal salvation from the ultimate penalty of our sin. All we have to do to receive this gift is to believe in him for it.

I am going to pray, then music will be played. During the music, you may come forward to either of the two tables to take the elements. You may consume the elements up front, right away, or take them back to your seat and partake whenever you are ready.

If you are not ready to take communion this morning, that's fine. No pressure.

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

Let's pray. Lord, thank you that, through Jesus, you came to be near us and for us. May we never forget. May we never take your grace for granted. Amen.