



Sermon Transcript March 24, 2019

Finding God in the Hard Place Gather at the Cave 1 Samuel 22:1-2

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on March 24, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
1 Samuel 22:1-2

¹ David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. ² And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them. And there were with him about 400 men.

Introduction

In considering the life of David, Shawn Thornton suggests that “if *People Magazine* had been around in ancient Israel, for months the cover would have featured the face of David.”¹ After all, he was the giant-slayer who delivered the people of Israel from the threat of Goliath and the Philistines. He was the handsome national hero young women sang about. Women adored him and men wished they were him—they all admired him.

Samuel the prophet came to the home of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel. After Jesse had paraded all of his sons before Samuel, Samuel looked at Jesse and asked “*Are all your sons here?*” To which Jesse said, “*There remains yet the youngest, but behold he is keeping the sheep.*” Samuel said to Jesse, “*Send and get him, for we will not sit down until he gets here.*” Seeing David approach, “*the LORD said, ‘Arise, anoint him, for this is he.’*” Samuel anointed David the next king of Israel. Soon David found himself in the “castle” at the service of King Saul. He became such a successful military leader that women sang, “*Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.*” He even married the king’s daughter. This once obscure shepherd boy had now become one of the most well known figures in all of Israel. He had fame. He had notoriety. It all looked so perfect! God was doing something incredible in David’s life.

But a few spears aimed at David by a jealous king Saul seemed to change everything. Saul was jealous of David and he became obsessed with killing David. And so David now found himself on the run. He was running for his life. It is interesting to note where he ran to. He ran to the home of his enemies. He ended up in the town of Gath. It was the hometown of Goliath. It was the capital city of the Philistines. Upon arriving in the city of Gath, David sought asylum with Achish, the king. But the servants of the king were suspect of David and David quickly got the sense that it was not a good idea to cozy up to the king of Gath. So David decided to act as though he had gone insane. He made marks on the doors of the gate and he drooled spit onto his beard. The king responded to David’s actions by saying, “*Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?*”

This brings us to our passage, 1 Samuel 22:1. “*David departed from there—from Gath—and escaped to the cave of Adullam.*” David went from the castle to the cave. David went from having his picture being celebrated on the front cover of *People Magazine* to being hunted and having his face posted on trees as “the most wanted outlaw” of the land. He went from a promising bright future to the uncertainty and darkness of the cave. “*David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam.*”

Now if you are curious how David was feeling about this rather sudden change of fortune—how he was feeling about being in the cave of Adullum—all you have to do is read some of the psalms he wrote while he was seeking refuge in this cave. In the heading for Psalm 57 we are told that this psalm was written by David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave. It is in this psalm you can hear some of his fear surface. He writes, “*My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts—the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.*” Psalm 142 also begins by telling us that this is a prayer of David from the cave. Here too we get a window into what David is feeling while he is in the cave. He prays, “*With my voice I cry out to the LORD . . . I pour out my complaint before him . . . Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low.*”

David is well acquainted with what it is like to be in the cave. David knows the hard place. In fact, some conjecture that he spent three to six months living in this cave. We are going to spend three weeks living in this cave. The next two weeks, we are going to look at the two psalms I just mentioned. From these two psalms, we are going to learn how to cry out to God and turn to God when we find ourselves in the cave. And then we are also going to learn how to praise God when we are in the cave. Did you know that you can praise God from the hard place? David did! But before we look at these two psalms, this morning I want us to begin by simply gathering at the cave.

In fact, that is what you find happening at the cave of Adullum. Once David arrives at the cave, not too long after that his family shows up. And then it says in verse 2, “*And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him.*” Strangely, this cave became a gathering place. Why? It doesn't seem like a place you would want to go to and gather. It became a gathering place because that is where the king was. It says in the text that they “*gathered to him.*” They gathered at the cave because they were aligning themselves with the anointed king.

So before we learn how to cry out to God from the cave and before we learn how to praise God from the cave, I just simply want to ask whether or not you have *gathered to him* at the cave. Have you aligned yourself with the king? When Colin Smith was preaching on this passage, he said to his congregation, “Here is how this story speaks to us today: I want you to look through the story of David and his followers to Jesus, the despised king for whom this world has no room in the world, who is gathering his people in anticipation of the day when his glory will be revealed.”²

We are saying two things through this sermon series: Life is hard. And, God can be

found. You find God not by avoiding the cave, but by gathering at the cave and aligning yourself with the king. Here is what you will discover about the king—Jesus—as you seek to align yourself to him. Jesus is the rejected king. Jesus is the redeeming king. Jesus is the ruling king. And so the question is this, “Is Jesus your king?” Have you aligned yourself to him? That is the critical question to answer. If you have gathered to him and aligned yourself to the anointed king, you are well equipped for whatever “hard place” you find yourself in this morning. If you have Jesus, you have “who” you need.

Run to the Rejected King

Let me tell you what you will find when you gather at the cave. The first thing you will find is a rejected king. Clearly, that is what David was. Though he had been anointed the next king of Israel, he was rejected by King Saul and here he is in our passage seeking refuge in a cave. Consequently, David’s path to the throne was not a pampered one. He wasn’t carefully groomed and prepped for the task. Instead, his path to the throne was a way of suffering, contempt and humiliation. He escaped to a cave, not a fortified castle.

Don’t imagine that this cave is some sort of small open space in the rocks. Rather, it was a large underground fortification. It was made up of a complex system of interconnected caves, and some of the caverns were big enough to hold up to 200 or 300 people. Therefore, there was plenty of room for the 400 men who came and aligned themselves with this rejected king who was on the run. The cave of Adullum was just over 12 miles away from the city of Gath, from where David had just fled. This underground fortification is referred to in verses 4 and 5 as a “*stronghold*.” It became a fortress and a shelter for David. God protected David in that lonely, cold, dark cave.

But the cave was more than just a place of refuge. The cave was a place of waiting. It was a place where David had to wait for God to fulfill his promise. That is one of the hard parts of being in the cave. It involves waiting. Sometimes that waiting lasts for a season. Other times, that waiting lasts for a lifetime. But as people who live by the promises of God, we can patiently wait and trust God. It was also a place of growth and a place of training. How many times in the history of God’s people has it been proven that we grow the most and learn the most when we are taken to a humble and lonely place where only you and God know what’s going on in your heart. This is where we find David. He is in the place of waiting, the place of growth, the place of training.

Another psalm that is attributed to this cave is Psalm 34. The heading for this psalm tells us it was written by David and the occasion for this psalm is stated like this: “when he

changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.” It is referring to when David acted as though he were mad in the city of Gath. Most likely Abimelech is another name for Achish, the king in Gath. It is in this psalm that David testifies from the cave, *“This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”* Clearly this cave was growing his trust in God as he waited for God to fulfill his promise to David when Samuel anointed him the next king of Israel.

I already mentioned that we need to “look through the story of David to Jesus.” David is a shadow that points us to Jesus. And what you have here is an established pattern of how God accomplishes his purposes in the world. Like David, the way to the throne for Jesus was through the way of suffering, contempt and humiliation. Jesus was the rejected king. Isaiah 53 tells us that he was *“despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”* John tells us in John 1 that Jesus *“came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”* Hebrews 5:8 adds that Jesus *“learned obedience through what he suffered.”* This is a path that led Jesus right to the cross. It is a path we will see Jesus walk this season as we come to Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

But you must know that this pattern also extends to those who align themselves with Jesus. It is a pattern that we experience if we gather to Jesus at the cave. I like the way Clark Tanner put it. He picks up this pattern that runs from David to Jesus and to us. He writes, “David was taking refuge in the caves, but he was still the king; and Christ was despised and rejected of men, but he was never less than King of Kings; and if we are identified with him in this world, we too will be despised and rejected . . . but we remain nonetheless, royal children of the king.”³

When we gather to Jesus and align ourselves to Jesus, we recognize that we are crawling into the cave with Jesus and one of the ways we come to know Jesus is in the *“fellowship of his suffering.”* We too will suffer. We too will learn obedience through our suffering. We too will learn to wait for God to fulfill his promises. We too will continue his work in humility and patience, suffering with him outside the camp, until that trumpet sounds. In other words, by aligning yourself to the rejected king you can be sure that there is purpose to your suffering. Like David, in the cave you might cry out, *“Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low.”* Or like Jesus you may want to cry, *“My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”* But this is where we find ourselves. We are at the cave and it is here where we meet up with the rejected Jesus and we carry our cross and willingly follow him in obedience.

I think this pattern has been lost on our American version of Christianity. We have lost the notion that following Jesus involves sacrifice and obedience. We are not attracted to meeting up with Jesus at the cave. We prefer the “invitation” to the castle. But you can’t meet him apart from the cave. Again, I ask you, “Is Jesus your king?” Have you aligned yourself to him? If so, be willing to meet him at the cave and be willing to take up your cross and follow him. Bonhoeffer famously put it this way in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁴ I can imagine, those who met up with David at the cave knew they were putting their lives in harms way simply by aligning themselves with David. So it is with us. Run to the rejected king!

Rely on the Redeeming King

There is something else I want you to see about aligning yourself with the king. Do you notice who starts showing up at the cave?. First of all, it is his family. I am sure with David on the run, one sure way of making him vulnerable would be for Saul to round up his family and threaten him through the capture of his family. And so his family gathers at the cave and seeks refuge under David at the cave of Adullam.

But take notice who else shows up at the cave. It says in verse 2, “*And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him.*” On the surface, this sounds like a rather motley crew of “outlaws and bandits” congregating around David. Perhaps, you might be tempted to think of these men as “undesirables,” - the kind you really can’t trust. As if David didn’t have enough to deal with in dealing with his own problems, and now he has the equivalent of Robin Hood and his “Merry Men” to tend to. But I don't think that is the case, at least not with the majority who aligned themselves with David. I think many of these 400 men were victims of Saul’s tyranny. That is why they were in *distress and in debt and bitter in soul*.

When the people of Israel asked for a king, Samuel warned them that the king would take their sons and daughters for his service and that he would take of their fields and their vineyards and their livestock for himself. Saul did just that. Colin Smith said, “try to put yourself in the shoes of a village farmer. You are sitting at home one evening when there is a knock at the door. Saul’s men are there. And they say to you, ‘Our records show that you have two sons in this house We’re here to take the oldest. The king needs him to drive his chariots.’ Six months later, your oldest daughter is gone, taken without her consent or yours. You work through the year on your vineyard, an inheritance given to you by your family. When the harvest comes, Saul’s men are at the door again. They have looked at the vineyards and they say plot numbers 1, 3 and 5 now

belong to the king. In addition, we want 10% of everything else from your vineyard.”⁵ Powerless against Saul, you can understand how one could be “*bitter of soul.*”

Whatever the story of these 400 might be, whether due to their own fault or suffering under the tyranny from King Saul, their condition was the same. Notice the repetition of the word “*everyone.*” “*And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him.*” Here is what they had in common; they knew they needed David. Colin Smith said, “The only hope for these people, who were *bitter, distressed, and in debt*, lay in someone who could come and bring an end to this kingdom, a king who would bring another kingdom.”⁶

Someone greater than David has come to deliver us from a tyranny greater than Saul’s. “*Everyone*” - there is not a person here this doesn’t apply to. We are all born dead in our sin. We all naturally follow the way of this world. We are enslaved to sin. The words *distress—debt—bitter in soul* describe life under the tyranny of the Devil. We try everything in our power to fix things. We chase after things—sometimes good things—thinking they will satisfy and bring contentment only to find that the hole in the heart is still there. With all the advancements man has made down through the centuries and the change that has come with it—still the words *distress—debt—bitter in soul* describe life under the sun—under the tyranny of the Devil.

The word *debt* reminds us that we are not just victims of this tyranny. We are also complicit in our sin. We have a *debt* we cannot pay and so judgment looms over us. We live out our lives in this misery. Then we die. And then comes the judgment. This is “everyone’s” *distress—debt—bitterness of soul*. Reflecting on this, Paul seems to helplessly throw up his arms and ask, “*Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” We need a David to run to. We need a king who can bring another kingdom. We have such a David. We have such a king. We have such a kingdom. In Colossians 1:13-14, Paul says, “*He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” Come to the cave and align yourself with this King. He did for you what you cannot do for yourself. He lived for you. He died for you on the cross. And he rose from the dead, declaring victory over the one who once enslaved you. Hallelujah!

I believe in the dynamic nature of God. Jesus is here this morning. The Holy Spirit is active this morning. The Word of God *makes you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus*. God is stirring someone’s heart this morning. I believe there are some here who God is

calling to come to the cave. You may have been coming to the church for a long time. But have you ever come to the cave? “The spiritual cave of Adullam is still open. In King David’s time there was room for 400 men, and no doubt their families, too. But, a greater David lives! In Christ, there is room for a great multitude, a multitude which no man can number. The Greater David will receive you, who are burdened with a lifetime of guilt and sin. He will receive you, for he was sent by the Father, “*to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that our bound.*”⁷ Have you aligned yourself with the redeeming king?

Risk it All for the Ruling King

The last thing you are going to find when you run to the cave is a ruling king. Once these men arrived and aligned themselves with David, the text tells us that David *became captain over them*. Even though David was yet to make his way to the “castle”, there in the cave they submitted themselves to David and they followed him. Because God was with David, God was with all who aligned themselves to David. Because of their connection to David, they did great things under David.

In the next chapter, 1 Samuel 23, David gets word that the town of Keilah, in the land of Judah had come under attack by the Philistines. David inquired of the LORD as to whether or not David and his men should go down and rescue the people of this town. It was a risky move because Saul had already mustered up his army and was closing in on David. In fact, David’s men questioned whether or not now was the time to concern themselves with this town in distress. They themselves were in distress. They were the pursued ones as they constantly maneuvered themselves to stay out of the reach of Saul and his vast army. They said to David, “*Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines.*” And yet, under David their captain, they followed him and they delivered this town from the Philistines. It is here that they discover under David, they can risk it all.

There is a story that emerges much later in David’s life that reflects the risk these men became accustomed to taking as they followed David. It is a story that is told as the writer looks back and reflects on David’s life. It is a story that emerges out of 2 Samuel 23. The men aligned to David are characterized as “David’s Mighty Men.” They are given this title because of the mighty things they did. In this chapter, you hear of story after story of mighty things these men had done in service to their king. One of these stories emerges from the cave of Adullam. What is uncertain is whether or not this took place at the time when David was on the run from Saul, or at a later time when David once

again sought shelter in this cave. Either way, the place outside the cave was teeming with the army of the Philistines. They even had a garrison stationed in Bethlehem.

David is in the cave with his men, riding this thing out. And he sighs, *“Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate.”* I don’t think he was sending someone to get this water. It probably was one of those wistful thoughts, *“What I wouldn’t give for some water from the well of Bethlehem.”* Three of his “mighty men” took this as a way to serve their king. They risked their lives. They snuck through the camp of the Philistines and made their way to the very well David alluded to and carried the water back to David. This is the stuff of movies. You can imagine the stealth and the risk and the tension and the music in the background as these men risked it all to serve their king. You can also imagine the exhilaration these men felt as they granted the wish of their “captain” and brought him the water. They probably couldn’t wait to offer David a drink from the well of Bethlehem.

What did David do when they returned to him? The text says, *“But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the LORD and said, ‘Far be it from me, O LORD, that I shall do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?’ Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.”* I hope this scene is played out in heaven. I would love to watch the faces of these three men as David spills that water to the ground. But that is not the point I want you to see here. I just want you to see how these men risked it all for their “captain.”

These things are recorded for us, to encourage us, to teach us what God is like, to show us that there is no earthly limit to the amazing things the Holy Spirit will accomplish through a life yielded to Jesus. No matter your age, intelligence, accomplishments, vocation or socio-economic status—there is no earthly limit to what God will do with a life sold-out to the “captain of your soul” - to Jesus. Risk it all for him! That is one of the key affirmations in our way of life. “I will live the conviction that God is at work in my life whether I see it or not.” It is what Mike was getting at last week in his sermon. When it seems like God is doing nothing, God is doing something.

Risk it! In Christ, we are “mighty men and women.” Speak that word that needs to be spoken. Love that person that needs to be loved. Meet that need that needs to be met. Pray that prayer that needs to be prayed. Answer that call that you know God has placed on your heart. Endure through that trial with faith. In all these things, know that God is at work through the one who comes and aligns himself or herself to the king. *“Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord*

your labor is not in vain.”

Conclusion

Have you gathered at the cave? Have you aligned yourself with the king? Life is hard. Next week we will learn how to cry out to God from the cave. The following week we will learn how to praise God from the cave. But the first step is to gather at the cave and to align yourself with the king. We are all at different places this morning. I wonder which of the three pictures of the king you need to stare at this morning.

For some, it is the rejected king. You need to be reminded that this is the pattern for you as well—the road of suffering. Embrace it and know that God is at work in it. Ask God for grace to endure.

For some it is the redeeming king you need to look at this morning. Perhaps there are some here, who need to look at this picture for the first time. Repent of your sin. Rely on what Jesus has done for you on the cross. Submit to him as the ruler of your life. And you will be forgiven of your sin and you will be aligned with the king.

Some of you need to look at the ruling king. Are you willing to risk it? Are you willing to step into that place that has been a fearful place for you to step into, but God is calling you to represent him there? It may involve risk. But don't underestimate what God can do through you.

Let us all gather to him! Let us all align ourselves to the king! If you have gathered to him and aligned yourself to the anointed king, you are well equipped for whatever “hard place” you find yourself in this morning. If you have Jesus, you have “who” you need.

¹Shawn Thorton “Alone in a Cave” www.pastorshawn.com October 16, 2016

²Colin Smith “Bitter, Distressed and In Debt” www.lightsource.com February 9, 2014

³Clark Tanner “The Cave of Adullam” www.sermoncentral.com October 6, 2002

⁴Deitrich Bonhoeffer *The Cost of Discipleship* (Touchstone, 1995)

⁵Smith

⁶Ibid

⁷Rev. M. Golverdingen “David in the Cave of Adullam” www.sermonweb.org

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. This is the last week of a 10 week segment for Community Groups. The next 10 week segment starts after Easter. Share with the group:
What you have appreciated about the group?
Is there something you would like to see improve in the group?
Do you plan to continue with the group?
2. What is something you took from the sermon this past week?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read 1 Samuel 22:1-2. As a group, acquaint yourself with the story of David. Peruse the chapter before and the chapter after 1 Samuel 22. What do you observe about David's story?
4. David—the anointed king—points us to Jesus. Which picture of Jesus from this sermon do you need to look at and why?
The Rejected King—the pattern of suffering
The Redeeming King—who delivers the distressed, in debt and bitter of soul
The Ruling King—who invites us to take risk in serving him
5. Read Hebrews 12:1-2. You might want to read Hebrews 11:37-40 (look for David's story) to put Hebrews 12:1-2 into context. How does David's story of faith inspire your story of faith?

Taking It Home

6. Reflecting on your discussion, have everyone offer the following prayers:
Lord, I thank you for _____
Lord, I ask you to _____
7. If you are not meeting in April, what can you do to stay connected?