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TO SHINE LIKE THE DAWN
1 Samuel 23

Laurie and I have found that there have been some great television shows that we think were terrific, but were only on for 1 season then were canceled. Recently there was one called *Forever* that we really enjoyed, but it's gone now. There was an old one called *The Finder* that we found quirky and fun. An even older and maybe even quirkier one was called *Firefly*. Hmm, they all begin with the letter F. I wonder if that means something?

Firefly was a sci-fi show about the crew of a rogue cargo space ship that continually landed in the middle of all kinds of mischief while trying to avoid entanglement with authorities. One member of the crew was a sort of blunt instrument, shoot first and ask questions later character, a man with the unlikely name of Jayne Cobb. In one episode the crew lands on a planet on which most of the people live almost at slave level, ruled over by one wealthy man. Jayne appears to be quite uneasy about being on this planet. It eventually turns out that he'd been there before and had robbed the wealthy ruler of the planet, so he fears he will be recognized and arrested. The entire crew is in for a shock when they come upon a statue of Jayne, of all things. They can't believe what they're seeing. Why would anyone make a statue dedicated to him? He has no explanation for it. Their astonishment grows when they go into a tavern with Jayne disguising himself to avoid recognition, and the person providing entertainment begins singing a song about the great hero, Jayne, and everyone in the place joins in.

It turns out that Jayne had stolen a great deal of money from the wealthy master but in his attempt to escape while being fired on by the man's security people, he had accidentally dumped all the loot out on the public square. The local people were able to scoop it all up. They were sure he was a sort of Robin Hood who had stolen from the rich man and then given all the money to the poor people of the planet. He was their hero. Of course, eventually the people were in for a big disappointment when they found out what really happened. He was no hero at all, just a thief who made a mistake. What a letdown when a hero turns out to be anything but heroic. Sadly we are painfully familiar with this problem. Alex Rodriguez was a surefire candidate for the baseball Hall of Fame until he destroyed his reputation by cheating and lying. Today the name Lance Armstrong is cause for nothing but scorn. Sometimes it seems like a good idea not to put any faith in a leader or a famous person because they will only disappoint you.

We can live with famous people disappointing us. Unfortunately they are not the only ones who disappoint. Most of us know what it is like to be disappointed by someone in our personal lives. How do we deal with that without becoming cynical or bitter? Today as we continue looking at the life of David we will see in 1 Samuel 23 that he knew all about being disappointed by people. If we pay attention we can learn some things that might help us when people let us down.

THE PEOPLE OF KEILAH FAILED DAVID

David is still on the run, hiding from Saul, who has made killing David his number one objective in life. However, David's situation has changed quite a bit. Chapter 22 tells us that after David's abortive attempt to hide safely in Gath he returned to Israeli territory and hid in a place called the cave of Adullam. His family joined him there. It would be nice to think that this was a matter of family loyalty where everyone was rallying to David. However, that probably was not what happened. They knew that Saul might go after them in order to force David into the open. They hid with David because they were in danger.

However, they were not the only ones who sought out David. Verse 2 of chapter 22 says, "all those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About 400 men were with him." These men were not the elites of their society. Some of them were running away from debt. Some of them were in distress, meaning they didn't know where to turn or what to do to get out of their situation. I wouldn't be surprised if there were a few criminals among them. However, they identified with David, because they saw him as a fugitive on the run from authority much like they were. They rallied around David and he found himself with his own private army.

David took his family to Moab, a different country, one that was not at war with Israel at the time. He left them there confident that they would be out of Saul's reach, thus safe. However, God did not want David hiding out in a foreign country. Verse 5 of chapter 22 tells us that a prophet informed David that he needed to go back to the land of Judah. He left and found a hiding place in the forest of Hereth. Apparently this was David's version of Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest. That's where David is with his private security force when chapter 23 begins.

David learned that the Philistines were attacking a city called Keilah, which was right on the border between Philistine territory and Israeli territory. Saul wasn't defending the city. He was not doing what should have been his priority, which

was to protect the citizens of Israel. He was too busy pursuing David. David proposed to go save Keilah.

David's men were not thrilled with the idea of defending Keilah. Verse 3 says that they said to him, "here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces." They were not a trained army, they were just a ragtag band of outcasts. How were they going to do fighting against the trained Philistine army? Even worse, fighting that battle would reveal their location to Saul. They'd end up having to fight both the Philistines and Saul's army.

Understanding his men's fears David checked with God one more time. Verse 4 says that the Lord told him, "go down to Keilah for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand." God promised David they would win the battle. Trusting God's promise he led his men against the Philistines. To the surprise of all they routed the Philistines and saved the city. That was great but their victory had exactly the effect that David's men feared. Word of their victory quickly reached Saul, who immediately called up all his forces and headed towards Keilah, thinking he had David right where he wanted him.

Observe Saul's reaction when he learned of David's whereabouts. According to verse 7 he said, "God has delivered him into my hands." Saul has been told twice by the prophet Samuel that God was going to give the kingdom to another man. Saul knew David was that man. And yet Saul concluded God had delivered David into his hand. We all have a strange tendency to believe that surely God wants whatever we want. God is on our side. Saul knows better, and yet he is thinking that God is giving David up to him. This serves as a warning that we can convince ourselves that God surely must want something that we want even when God has specifically said it's not. I have seen Christians rationalize some of the most ridiculous things and convince themselves that God must want it for them. Let's let Saul serve as a cautionary tale for us and not repeat his mistake.

David learned that Saul was on the way. He had just saved the lives of the people of the town of Keilah. What would they do? Would they side with him now and protect him? Wisely David did not ask them their intentions. He asked the Lord what they would do. According to verse 12 he asked the Lord, "will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" God informed him that they would indeed give David up.

It's not too hard to understand the calculus behind the thinking of the people of that town. They knew that Saul had already had every man woman and child in a town

killed because one man in the town innocently helped David. What can they expect if they helped David? Saul was going to bring his troops and destroy them. It came down to David or them. They might have hated turning David in to Saul, but if the only alternative was to be wiped out by an enraged Saul, then they would turn him in. It was a matter of self-preservation. They probably could have made the case of the greatest good for the greatest number. It made no sense to sacrifice everyone in the town just to save one man.

THE PEOPLE OF ZIPH FAILED DAVID

People had continued to flock to David. Verse 13 tells us that his private army now numbered about 600. Knowing he was not safe near Keilah David led his troops out from the town. They began camping out in the hills in the desert area of Ziph.

Saul had no idea where David was, but that was about to change. The people who lived in the area of Ziph knew that Saul wanted to kill David. Those people saw an opportunity. They could curry favor with the King by informing on David. And that's exactly what they did. By this time Saul has given ample evidence that he was not worthy of being the king. He has shown himself to be cruel, self-obsessed, unrighteous and mentally unhinged. Is this the kind of man that any sane person would want to have ruling them?

Despite all that these people chose to help Saul. They didn't care that David was innocent. They didn't care that David was God's chosen man for the throne of Israel. They saw an opportunity to further their own personal gain. Even though it meant betraying an innocent man, they went to Saul and told him where to find David.

David fled to a different desert region nearby with Saul in close pursuit. Due to the intelligence provided by the people of Ziph, Saul almost caught David and his band of merry men. Saul and his forces were on one side of the mountain while David's forces were on the other side of the same mountain trying to get away. Saul's forces were almost on them when Saul learned that the Philistines had mounted a major attack again. He was faced with the choice of either continuing his pursuit of David while forfeiting his kingdom to the Philistines, or going to fend off the Philistines and losing his chance to kill David.

At least he had enough of his wits left to know if he ignored the Philistine attack in his obsessive pursuit of David he would lose his kingdom. There was no way people would continue to follow him if he allowed the Philistines to ravage his

country while he tried to kill one innocent man, so he broke off the attack against David to go fight the Philistines.

IMPLICATIONS

SOME PEOPLE WILL DISAPPOINT

If I had been in David's sandals I would feel more than a little disappointed by the people of Israel especially those of Keilah. David didn't owe them anything. He had no obligation to protect them. They were going to be destroyed by the marauding Philistines. David put himself and his men at risk by fighting against the Philistines and thus revealing his whereabouts to Saul. He stood nothing to gain from taking that risk, but he did it anyway.

I would think it reasonable to expect a little better from the people of Keilah than betraying David to Saul the moment they felt a little threatened. If I were David I'm quite sure I would be thinking, "Really? That's the thanks I get for rescuing you? Thanks for nothing." The people of Ziph weren't much better. David didn't rescue them so they didn't owe him anything at least. However David had done them no harm either. Saul had no idea that David had gone into their area. All they had to do was just keep their heads down. They didn't have to put themselves at risk to protect David, they just needed to not say anything. But they went out of their way to betray David because they thought they saw an opportunity to help themselves. How do you think David was feeling at that point? He had to be thinking that he couldn't trust anyone and that pretty much everyone in Israel was against him. Again, if I were in his sandals I'd be feeling pretty cynical about these people. It appears to me that these people would sell you down the river at the blink of an eye.

This may sound like a cynical, even bitter and harsh view of the human race, but what we see in this chapter is a statement about human nature. This says we should not be surprised if something like this ever happens to us. In other words we should not be surprised when someone we thought highly of chooses to protect himself or further his own agenda at cost to us. We should not be shocked if people disappoint us.

This happened to David more than once or twice. Look at Psalm 41: 7-9. "All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying a vile disease has afflicted him; he will never get up from the place where he lies." Well that's bad. David has a lot of enemies hoping for the worst for him, hoping that he'll get some terrible disease that will kill him. It gets worse. In verse 9 he says, "even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned

against me.” Among those whispering behind his back and hoping something terrible would happen to him was someone he considered a close friend, somebody he trusted. How do you think that felt? If you’ve never been betrayed like that you may not know how it feels, but from personal experience I can tell you it is deeply painful.

In Psalm 55:11 David wrote, “destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets.” Once again we see David feeling surrounded by enemies who are lying about him and hoping that something terrible happens to him. But look at verses 12 through 14. “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God, as we walked among the worshipers.” Once again one of David’s closest friends had turned against him.

We will see later in his life that one of David’s own sons, Absalom, turned against him and tried to overthrow him. There again you see someone pursuing his own personal, selfish agenda to David’s great detriment. That had to be unimaginably hurtful. But to add even more sting to it, one of David’s closest advisors, a man named Ahithophel, joined in the rebellion against David.

David wasn’t the only person in the Bible to be disappointed by people. You might remember that Peter denied Jesus at the lowest point of Jesus’ earthly life. You might remember that the Christians in Corinth, many of whom were brought to faith by Paul, later turned on him and rejected his leadership, deciding he wasn’t dynamic enough for them. Philippians 1:17 tells us when Paul was incarcerated there were people preaching the gospel whose hope was to stir up trouble for him! That’s terrible. Near the end of his life Paul was once again on trial. In 2 Timothy 4:18 he wrote, “At my first defense, no one came to me support, but everyone deserted me.” The people he had ministered to deserted him at the critical moment. I think that’s awfully disappointing.

David ran into human nature. The biblical picture of human nature is not pretty, but it is true. It says that at their core people’s hearts have been twisted out of true. At the core of all of us is a relentless commitment to self. Our tendency is to calculate every situation with the question “what will I get out of it?” Often even what appears to be self-sacrifice is actually a ploy to gain some return for the person supposedly doing the sacrificing. In other words, we should not be surprised when people do whatever they deem to be in their best interest even if someone else gets hurt by it. We should expect it. That’s what fallen people do.

Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” That is a stark statement. The human heart lies. It is so deceitful it even lies to itself, and therefore is beyond curing of its illness. We need to recognize that this is what we are dealing with in every encounter with other people.

In Mark 7:21-23 Jesus said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.” Jesus claimed that all of the ugliness we see in the world should not surprise us. It all comes right out of the human heart. It is all there inside of us.

Romans 3:10 says, “there is no one righteous, not even one.” Genesis 8:21 says that after the flood God said, “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.” Did you get that? Every inclination of the human heart is evil even from childhood. Evil touches everything we think from the day we can think.

There is a fundamental divide in our culture over how we view human nature. One view says that humans are basically good. It sees all the greed, selfishness, unkindness, abuse, conflict, violence, crime that humans continually visit upon one another as a result of external things that have happened to basically good people causing them to behave badly. Just change those external things and then we will see that native goodness blossom.

The view of human nature that we see in the Bible says that humans are not good at their core. They are self-obsessed. Even their goodness can be a strategy for getting something they want. This being the case the bad behavior that we see, the envy, greed, adultery, malice, deceit, is not an aberration. It is exactly what you would expect. The problem isn't the system. No matter what system you put humans in they will distort it because the problem isn't the system, it's in the heart of humans. But this is such a negative, dour view of people. You are truly Mr. Frowny Face if you think everybody's that bad. That's one of the most cynical things I've ever heard. Actually it's not cynical, but even if it were that's not really the point. The point is, is it true?

There was a point in my life a long time ago when I saw myself as a great athlete. I could be a great player at any game I chose. I thought surely I must be destined for athletic glory. Then I started running into coaches who evaluated what I could

actually do. They saw me as not nearly big enough, not even close to strong enough, definitely not very talented, and generally not much of an athlete. It was unkind, harsh, and it hurt my feelings. Yes, but that's not the point. The point is, was their evaluation true? Sadly, it was. Had I lived my life thinking they were just negative, cruel, cynical people who didn't want to admit the truth I'd have just set myself up for more pain. I needed to see the truth and make choices in light of it.

Are people really that fallen? I was thinking about this while I was driving recently. I observed some interesting behaviors while driving. Coming out of our neighborhood there is an intersection with a traffic light of one not very busy street with a very busy one. I was on the less busy street, stopped at a red light, waiting to turn left onto the busy street. Across from me was a car going the opposite direction, also waiting for the light. He did not have his turn indicator on, which I took to mean he was going straight across the intersection, so I would have to wait for him to go through before I could proceed with my left turn. The light turned green, I waited and watched as he started across, then turned left. This was not a big deal, but he made me wait a bit simply by not indicating he was going to turn. Here's my problem: how hard is it to flip on your turn indicator? Why wouldn't you do that? What essentially happened was that person said, "I can't be bothered with such trivial details and I don't care if it inconveniences you a little bit. You'll get over it." He didn't seek to inconvenience me. He just did what he wanted to do without regard for how it might affect someone else.

Oh, come on Rick, you're making way too much of this. Hold on. I continued to drive. I came to a major intersection where I planned to turn right. This is one of those big intersections where if you get stopped by a light that has just turned red you might well experience two birthdays sitting there before the light turns green again. Fortunately for me though the light was red I was turning right, so I just had to wait for traffic to clear. Or so I thought. There was a car in front of me that was going straight so he had to wait for the light to change. However, even though the lane was plenty wide enough for me to pass him on the right he made sure to pull far enough over to the right that he would block anyone trying to turn right. He just sat there blithely ignoring the fact that several cars behind him wanted to turn right and he was in their way. He was doing what was important to him, and that was all that mattered.

I'm not done yet. A little later on this same trip I was driving on a major street that is 3 lanes wide each direction. I was traveling 55 miles per hour, the speed limit, as I approached another intersection. The light was green so I was going to go right through at that speed. As I got close to the intersection I could see a car come to

the red light from the right. He wanted to turn right. He stopped at the red light, checked oncoming traffic, saw me now entering the intersection, then *slowly* went ahead and made his right turn right in front of me, causing me to have to brake dramatically. There were no cars behind me for quite a distance so if the person had waited 5 seconds for me to pass he would have had a clear lane. But he couldn't be bothered to wait for such a long time. He was in a hurry to go slow.

These are not big deals. But each one of them was an example of a human being caring only about what he wanted to do, choosing what he deemed best for himself, even though it inconvenienced other people. In every instance to be kind to others would have required the tiniest of effort. Put your turn indicator on, don't pull as far as possible to the right of lane, wait 5 seconds for traffic to clear. Nope, none of those things matter. I'm doing what *I* want to do, what is important to me, what serves me, and I don't care how it affects others.

You might say those incidents prove nothing. I agree. They don't, but they do illustrate the problem with human nature. I've watched it in much more significant contexts too. Last week I mentioned an interaction in a family on the beach that I observed while we were on vacation. It was about people doing what they thought was best for them and hurting others in the process. The next day we were again on the beach and were next to a family group similar to the day before. Once again I saw exactly the same thing play out. It was like watching a movie I've seen before.

The news flash here is you and I are going to be hurt by people. They are going to let us down. They may even do things that almost feel intended to harm us. They will disappoint us. Not everyone all the time, but it is going to happen and it will hurt. Sometimes it will hurt badly. So, what are we supposed to do with this? Are we supposed to become curmudgeons who think everyone is awful? No, my point here is that we should not be surprised when human nature asserts itself in disappointing ways. We will always hope for better and usually fall into the trap of expecting better. The problem with that is that it can cause us to become bitter toward people and even cynical about people and life in general when they let us down. The point is to not let that dictate how we live. How can we respond in ways that can enable us to be more joyful, more loving, more hopeful and more godly?

WE CAN OVERCOME DISAPPOINTMENT

Inquire of the Lord

In John 2:23 the apostle tells us that there was a point in Jesus' ministry when he was gaining quite a following because of the miracles he was doing. Verses 24-25 tell us, "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He

did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.” The New Living Translation renders the last phrase of verse 24, “For he knew human nature.” Jesus knew all about people. But that did not change a thing for him. He continued to love them, be patient with them, do good for them, and finally sacrifice himself to save them.

In our story David didn’t get mad at the people of Keilah or the people of Ziph. He didn’t try to take revenge against them. He simply went on about his life doing what God wanted him to do. God wanted him to stay out in the wilderness areas and avoid Saul, so that’s what he did. David’s actions were not dictated by the failures of other people or by his own selfish desire for vengeance, but by what God wanted him to be and to do.

That’s what we need to do as well. What does God want us to be and do? Does he want us to get back at people or be angry at them when they don’t meet our expectations? No, what God wants is that we would love them. He wants us to see that we share their condition, that we too are committed to ourselves and have likely disappointed others just as they have disappointed us.

Our little granddaughter, Ella, is very possibly the happiest baby I’ve ever known. But she is a human baby with a human nature. Mostly she is terrific, but she has a little human will, a fallen will, and on occasion it shows up. We have on my cell phone a little video of her playing. She just started belly laughing. She loved looking at herself in action. She was totally riveted by watching it. When the video ended we took the phone from her. You’d have thought we were torturing her. She screamed so loud it was painful to the ears. She wanted that phone back. How dare we take it from her? It was some really ugly behavior. Laurie and I were shocked. We just did not expect such behavior. We had to rethink whether we could continue to consider her our granddaughter if she was going to be like that. Do you believe that? I hope not. That little explosion of self will did not change even a little how we think about her and treat her. I recognize that’s part of her nature that I share. I’ve just learned to control it to some extent, and so must she. But we still see her as the most precious thing in this world.

That is how Jesus sees us. Our failings, our disappointing him, did not stop him from dying for us and it does not keep him from patiently continuing to love us. And that’s what he calls us to do for others. We love Ella despite those little flareups of selfish human nature because it’s part of being 8 months old. We continue to love others when they disappoint because their actions are part of having the disease of being human.

In Matthew 5:44 he said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” When we inquire of the Lord, this is what he tells us we are to do. When Toby was in high school playing football they had one game his senior year that was a crucial game against a team his coaches warned them about. The team was known for dirty play. They would trash talk, cheap shot, do everything ugly thing they could to try to get his team’s players to lose focus. The coaches said, “Don’t go down to their level. Don’t be like them. Just focus on what we have told you to do and keep doing it. That’s what we must do when other people disappoint us.

Take strength from the exceptions

The cool thing is that while everyone has this human nature, some will rise above it. Jonathan was one of those. In contrast to the people who were thinking of themselves he put himself at risk to help David. What an encouragement it had to have been for him to show up and tell David that God was going to take care of him and he didn’t need to fret. Those people will show up in our lives. We should treasure them and be grateful to them, and to God for them. We must never forget the blessing God gives us through those people.

A couple of years ago one magazine asked 50 successful men who helped them gain the success they had. Tyler Perry, the movie actor, writer and producer, said it was a neighbor, Mr. Johnson. He said even in his own house he was mostly overlooked. But he said of Mr. Johnson, “He was the kindest, most gentle man I’ve ever met, and he was the first person to actually see me. Not even in my own house did I exist, but when he looked at me he let me know I was alive and that I had a voice.” It was Mr. Johnson’s encouragement that launched him on his way. We should treasure those who encourage us. And we should decide to be the people who encouragers of others.

Know that God is at work

The coolest part of this story comes at the very end. Saul, the most powerful man in Israel, was determined to kill David. The people of Keilah proved human and betrayed David to save their own skins. The people of Ziph thought they could help themselves at David’s expense and they also turned on David. And in the end David escaped anyway. Just when Saul is about to finally achieve his goal and terminate David, word comes that the Philistines are attacking. He can’t ignore it and has to abandon pursuing David. No human being could have arranged that timing. That was God at work.

The most important thing we can ever remember is that God is at work, regardless of what people may try to do. We need to keep our eyes focused on what God is doing and not fret so much about what people might do. Psalm 37:1 says, “Do not fret because of those who are evil.” Verse 7 says, “Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.” Verses 5-6 say, “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.”

In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul wrote that God is working out everything according to the counsel of his will. He is doing it all to the praise of his glory. Imagine that you amazingly get a bit part in a movie being made by Steven Spielberg. This is expected to be a blockbuster and you have this little role that consists of saying two short sentences. You act your part and are pleased with how you do. You are dismayed when people criticize your little part and try to get it removed from the movie. Spielberg decides to cut one of your two little sentences and you are hurt. But then you see the premier and the movie is powerful. You realize Spielberg knew what he was doing. Your part felt like exactly what it should have been, but more importantly you see that what matters is not you and your part, but the glory of the entire movie. God is the one directing. He's at work. What we need to do is focus less and less on what people do, and more on the fact that God is directing the entire project and it is for his glory.

It is essential for us to remember what is happening in this world isn't nearly so much about what people do, as it is about what God is doing. His plan is being worked out no matter what people do.