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## BECAUSE THE COIN JUST DOESN'T WORK

### 1 Samuel 19

George Dixon was a lieutenant in the Confederate army during the civil war. He was engaged to a beautiful woman from Mobile, Alabama, named Queenie Bennett. Miss Bennett gave her fiancé a \$20 gold coin to carry with him as a reminder of her when he went off to war. In the battle of Shiloh Dixon was shot at point blank range, but the bullet struck him in the pocket where he carried his gold coin. The bullet was stopped by the coin, saving his life. From then on he carried that coin with him as his good luck piece. In the most stressful times he could be seen rubbing that coin. Some people believed that old story was just one of the many legends that came out of the Civil War, or if you're from Mississippi, the War of Northern Aggression. However, in 2000 experts were able to raise the *CSS Hunley*, the confederate submarine that was the first submarine to ever sink a ship. It sank after the engagement in which it torpedoed the Union ship the *Housatonic*, and all of its crew died. The senior archaeologist on the Hunley project made an amazing discovery. She found a \$20 gold coin. It was bent from having been hit by a bullet and on one side of the coin was inscribed with the words "Shiloh, 1862. My life Preserver, G. E. D." George E. Dixon. It was the bent and bullet scarred lucky coin of none other than Lieutenant George Dixon, the commander of the *Hunley*. He had his gold coin with him when his ship went down with all hands and he was killed. I would conclude his lucky charm didn't do him much good.

People rely on all kinds of things to protect them in this life because we have lots of reasons for fear. There is so much that is out of our control and so many threats in this world. While we were on vacation we visited one day with an old friend of ours. The day before our visit her son was diagnosed with melanoma, a daughter in law had to have surgery, and she suffered a knee injury that likely will lead to surgery. In our conversation she said, "One thing I've learned for certain is that I control almost nothing in this world." Is it possible to have peace and optimism in a dangerous world? It is. Today we will look at the experience of David in 1 Samuel 19 and find out that while his life was seriously threatened he had reason to be at peace, and we do too.

### JONATHAN PROTECTED DAVID

In chapter 18 we saw that Saul's growing insecurity and instability caused him to fear David unnecessarily. His irrational fear led him to make an impulsive but abortive attempt to kill David. He followed that with a couple of plots that he

hoped would lead to David's demise, again to no avail. In the beginning of chapter 19 we see that his attempts to do away with David are no longer rash spontaneous outbreaks of fear and anger. Now they have become an obsession. In verse 1 we see that Saul instructed his son and his aides to kill David.

There is a pattern in this chapter that shows up right in the first verse. Saul sets in motion an assassination attempt on David's life. Then we read, "but Jonathan had taken a great liking to David." Saul is determined to kill David and then we see the word "but." Something is going to interfere with his attempt. In the first case it is Saul's own son Jonathan. We will learn more about Jonathan's relationship with David next week, but for now we can see how much Jonathan cared about David. Rather than obeying his father's command to try to kill David, Jonathan put himself at risk by warning David about the plot on his life. Then he took the step of intervening on David's behalf. He pleaded with his father to change his mind because David was not an enemy.

At that point Saul still had a shred of rationality left. Soon he will be so dominated by his fear that all evidence of rationality will disappear. But at this point we learn in verse 6 that Saul listened to Jonathan and swore that he would forgo any further attempts to kill David.

#### MICHAL PROTECTED DAVID

Unfortunately, unstable people tend to be, well, unstable. Maybe you've heard about the incident when the FBI was investigating medical fraud at a mental hospital. They raided the facility to gather evidence. As the day dragged on they grew hungry so one of the agents called a pizza parlor and ordered 19 pizzas and 67 cans of soda. The kid at the pizza parlor asked, "Where do you want them delivered?" The agent said, "The psychiatric hospital." The kid, now wary, said, "Um, the psychiatric hospital?" "That's right. I'm an FBI agent investigating here." "You're an FBI agent?" "Yes, all of our group are agents." "And you're at the psychiatric hospital?" "That's correct. When you deliver the pizzas don't come to the front doors because we have them locked. Bring them around to the back." "Uh huh. And you're all FBI agents?" You see the problem. Can you trust the word of unstable people in a mental hospital? An unstable Saul could not be counted on to keep his promise not to harm David.

After Saul had made that promise David again went out and successfully led troops in battle against the Philistines. David's popularity continued to rise and Saul's paranoia deepened. Once again while David was trying to calm Saul's disturbed psyche by playing his guitar, Saul flipped out. He fired his spear at David with

malicious intent. David dodged that bullet, but Saul was not done yet. According to verse 11 Saul next sent a hit squad to David's house.

Verse 11 follows the same pattern that we saw in verse 1. It says, "Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him. If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed." In verse 1 we saw Saul cooking up a plan to kill David but there was an obstacle. It was Saul's son Jonathan. In this incident Saul cooks up another plan to kill David but there is another obstacle. This time it's Saul's daughter, Michal.

This sounds like something out of a Jason Bourne movie. Saul tries to shoot David but our young hero dodges the bullet and escapes. He goes to his house where his wife warns him an assassination team is on the way. He has to run. Knowing they are watching the entrance to the house she lets David out a back window. I could be completely wrong here, but I can't help wondering if Saul's hitmen were something less than enthusiastic about their mission. He would send his best men, right? If they're the best he had, how is it that they didn't watch the back of the house? Seems like a pretty glaring oversight, don't you think? My suspicion about the hit team grows even more when you see that they finally went into the house in search of David and his wife told them that he was sick. They said, "oh, all right. Sorry for interrupting. We will come back later when he's feeling better." What kind of a hit team is that? What assassins view illness as an excused absence by the victim for that day? Sounds to me like one that was giving its intended victim every opportunity to get away.

When the men report that they couldn't kill David because he was sick Saul, undoubtedly disgusted, sent them back. He told them if David was too sick to get out of bed then carry the bed if you have to. But David's wife had created a dummy that she had put in the bed that they had apparently mistaken for the real thing. She had used an idol for the dummy. That suggests that maybe Saul's family wasn't quite clear on what it meant to obey God since his daughter had an idol, a clear violation of one of the 10 Commandments. Nevertheless, the upshot is that David got away with his wife's help.

To no one's surprise this did not make Saul happy at all. His own daughter had betrayed him by helping David, his enemy. Her response when he asked how she could do such a thing was to claim that she had to. David, she said, had threatened her if she didn't help him. That was an outright lie. It apparently got her off the hook with her dad, even though it was a pretty flimsy lie. The main point here,

though, is that once again Saul's effort to assassinate David was thwarted, and once again it was by one of Saul's own children.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT PROTECTED DAVID

Up to this point this story would make a pretty good action movie. It has intrigue, attempts at violence and tension. However, at this point the movie changes genres. In the last section of this chapter it becomes a comedy. In fact it's almost a farce. It amazes me that some people fail to see God's sense of humor. There are several passages in the Bible that I think are hilarious, and this one is a classic.

Saul would not give up. Having escaped from Saul's web David went to the town of Ramah where he took refuge with Samuel the prophet. Like any good tyrant Saul had an excellent intelligence network. He had eyes and ears everywhere. So it wasn't long before Saul got word that David was at Ramah. Once again he sent an assassination squad after David. This is where events take a turn for the hilarious. Remember the pattern that we have seen in this chapter. Saul determines to kill David and sets a plan in motion and then comes a "but." Something blocks his plan. Saul has sent his men to Ramah to kill David...but. When they arrive they find Samuel and a group of prophets and they are all prophesying. Verse 20 says "the spirit of God came on Saul's men, and they also prophesied."

We saw earlier that apparently the action of prophesying at times involved behavior that was more than a little quirky. It was as if the spirit of God took over a person and they spoke in ways that they otherwise might not have, or did some unusual things. In this case it seems as though the spirit of God takes over the minds of Saul's hit team and they somehow forget all about their mission.

First it was Jonathan who stepped in to protect David, second Michal helped him, this time it was the Holy Spirit who stepped in to protect him. Don't you wish you could've been there to hear that hit team's report when they returned to Saul? He asked if they had killed David. There was some shuffling of feet and clearing of throats and averting of eyes to avoid looking directly at Saul until someone finally said, "Uh, well not exactly." "Not exactly? What's that supposed to mean? What exactly happened?" "Well, we're not quite sure." "You're not sure? How is that possible?" "Well, what happened was..."

Saul had to have been utterly disgusted with his elite soldiers. Not only had they failed, they had no coherent explanation for why they had failed. I wouldn't be surprised if in his paranoia he thought that maybe they were helping David. He couldn't trust them. Operational Detachment Delta had failed miserably so he

looked for another group. He tasked Seal Team Six to go after David. But the Seals came back looking just as puzzled and gave the exact same report as Delta Force did. Nearing the limit of his frustration Saul tries again. This time he tries a platoon from Marine Force Recon. Surely the devil dogs will succeed where the others had failed. But once again, he found out he didn't have assassins, he had prophets.

Now it takes a really humorous turn. Saul decides he can't trust anybody so he'll deal with David himself. He heads over to Ramah intending to kill David by his own hand. But verse 23 says, "but (there's that word, 'but,') the spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth." It happened to him too. Then it gets worse. When he gets to Samuel he takes off his clothes. He lies there naked all day and all night ranting and raving in prophecy. Some idiot tried to make a TV series about it called "Naked Prophesying," but Saul threatened to kill him so he stopped. I made that last part up. Saul's obsession with himself and his reputation ended with everyone thinking that his trolley had just run off the rails. He wound up looking loonier than Daffy Duck.

Imagine that you work for a company that has a boss who has a fierce reputation. He's known as one of the most intimidating people on the planet. His explosive harangues at employees are legendary. Stories of employees shaking in their shoes at the very prospect of having to face him are rife in the company. There are even stories of people so intimidated by his ranting at them that they've lost control of their bodily functions. And you have just had a project go sideways. It is a project that was important to the big scary boss. Now you have been summoned to his office. You try to steel yourself knowing what is coming but frankly, you are scared stiff. You keep hoping that your meeting with him will be canceled, but no such luck. The time has come and his assistant informs you he is ready for you to come into his office. You go in and find the big boss dressed in a clown suit babbling nursery rhymes. You are stunned. What is this? What's going on? After a while you hesitantly try to get his attention and tell him you're here to give an explanation but he just starts singing Baa Baa Black Sheep. After waiting for some time for him to come to his senses you just shrug your shoulder and leave the office wondering what in the world just happened.

That scenario is not much different than what happened when Saul went to Ramah to kill David. The final line of this chapter says that experience gave rise to a saying in Israel. The saying was, "is Saul also among the prophets?" That saying had actually come up once before in chapter 10 verse 11. Saul had gotten caught up in the prophesying thing when he was anointed king. People said the same thing

then. I think it meant, “wow, can you believe that? Saul prophesying? Didn’t see that coming.” It meant something astounding and totally unexpected had happened.

On our flight back to Mississippi to visit Michael and Carissa a portion of it was on a commuter jet. It had just one restroom in the back of the plane. At one point I needed to use that facility so I went to the back of the aircraft and encountered something I’d never seen before. This restroom was on the side of the aisle and when I got there I saw that the door was open and a man’s feet were extending out of the restroom into the aisle. Some guy was in the restroom with the door open! I had no category for understanding what was going on. What in the world was this man doing? Could he possibly be using the facility with the door open? Is anyone that clueless about propriety? I didn’t want to look in the room to see what was going on because I was afraid I might see something I would never be able to unsee. I stood there, totally unsure what to do, because I did need to use that facility. I looked at a guy who was sitting in the last row of seats who could see into the restroom. He rolled his eyes and shook his head. I had wondered if maybe the man in the restroom was having a problem, but the look on the face of the guy in the last row wasn’t concern, it was disgust. I stepped closer and looked in and found the man just sitting there on the closed toilet, fully clothed. Is Saul among the prophets? In other words, this is something totally unexpected. It was so unexpected I could not understand what was happening. When Saul went after David and ended up prophesying naked on the ground all day and all night people had no category to understand it. Wow, can you believe that actually happened? What was that about?” To ease your minds, the man did get up at that point and returned to his seat, expressing extreme unhappiness about the size of the plane.

At this point ancient readers were texting ROFL to their friends. For the uninitiated that means “rolling on the floor laughing.” This story is hilarious. But there is a message in this chapter that David should not have missed, nor should we. God was protecting David so he had nothing to worry about. God protected him from the murderous efforts of the most powerful man in Israel 3 times in these incidents, and the last time he did it in an unforgettable way. Hey David, never forget, God can make that nut job Saul prophesy any time he wants, so you have nothing to worry about. Remember in your most terrifying moments that Saul could be among the prophets again if God so chooses. David is about to enter a phase of his life where he will be under constant threat from King Saul who has completely lost it. The major issue of his life will be about whether he will live by the principle that God was teaching him in this chapter. Would he believe that he was safe not because of his own strength or cleverness but because God was protecting him?

## IMPLICATIONS

### WE MUST ANSWER ONE QUESTION

All right that's mildly amusing and interesting I suppose. But what does that have to do with me? It's great that God protected David, but so what? At issue is the question: can God be trusted? God made a promise to David that he would be king. In order for David to be king he would have to be alive. Could David trust God to fulfill his promise and protect him when the most powerful man in his nation was doing everything he could to dispatch David with extreme prejudice? Would God be faithful to him and take care of him?

The answer is yes. God was faithful to take care of David. But what about us? We must also have an answer for the question of whether God can be trusted. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 Paul wrote, "we live by faith, not by sight." Unfortunately our response as gauged by our actions and attitudes actually is, "No we don't. We live by sight." We all know what it means to live by sight. It means I'm only gonna believe it if I can see it. I'm going to feel safe and protected from some criminal who might do me harm if I have big walls around my house, an impenetrable security system and powerful bodyguards. I'm only going to feel safe about my future if I can see the numbers in my bank account, do the math and realize I've got more money than I could spend in 10 lifetimes. Walking by faith is totally different. It means I believe in God's promises and act as though they are all true, even though I can't see him, his kingdom, eternal life or the spiritual realm in which he exists. It means I believe he's telling me the truth about how I should live even though doing it is no guarantee that life will go the way I want. The bottom line of life for a follower of Jesus is, can God be trusted? But before we answer that question we must answer another. What has he promised to us? What can we trust him for as we live by faith not by sight?

### GOD HAS GIVEN US TRUSTWORTHY PROMISES

First consider what God has not guaranteed us. Unfortunately he has not guaranteed us the thing that most of us think we want. That is a life with no pain and no disappointment. Inexplicably life does not work out that way, even for people who trust in God. We are not promised that.

You might recall that Jesus told his followers that they would have trouble. Was he right? Peter and John were arrested and beaten. Peter was arrested again, put in jail and scheduled for execution before he was freed in a miraculous rescue operation. In the end he was executed. James was executed. John was tortured and exiled to a place that was more isolated than Meridian, Mississippi. Paul was repeatedly arrested, stoned, beaten, suffered shipwreck before finally also being executed.

Whatever troubles we may face, we are light years better off than those guys and they were all chosen by Jesus to lead his church. If they had that much trouble, do you think it likely that all will be unicorns and roses for us?

David was protected by God, but not from great hardship and disappointment. We will see him have to live on the run for years, hiding in hardscrabble wilderness areas, continually in fear for his life. I think we can conclude that if all those people went through that much upheaval we should not be surprised if our lives feel more like we're shooting class 5 rapids than merrily rowing our boat gently down the stream. Then what has God promised?

**He promises to give us eternal life.**

This is the most important thing we can ever possess. We are all going to die. There is no way around that. If all we have is our 80 years on this planet, years that for most of us won't turn out the way we had hoped, then we are condemned to live in disappointment, bitterness and fear. We will always be continually at risk, easily threatened, and that fear will grow dramatically as we get into our final decades of life.

But God has promised this is not the end. God assures us that we will live again even after we die. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 he said "God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." The resurrection of Jesus is the first piece of fruit of a great crop that consists of all who believe in Jesus. They will rise from the dead as surely as Jesus did and physically live again. The book of Revelation guarantees us that the life we will be raised to is one that is far better than this life. It will have a lot in common with it, but it will be what Jesus called the restoration of this life. In other words, it will be like this life but with all the things that are wrong in this world put right.

Laurie and I were recently talking about shows that have been our favorite television shows throughout our lives. This was prompted by the fact that probably our most favorite over the past few years was recently canceled. All of our favorite shows have one thing in common. They all ended. That's true of everything good in this life. We even have a saying that all good things must come to an end. Why must they? Because this world is broken. But God has promised that someday we will be in his eternal kingdom where all good things just go on forever. Nothing will be bittersweet, it will just be sweet.

I have friends who are high energy, almost driven people who don't like to sit still. They are the types who get bored if a vacation goes on very long. I am not like



that. I guess it's possible that I might get bored if a vacation goes on too long, but I've never had a vacation that got close to being too long. I find as I get to the last day or two of a vacation I start feeling a little sad because I don't want it to end. I start wanting it to slow down, I try to wring everything I can out of it because the end is near. Last year we had a vacation where we spent some time at a beautiful place that I loved and didn't really want it to end. But as we got near the end of it I wasn't really upset about it at all. That's because when that ended our vacation wasn't over. We were just going to move to a different locale that is one of my favorite places on earth. That is much more like our lives here. We may not want them to end, but we don't get panicky about it because this isn't the end. We move from here to a place that is even better. God has promised to give us this eternal life. This is a promise that we can trust at all times, and being secure in that truth completely changes how we think about life.

### **He promises to never leave us.**

Romans 8:38-39 promise us that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Hebrews 13:5 promises us that he will never, ever abandon us. That means that at every moment, even the darkest, saddest moments of our lives, he is still with us, caring about us.

It means that we don't need to go through life fearing that we are going to put a foot wrong and God is going to get disgusted with us, maybe even reject us. I have used this illustration before, but I always think of a hike our family once took. We followed a trail through dense tropical jungle that in part of it went along a creek that was like something out of a painting. The scenery was spectacular, but I didn't enjoy it as much as I would have liked. That's because the trail was totally muddy, but it wasn't thick mud you had to slog through. It was slick mud. Every time you took a step your foot would slip a little, so you were in constant danger of falling. At one point young Toby took a step and his foot shot straight out and he went completely horizontal, parallel to the ground, then fell flat on his back. The problem is when you are totally focused on making sure of your footing you can't be looking around enjoying the scenery.

If God is looking over our shoulders, mostly displeased and quick to slap us down, our lives are going to be nothing but stressful and full of threat. That will prove to be a sad and energy sapping existence. But God has promised us that he loves us and nothing will ever change that. We don't need to ever fear that we are going to fall out of favor or be rejected by God.

Because he is with us he has promised us that he will bring good out of everything that happens in our lives. Some of it will be hard or painful, but nothing in our lives will be meaningless. And God is able to make something good come out of even the worst that happens to us.

Because he is with us we know we can persevere and not be defeated. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 God promises he won't allow us to experience anything that is more than we can bear. Isaiah 40:28-30 promises he will give us the strength to keep going. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 describes what happens when we go through hard times. "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet we are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."

Laurie and I have been exercising by doing some workouts that we follow from some people on line. They break up the workouts into segments that often are 20 seconds or 45 seconds long. The last 5 seconds of a segment they have a timer that beeps. I was doing one of these exercises and was out of gas, thinking I couldn't keep going. Then I heard the beeping. I can do 5 more seconds. God's promises to be with us and strengthen us are like that beeping. When I hear them it says to me, "You can do it, just hang on a little longer."

### **He promises to protect us from evil.**

Do you remember what Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:13? It was near the end of what we call the Lord's prayer, which is really our prayer. He said we should pray, "deliver us from evil." It is God's will that you pray that. Do you think he'll say, "Pray this," then when we do he'll answer, "Nah, I don't think so. Hah, made you pray. Fooled you." In John 17:15 Jesus prayed on behalf of his followers, including us, "I do not ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." Again, do you think God heard his Son's prayer and said, "Let me think about it"? We can know that the Father answers that prayer.

Fear has become pervasive in our society. The media has definitely not helped in that matter. We hear about terrorist attacks, ebola, zika virus and myriads of other threats. Parents don't fear for their kids because of personal knowledge of anything bad ever happening to a kid in their town, but because of what they've heard about from the news. On top of that we have our own personal fears that can easily control us. But God does not want us to be fearful people. More than 100 times in the Bible God says some form of "do not be afraid." 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." Romans 8:15 says, "You have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again." God

does not want us living in fear and has given us his Spirit so we don't have to. He has not given us a spirit of timidity. He wants us to live with confidence and hope. We can do so because his Spirit is in us and we can trust him to protect us from the evil one.

A researcher named Roger Hart conducted a study in 1975 in a small town in Vermont. He followed 86 children between the ages of 3 and 12 and documented where they went by themselves and felt safe playing. He found that even 4 and 5 year old kids in the town went throughout their neighborhoods unsupervised. By the time they were 10 kids had the run of the entire town. Both they and their parents felt they were completely safe. In 2014 Hart went back to that same town and studied a new generation of the town's kids. He found that the kids only felt safe staying on their own property. Even when the kids were older the parents insisted on knowing exactly where they were at all times. What is amazing is the town is the same as it was in 1975 and its crime statistics were identical. The only thing that had changed was the level of fear the residents had.

We get focused on the hard or painful things that have happened to us and forget about all the things that could have happened to us. When I was in college one day we had a baseball game in Riverside. It wasn't that far from our college in Claremont so several of us went to the game with one of my buddies in his car. On the way back after the game we were driving along at 60 miles per hour as we approached an intersection. The light turned red, but our buddy driving didn't slow down. We urgently called his attention to this problem and he responded in a panicked voice, "I can't stop! The brakes just went out." The intersection was a busy one and there were a lot of cars going through. There was nowhere our driver could go even if he wasn't paralyzed by fear. We roared through that red light and didn't hit a thing. Cars were stopped at the light in the lane next to us, but not in our lane, cars crossed through the intersection seconds before we got there and immediately after we cleared it, but we sailed through untouched. There was no swerving or evasive maneuvers, no slamming of brakes to keep from hitting us, not even any angry blaring of horns at the idiot who appeared to blithely and recklessly run a red light. That could have and should have gone very different than it did.

Maybe more to the point is that day after day we are being attacked by our spiritual enemy and the only thing that keeps him from ripping us to shreds is the fact that our Heavenly Father is protecting us from the evil one. Did you know that since 9/11 there have been more than 31 separate domestic terror attacks thwarted with more than 70 plotters arrested. Targets included locations in LA, Kansas City, Tampa, Dallas, Springfield, Illinois, and Elkins, West Virginia. They included the

New York subway, the Federal Reserve building in New York, the Brooklyn Bridge, the New York Stock Exchange, the Capitol and the Pentagon and more. The usual methods were bombs, but the plots also involved a remote controlled radiation emitting device, explosive packed radio controlled model planes, bombs with shrapnel that has been soaked in rat poison, grenade launchers and others. Think of what might have happened had someone not been trying to stop such things. What would happen to us if God were not protecting us from the enemy would be far worse. I suspect if we could see the spiritual realm we'd see a number of incidents of Saul being among the prophets in our own lives, incidents that would cause us to say, "Wow, I can't believe that just happened."

What are you relying on to protect you? Do you have a gold coin equivalent? It will not ever protect you from the attacks of the enemy. Do you believe that you can trust God in any and every circumstance you will face in life? When we believe in God's promises and trust him, we can live with hope, confidence and courage no matter what may occur in this world.