

August 7, 2016
Rick Myatt

WAY MORE IMPORTANT THAN POKEMON

1 Samuel 21

I was watching a playoff hockey game a couple of months ago when the goalie, on one of the teams made a bad mistake. The opposing team shot the puck in behind the net. He went around the net to control the puck and pass it to one of his teammates, but he badly flubbed it. He ended up just letting the other team gain the puck and proceed to stick it into the wide open goal. Bad idea. It reminded me of an incident with my son, Toby. I was coaching his high school hockey team. It was a brand new team that shocked people with how good it was. We had a couple of players that were terrific, one of them was Toby, who was and is a terrific goalie. We were in a tournament against a team we weren't supposed to have a chance against, but with only a couple of minutes left in the game it was tied at 1. The other team fired the puck into our end and Toby went to play it. He was against the end boards to the left of the goal. He looked up and saw our best skater coming trailed by a player from the other team. In that situation what I wanted him to do was send the puck around the boards behind the net to the other side of the rink where our player could retrieve it. But Toby thought he could pass the puck to his teammate and give him a chance to take it back the other way. He fired his pass...right to the guy from the other team. He promptly shot it into the empty net for the game winning goal. After the game I calmly asked Toby, "Uh, what was that?" He said, "Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time." I said, "Just for future reference, it wasn't. Keep the puck on the boards."

It seemed like a good idea at the time. We were in Mobile, Alabama on our way back to Mississippi from Pensacola when we encountered a street sign that Laurie said she had to get a picture of. It warned of a "Speed Lump" ahead. A speed lump? I guess that seemed like a good idea to someone, but I think everyone else in the world would call that a speed bump. Today we're going to look at an incident from the life of David in which he made some decisions that seemed like a good idea at the time. However, his clever ideas turned out to be disastrous. They were disastrous because they shared a common element that always leads to bad results. It is, unfortunately an element that continues to show up in our lives today. Let's look at 1 Samuel 21.

FAILURE TO TRUST CAUSED GREAT HARM

David is on the run from Saul. He has no illusions that he can remain anywhere near what was then the capital of Gibeah, Saul's home town. It is apparent to him

and everyone else that in Saul's eyes David is public enemy number 1. He had first tried hiding out with Samuel at Ramah, but Saul found him there, so his next option is to go to the town of Nob and look for help from a priest named Ahimelech.

Ahimelech's reaction to David is interesting. Verse 1 says he trembled when he saw David and asked, "why are you alone?" I suspect that he was aware of the problems between Saul and David. David had a significant ranking in the Israeli army so would normally have an entourage with him. Ahimelech immediately recognizes that David arriving alone is not a good sign. It likely meant that David was, in fact, on the run from Saul. That created a problem for the priest. It meant David was probably coming for help of some sort, but if Ahimelech helped him that would be seen as treason by Saul. But David was known as a fierce warrior. If the priest refused to help him it might cause David to do something violent. Either way it appeared that poor Ahimelech was in a lose-lose situation.

David's answer was that he was alone and appeared to be on the run because he was actually on a secret mission from Saul. In verse 2 David claimed that Saul had told him, "no one is to know anything about the mission I'm sending you on." His story was that he was undercover, the fugitive thing was part of the mission. He was doing Saul's bidding all along. Uh huh. You work for the CIA. Sure, I believe that. Because we've seen too many movies or TV shows where someone tries to use that as a cover story it is tissue thin. But in that day it was believable.

This story assuaged Ahimelech's fears. As we see in the story David needed food and a weapon. The only food Ahimelech had to offer him was some consecrated bread that was to be used in his ministry as a priest. Given the obvious importance of David's mission the priest agreed to make an exception and let David have the bread. He also had the late Goliath's sword in his possession. We don't know how that came about but it proved fortuitous. David took the sword as well.

Unfortunately David's story was a blatant lie. He was not on any mission from Saul, he was running from Saul just as Ahimelech feared he was. David told this lie because he knew very well if he told the priest the truth there was a good chance he would get no help from him.

It is important to remember some of the historical context of this incident. Think back to chapter 19. Saul's efforts to eliminate David turned into a crusade, his number one priority. Remember that in that chapter God protected David on several separate occasions. The last occasion was the one that was bizarre and

comical. David was hiding out with the prophet Samuel. Saul found out about it and sent an assassination team to take him out. But when they got there we are told that they began prophesying and somehow forgot all about their mission. Maybe you have seen those posters that mock the motivational posters people like to put up in their offices. One of my favorites shows a storm trooper from the Star Wars movie sitting at a desk, obviously in the process of being fired. The caption says, "As it turns out those were the droids you were looking for." You probably remember the scene when Obi-Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker entered the desert city of Mos Eisley and were stopped by storm troopers who were searching for R2-D2 and C-3 PO. Using the force Obi-Wan said, "these aren't the droids you're looking for." The lead storm trooper then said, "these aren't the droids were looking for." That's pretty much like what happened with Saul's assassination teams he sent to Ramah to kill David. God played a Jedi mind trick with them and they forgot all about David.

The climax of that story was that Saul himself finally went in search of David only to have the same thing happened to him. Except it was even worse in his case, for he ended up taking off all of his close lying down by the road and prophesying all day and all night. Why did God arrange such a bizarre event? It was to give David a vivid and unforgettable demonstration that Saul was never going to be able to harm him. God would see to it that Saul would be thwarted even if it meant using the "these aren't the droids you're looking for" gambit. If you were with Obi-Wan after he pulled that trick off, wouldn't you trust him? If you were with God after he pulled his trick, would you trust him?

The message for David was that God would protect him. Here David utterly failed to trust God. He believed that it was up to him to keep himself safe. I can understand why he would think that. He's in a dire situation and he's just trying to do the best he knows to keep Saul from killing him. And so he did what humans typically do, which is to think it is up to them to solve their problems. He decided that he had to come up with his own strategy, use his own cleverness to figure out some way to take care of himself. So he cooked up a bald-faced lie to convince Ahimelech to help him.

You might think that David's lie was understandable. After all, he was just trying to protect himself and prevent an evil thing happening, Saul killing him, an innocent man, God's chosen man. Perhaps David rationalized that he didn't actually hurt Ahimelech, so how big of a deal with this? It turned out to be a big deal.

It was disobedience to God coming from failure to believe God could protect David even after he had given such a graphic demonstration that God would take care of him. Verse 7 gives us a warning that there was going to be a problem. There was a man there named Doeg who is described as one of Saul's servants. He was an Edomite, meaning he was not a native Hebrew. He was from the land of Edom. The Hebrew text says that he was detained there, but scholars scratch their heads over the real significance of the word translated "detained." The best guess is that he had some sort of religious vow that he had made that caused him to be there. The key statement though, is that he was one of Saul's servants. In other words, word of what happened was going to get back to Saul.

To see the result of David's action we have to look at the next chapter. In 1 Samuel 22:9 Doeg tells Saul that he saw Ahimelech give provisions and a weapon to David. In verse 13 Saul confronts Ahimelech. He says, "why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?" The priest replied that David was loyal to the King and was not conspiring against him. I suspect that he also explained that David had tricked him, but to no avail. In verse 16 Saul said, "you will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your whole family."

Saul ordered his guards to kill the priests but they refused. Verse 17 says they "were unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests of the Lord." They had too much respect for God and his servants to do that, plus they knew Ahimelech was innocent. Unfortunately Doeg had no such scruples. He was not an Israeli, and apparently did not have the same respect for a priest of the God of Abraham that the Hebrews had. He carried out the sentence and killed Ahimelech and all of the priests that were with him, 85 of them. And then according to verse 19, "he also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and his cattle donkeys and sheep. David's lie led directly to the deaths of hundreds of innocent people.

Only one man escaped the carnage. It was a son of Ahimelech named Abiathar. When he got away he tracked David down and told him what had happened. At the end of verse 22 David admitted, "I am responsible for the death of your whole family." That is a huge consequence for one seemingly excusable lie. It should warn us that when we start relying on our own devices rather than trusting God bad things can and will happen.

FAILURE TO TRUST CAUSED DISGRACE

David next concluded that the safest way to get out of Saul's sphere of influence was to get out of Israel altogether. Saul seemed to have spies everywhere in Israel, so no matter where he went the king tracked him down. And so, verse 10 tells us that he went to the town of Gath, which was not in Israel, thus out of Saul's reach. The king there was a man named Achish. It appears to me that David panicked. I think that because Gath was a Philistine city. It was the home of Goliath.

I'm not sure what David was expecting. Perhaps he hoped that no one would recognize him there. Maybe he figured that the Philistines would just think he was some random Israeli outcast and pretty much ignore him. It had to be either that or he thought that maybe they had heard that in Israel he was public enemy number one, and any enemy of Saul's was a friend of theirs.

I had a friend in college who told me about an incident that took place in his life when he was playing football in his high school days. I suppose this incident is very current because he got hit so hard that he was briefly knocked out. Undoubtedly he had a concussion. His loss of consciousness was so quick that no one was aware of it. He staggered up but his brain was little bit scrambled. All he knew was that he needed to go to the huddle to prepare for the next play so he did. Unfortunately, he went to the other team's huddle, unaware that he was in the wrong place. You will not be surprised to learn that the other team did not welcome him with will open arms.

David's plan fell apart quickly. He was recognized. According to verse 11 they said, "isn't this David the king of the land! Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: Saul has slain his thousands and David is tens of thousands?" That little song has given poor David a lot of trouble. It was the beginning of his woes with Saul and now it crops up again. You can imagine how the Philistines felt about David. They quoted how the Israelis celebrated in saying David has slain his tens of thousands and they knew that they were referring to tens of thousands Philistines!

Do you know who Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is? He's the head of ISIS. Earlier this year the *New York Post* carried an interview with Saja al-Dulaimi, who is an ex-wife of al-Baghdadi. Her marriage to him did not last long, but she says while they were married she had no idea who he was. She said he was rather brusque but otherwise seemed a "normal family man." Suppose that "normal family man" decided he wanted to take his family to Disneyland. Do you suppose he would be welcomed here with open arms? Oh, hello, Abu. We hope you enjoy your visit to

the happiest place on earth. I don't think so. He would be more welcome here than David was among the Philistines.

According to verse 12, "David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish, King of Gath." He realized he'd made a grave mistake but now it was too late. The Philistines were hardly going to just let him walk away. He had jumped from the proverbial frying pan right into the fire. So David came up with another plan. He pretended to be insane. He started scratching doors and walls and drooling all over himself. He probably babbled a bunch of nonsense, incoherent language.

I don't imagine it was very hard for him to convince the Philistines that he was out of his mind. They could think of no other reason why he would conclude that living with them was a good idea. Just like the other team knew when my college friend joined the wrong huddle that he didn't have both oars in the water, it was easy for them to think that David clearly had to be Looney Tunes. He acted in a way that seemed to confirm that diagnosis.

They figured that the king would want to see this notorious Israeli so they took David to see him, probably to let him decide what to do with Daffy David. His reaction was classic. According to verse 15 he said, "am I so short madmen you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me?" Once again we see a little bit of the humor the writer of this book. I'm sure he got a good laugh out of quoting the Philistine king as saying, "do we have such a shortage of nut jobs that we have to import them from Israel?"

What a humiliating experience for David. He was a noble and popular man. Highly respected and widely loved. All you need to do is read some of his songs to know that he was talented and intelligent. And now he has to humiliate himself by acting like a crazy man in order to save his life. The ancient cultures like the Philistines weren't known for giving the mentally ill proper medical treatment. However, they took a kind of "hands off" approach to them. Just leave them alone. David knew this, which is why he chose the wild man option. He knew they wouldn't punish him if he was crazy, they'd just turn him loose to roam around on his own, and hopefully remove himself from the human gene pool.

Once again we have to ask why David was in that situation. He was there because he did not believe that God would protect him. He became afraid and in a sense he did indeed lose his mind. He began relying on his own cleverness and his own schemes to try to protect himself. His first attempt resulted in the death of many

innocent people. His second attempt didn't have such horrific consequences but it did disgrace him.

IMPLICATIONS

When we study historical books in the Bible we always come back to the question of what this means to us. Why has God told us this story? What is the point?

This chapter depicts what happens when God's people stop believing that His provision is sufficient.

The core principle of the new covenant is that what God supplies is enough. Maybe you've heard that before. When Jesus Christ came into this world, lived a perfectly righteous life but was rejected, died and rose from the dead as the payment for our wrong, what he did was enough. It was enough to restore us to God himself and to give us life. God's grace given to us through Jesus Christ is sufficient to give us forgiveness and new life, eternal life. We can add nothing to what God did through Jesus, it is completely sufficient. Some of our biggest problems occur when we fail to believe that. Our job then is to trust that what God has provided in Jesus Christ is enough.

That principle is the engine of the entire Christian life. When Paul fretted because his physical ailments were inhibiting him and he thought they were limiting his effectiveness in ministry, he prayed repeatedly for God to take his physical problems away. God responded in 2 Corinthians 12:9 saying "my grace is sufficient for you." What God would provide him would be enough to sustain him, to enable him to function and to make his ministry effective. What God provided was enough.

That principle is at the core of 1 Samuel 21. God had promised David that he would protect him and had proven that he would, in fact, do so. But David found himself in a frightening situation and stopped believing that God would provide sufficient protection. He went to the human default, which is to think it was up to him to protect himself.

When we fail to believe God's provision is sufficient we will disobey God.

In David's case it meant he told flat out lies. He made up a wild tale about being an undercover operative on a secret mission from the king that did not have even a shred of truth in it. Lying is disobedience to the God of truth.

Unfortunately when we lie to people there is another act of disobedience to God that is going on at the same time. Whenever we lie to people we are choosing to

take care of ourselves and not love them. Was David loving Ahimelech when he lied to him? Obviously he was not. He was putting the priest's life in severe jeopardy. Maybe David did not know that King Saul would be so crazy as to murder an entire town because of the actions of one innocent man. But he had to know that Saul would find out that Ahimelech had helped him and that as a result the priest would suffer the consequences. David chose to take care of himself regardless of the effect it would have on the innocent priest, and he knew that effect would be bad. In other words, he sacrificed Ahimelech to save himself. That is definitely not love.

Unfortunately this is always what happens when we stop believing that what God supplies is enough. We start looking out for ourselves, we disobey God, and awful consequences result. In Genesis 12 Abram left the land of Canaan when there was a famine and went to Egypt in search of food. While he was there he panicked. He was overwhelmed by fear that because his wife, Sarah, was a gorgeous hottie, that some Egyptian was going to kill him to get her. He failed to count on the fact that God had given him a promise. God had told him that he and Sarah were going to have children, and that their descendants would inherit the land of Canaan and become a vast prosperous nation. That could not happen if Abram was dead because some Egyptian killed him to get the beautiful Sarah for himself. But Abram stopped believing that what God provides is enough. He did not think God could protect him so it was up to him to take care of himself. His solution was similar to David's. He lied. And he instructed his wife to lie. He decided they should tell everyone that they weren't married and that she was actually his sister. How loving was that toward his wife? How loving was that toward the people of Egypt? It was not loving at all. Poor Sarah was forced into a terrible compromise by her cowardly husband. When we choose to not believe that what God supplies is enough, we will disobey God, and people will get hurt.

This problem will have enormous impact on the kind of people we are and on how we treat other people. It always starts with us wanting something badly and deciding we have to get it for ourselves because we don't think we can trust God with it. When we were visiting Michael and Carissa we all drove down to Pensacola, Florida to enjoy the beach there and to watch the Pensacola airshow. The first afternoon we were there we went to a beach that is on the Pensacola Naval air station. It was a beautiful beach with very few people on it. But there was a family not too far away from us on the beach. I was the one in our group who was seated closest to them and though I didn't mean to be nosy I couldn't help but overhear an interaction that occurred between them toward the end of the day. Because I wasn't trying to study them I don't know who all the players were but it

was obvious that there was a mother, her two adult daughters and their children in the group. I could not help overhearing at one point that the mother and one of her daughters were arguing. I don't really even know what the argument was about except it had something to do with the right way to do something. I was actually trying to ignore them but the level of their voices got higher and higher until finally at one point the daughter barked out, "oh yes *Mother*, you're always right. I guess we always have to do it your way, *Mother*." Her tone dripped with contempt for her mother. The mother fired back, "Don't you '*Mother*' me. I don't need this. We're never going to do this again. I don't need to go to the trouble of bringing you all here to put up with this." That was not the end of that discussion, but I won't bore you with any more details except to say a good time was not being had by all. So what happened there? Both the mother and the daughter had something they wanted. In that case they wanted to be right, and they wanted to be treated with love and respect. I can absolutely guarantee you that they did not think that what God supplied them would be sufficient. His love for them, his valuing of them was not enough. They absolutely had to be right and had to be treated with the respect that they wanted. And they were going to get it for themselves, even if that meant slamming someone whom they were supposed to love. And so that determined how they treated each other, and it wasn't pretty. It certainly wasn't loving. No one was trusting God and trying to obey him. The result was that pretty much everyone went away hurt and unhappy. This is what happens when we don't believe that what God supplies is enough. It even impacts the way we relate to other people.

During our travels I got tested on this very point. We flew home from New Orleans. Our flight from New Orleans to Dallas was to leave about 7 in the evening connecting to a flight at about 10 PM from Dallas to San Diego. We had about an hour layover in Dallas. While we were waiting in the New Orleans airport I received a call from our airlines informing me that our flight was going to be delayed because of a mechanical problem. It was going to be delayed nearly an hour. It wasn't hard to do the math. If we have an hour layover and our plane is an hour late we're going to miss that connection, probably the last San Diego flight of the night. We tried several things. I went to the gate to talk to the agent there and explained the situation to him. His answer summed up the situation quite simply. He said, "I really wish I had better news for you, but you're screwed. There's no way you will get another flight to San Diego that late." I called the airline's reservation number. I explained to the woman agent that our flight from New Orleans to Dallas was delayed because of a mechanical problem and that we were almost certain to miss our connection to San Diego. Could she find a way to get us on another flight or could they hold our San Diego flight until we arrived? She

asked for our names and flight information. Then she said, "I see that your flight gets just before 10 and your flight out is at 10:07." I said that that was correct. Then she said, "well sir, I see that this reservation was made in April. You have known for months that that connection was too tight to make. Why did you wait until now to deal with it?" I was flabbergasted. She was blaming me for the problem. Instantly the anger flared up. I had something I wanted. I did not want to spend the night in Dallas, I wanted to get home. I also wanted to be treated like I was a semi-intelligent human being. I felt this overwhelming urge to say to her, "I really hope this call is being monitored for quality assurance. If you would just listen, Ditz Brain, you would know that the flight was scheduled to get in nearly an hour earlier but it's delayed because of a problem with your airplane. This was caused by your airline, not me." Fortunately, before I opened my mouth I paused and asked if what God supplies is enough. Can I trust God to take care of us in this situation? Can I believe that his love for me is more important than the attitude of some random reservations agent someplace? Can I believe that when God tells me that he wants me to always treat people with love and respect, even when they are being offensive that he is looking out for my best interest and that if I will obey him what he gives me will be enough? In that moment, fortunately, I decided to live by the new covenant. I briefly told the Lord I would trust whatever he did with us that night, then tried to be patient and respectful towards the woman. As calmly as possible I again explained that we had the problem because our flight was delayed. I didn't get what I wanted. We spent the night in Dallas. But we got home safely, and I didn't end up feeling guilty over treating that woman in an ugly fashion.

In nearly every aspect of life, the new covenant comes into play. When we live by the new covenant, when we trust that what God supplies is enough, we will become godly people who live in peace, who reflect God's grace, love others, and experience peace and joy. But when we fail to believe what God supplies is enough we will become more self oriented, we will disobey God, we will mistreat other people, we will introduce a great deal of stress into our lives and we will never experience peace. We will do damage to other people, just as David did to Ahimelech and his colleagues.

We will also heap shame on ourselves. David ended up having to admit to Abiathar that he was responsible for the deaths of an entire town, including that man's family. Furthermore in the next episode he would bring shame upon himself as he had to act as though he were totally insane. Would you say that the family on the beach covered themselves with glory in the way they interacted with one another? It was pathetic and it made no one happy. Had I exploded at that woman on the

telephone from the airline and read her the riot act like I wanted to, do you think and I would've come off as a noble and good person? You think I would've been proud of how I handled the situation? Failing to operate out of the truth that what God provides is enough will always result in shame for us.

When we fail to trust what God supplies we will make bad decisions.

Failing to trust that what God supplies even affects our judgment. In our panic to take care of ourselves we don't see things clearly and we make self-defeating decisions. David made a terrible decision to lie to Ahimelech and put him at risk. I think David regretted that decision for the rest of his life. But it wasn't the last bad decision he would make in that chapter.

Would you say that going down to Gath, the capital of his sworn enemy, was a wise decision? In his activities as a military leader David was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Philistines. He had personally killed hundreds, maybe thousands of them. That was guaranteed to produce an extremely hostile welcome in Gath. If the only option was to get out of Israel, why wouldn't David have gone to Moab or Edom or some country Israel was not at war with? From the vantage point of 3000 years later it is mind-boggling that David made that choice. But when we stop believing that what God supplies is enough our judgment goes out the window. Would you say Abraham made a good choice when he lied about Sarah being his sister, not his wife? When you stop believing that what God supplies is enough there is no telling how many bad decisions you're going to make.

I have a friend who is very successful. He loves God deeply. He has great knowledge, is respected by other believers and is also a very intelligent man. But many years ago at one point when he was fairly young he came to a realization that he was not going to be able to support family in his chosen profession. He had to make a career change. It did not go very smoothly. In the process he faced a difficult financial crunch that was really tough on him and his family. It was a very stressful situation. He got through it, but not without some battle scars. It created in him a settled determination that he would never be in that situation again. It produced in him a hyper work ethic. For decades since then he has been consistently successful. But that drive inside of him, which at its core is actually fear, has never gone away. The result was that he ended up abdicating his responsibility as a husband and father. Their family is still together, but considerable damage has been done and the effect to this day is actually pretty grievous. Through the years he has been told repeatedly that his priorities are out of whack. He has even admitted it, but nothing has ever really changed. The heart

of the problem is that he has never really believed in his heart of hearts that what God supplies is enough. He felt in that one painful period of his life that God did not supply enough and that was proof that he cannot count on God to come through for him. If you ever suggested that to him he did not trust God, he would adamantly argue that he believes that what God supplies is enough. He would never, ever suggest that God is not faithful to provide. And yet, he has made poor decisions for many years and continues to this day because in truth he does not believe that what God supplies is enough.

I guarantee you that if you do not live in the reality that God provides all that you need and that His grace is sufficient in every situation, then it will warp your priorities. It will blind you to some bad judgment and poor decisions. It will warp you in very many ways that will distort your life.

What is the conclusion? It is very simple. Believe that God's grace is sufficient. Believe that what God supplies is enough. Whether it has to do with how you enter the kingdom of God, how to get God to accept you and love you, your own sense of your worth or value, success in your endeavors in this world, your finances, and every other aspect of your life, the key element is trusting that what God supplies is enough.

But does that mean that we just float along with the current, doing nothing, trusting that God will supply? Not at all. We are to be very proactive in this world. But what we are to be proactive doing is being faithful to God and obeying him. David needed to do everything he could to stay away from Saul and to try to keep himself safe. But as he did so the main thing he needed to was trust God and believe that God would take care of him. He needed to not disobey God. God had proven that David could come face-to-face with Saul while Saul was bound and determined to kill him and the result would be that Saul would begin prophesying and completely lose track of where he was. So for us we should be diligent, faithful, obedient, and most of all trusting God.

While the shuttle from a parking lot to the airport before our trip to Mississippi I happen to notice a young teen playing a videogame on her phone. Only it looked like a very boring videogame because it consisted of this character walking along a path. Little did I know that the game she was playing is now wildly popular. You've probably heard about the Pokemon Go phenomenon. It is now the most downloaded videogame on the planet. Because the game involves players carrying out actions in the real world it has actually created some problems in various places when people have been so focused on their phone and the game. As I

understand it the game basically involves following paths which are in the real world but depicted on your phone. You follow these paths to capture Pokémon and gain tokens that cause your character to grow to another level. In a way that's a little bit like what we are to do. We are to follow God's direction around in the real world doing what he gives us to do in the way he gives us to do it, and then we are to leave the results to him trusting that what he will provide will be enough.