

Life of David, "It's Complicated" 1 Samuel 21, 3/9/25

Footsteps of Paul Tour Announcement

Title Slide Turn to 1 Samuel 21 as we continue in our life of David series. During the Soviet occupation of Romania, **Richard Wurmbrand** and other Christian leaders were pressured to publicly support the Communist regime, which was openly hostile to Christianity. In a government-organized gathering of religious leaders, many pastors stood up and praised the Communist Party to avoid punishment. Wurmbrand's wife, Sabina, turned to him and said, "Richard, stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ." He knew that if he spoke out against the regime, he would be arrested or worse. But if he remained silent or lied, he would betray his faith. Wurmbrand chose to speak the truth, openly declaring that Christians should follow Christ, not the Communist government. As a result, he was arrested, tortured, and spent 14 years in prison, much of it in solitary confinement.

When I read that story and others like it, I have to ask myself the question, what would I have done? Would I have risked my life and the life of my family? Or for the sake of protection and security would I have lied? It's complicated isn't it? Today, we will see that David finds himself in two complicated ethical dilemmas when speaking the truth may put him in danger. What will David do? And then we are going to ask the question, what difference does this make in our lives today?

We are at a turning point in the life of David. There are four seasons of David's life **Shepherding Years, Hiding Years, Conquering Years, Reigning Years.**¹ We are now in season two, The Hiding years, because he is being pursued by a jealous and unhinged King Saul. So David is going to play hide and seek with King Saul for the next 10 years. Many of our most treasured Psalms come from these years where David had to learn how to trust God in fear, loneliness, and uncertainty.

So we pick up the story in chapter 21 at the very beginning of these hiding years. **David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest.** Nob is just north of Jerusalem, modern day this town is called **Mt. Scopus** where you get a beautiful view of the ancient and modern city. But in David's day, it was a town of priests and a place of cleansing ceremonies and sacrifice to the Lord. **Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"** You can understand why his spidey sense is going off. The fact that King Saul's son-in-law, a general in his army, is there alone without an entourage, without protection, without Secret Service is a red flag. **2 David answered Ahimelek the priest, "The king sent me on a mission and said to me,**

'No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.'

As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place.

¹ Thanks to Pastor Gary Hamrick for these categories.

3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." David makes up a clever story. "I'm Ethan Hunt and this is Mission Impossible. And the message I'm about to give you is going to self-destruct in 15 seconds." Why did he lie? We can only make an educated guess that he didn't trust Ahimelek, maybe he thought Ahimelek might have loyalty to King Saul and rat him out. We don't know for sure. Not only did he ask for bread,

8 David asked Ahimelek, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here?"

I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's mission was urgent."

9 The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here;

it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one." I think the reason David went there in the first place is because he knew exactly where that sword was stowed, even though he's playing coy. *David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."* Well the lie works. He saves his own skin, he gets some rations, he gets a weapon and, at least for now, he thinks no one will know he was ever there.

10 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. Now Gath, does that sound familiar to you? Who else was from Gath? Goliath! Gath is the capital city of Israel's sworn enemies the Philistines. You say, "Let me get this straight...the guy who killed Goliath goes to his hometown alone with Goliath's sword?" Yup. "What was he thinking?" You know, maybe when I get to heaven one day and run into David, I'm going to ask him the same thing. I don't know if this was just sheer panic or maybe the thought is, "It's been a few years, I hit puberty, I have a beard now, they won't recognize me," Well whatever the reason, it clearly was an ill-advised plan. **11** But the servants of Achish said to him, "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 his tens of thousands'?" Immediately David regrets having a hit song written about him. Fame isn't all that it's cracked up to be.

12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath.

13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands

he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

14 Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me?"

15 Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Which is just a great line. So we learn something else about David. Not only was he a shepherd, not only was he a musician, not only was he a warrior and a leader, but he was an actor. And evidently a pretty good actor. It was believed in those days that to be mentally ill was an affliction of the gods and they may have had a superstition that insanity was contagious, so

they would often avoid them. And that's apparently what happened. **Chapter 22:1 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam.**

That's as far as we are going to go in the story today. This is an ethically complicated story isn't it? What do you make of what David did? Raise of hands- How many of you would say, it was justifiable because his life was in danger, you gotta do what you gotta do? How many of you would say, it was morally wrong, after all at the end of the day he still lied and deceived? And how many of you are Switzerland? Well it's situational ethics... gray area neither right or wrong. It's complicated isn't it?

I will tell you, commentaries don't all agree on this, and I will be honest with you, coming in this week of my sermon prep I wasn't sure where I was going to land...which is why I named this sermon weeks ago in our planning- "It's complicated"...cover all my bases. But I'm going to give you my take. The Bible's heroes are complex and made of flesh and blood, flawed and fearful just like you and me. While I do believe there are situations where the higher law of God overrides the unjust laws of man, I do not believe that what David did was justifiable. I believe David sinned before the Lord.

Let me show you why. Two reasons- **1- David's lies came out of his own scheming, not God's directing.** Never once do we read that David consulted God about what he should do, where he should go, or how to respond in his circumstances. It seems that he acted out of his self-protective instincts. Not until later in chapter 22 do we finally see David seek God's guidance. **2- David's lies were based on fear not faith.** In fear of what Achish would say he *made* up a lie, in fear of what King Achish would do he *acted* out a lie. This was the same David who stood fearlessly and confronted Goliath with a sling while everyone else was afraid!

"Well," you say, "God still saved him and it seems like nothing bad came out of it so how bad could it be?" But, there are always consequences for sin, even if we don't see them right away. Let me suggest to you that David's ends-justify-the-means deception here may have led to something far more devastating later. Years later, David trains-wrecks his life with his sexual sin against Bathsheba, getting her pregnant, attempting to deceive her husband, and eventually killing him off in an attempt to cover everything up and he thinks he got away with it that time too until the prophet Nathan confronts him. We look at that situation and say how did that happen that David suddenly out of nowhere blows it that badly with all the scheming and lying? I would argue that he started to get a little bit of practice here in 1 Samuel 21, and thought he got away with it. And there were some other morally questionable situations in David's like that we will see and that he may have thought he got away with as well. Remember what we were all told at Sunday school growing up? Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. Now feel free to disagree with me and write me an email, but this is my take.

What about you and me today? Chances are, you and I likely will be tempted to lie to save our lives like Richard Wurmbrand or like David here in our study today. But we all face situations where we are tempted to lie to save us from embarrassment, or get out of a conflict, or to get ahead. What will we do?

I think most people think lying is inevitable, it's excusable because there are situations where you just need to do what you need to do. Studies show that the average person lies about 2x a day.² One study by the University of Massachusetts said that 60% of people in meeting someone for the first time can't go 10 minutes without telling at least one lie.³ But as Christians, do we stop and think, what does God think about lying, even those little lies that "don't hurt anyone?"

There are over 100 Bible verses that tell us what God thinks about lying. **Proverbs 12:22 *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are His delight.*** Strong language!

Colossians 3:9 *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices.* In other words, lying belongs to our corrupt nature, not our new nature as a Christian. And let's not forget, it was a big enough deal for God to put in the 10 Commandments.

But here's another reason I think this is such a big deal to God. John 8:44 Jesus talks about the devil and here's how he describes him. ***When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*** And so when we lie we are speaking the devil's language, ever think about that? In fact, this is the devil's primary weapon against us, lies.

The Devil's three point strategy:⁴

1- Get you to lie. Get you to speak his native language. White lies to get you out of a jam. The time you were late for work, and the truth is there wasn't an accident on 95...you just slept through the alarm clock. Or lies to get what you want. When you've had your house on the market and a potential buyer looks you in the eye and asks, "Have you ever had any water problems in your basement?" Or half-truths, like when your parents ask you why you were home so late and you said you were doing homework with friends...but really the homework was only 20 minutes and the gaming session was 2 hrs. Or fudging the quarterly reports to make it look like you did better than you actually did. Or exaggerating a story to make you look like the hero or the victim. All of these are just ways to get you to speak the devil's native language.

2. Get you to lie to yourself. You rationalize your lies. It's not a big deal, it's not my fault, I had to protect someone, I didn't know what else to say. I can't tell the truth because it would cause too much drama. It's OK because it got me where I wanted to be. And when he can get you to justify your lies, then finally...

3. Get you to live a lie. This is the devil's masterpiece. To claim one thing but to live something entirely different. To live a secret hidden life. This is some of us. Perfect life on SM but inside you battle depression and crippling anxiety. Perfect marriage where you act the part and look the part but you and your spouse never talk anymore and sleep in separate beds.

² Bella DePaulo (1996), which found that people tell about one to two lies per day on average.

³ 2002 study by Robert S. Feldman, suggests that people might lie as many as 10 times in a 10-minute conversation, depending on social context.

⁴ Big thanks to Craig Groeschel for this outline. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-jo6gDYEiY&t=115s>

Some of you may be living a life of religious hypocrisy. Saying you are a Christian just because you go to church and look the part, but you don't actually believe or it hasn't affected your lifestyle, attitudes, affections, habits. 1 John- If anyone says they are a Christian and yet there is no obedience to Christ, the truth isn't in them. The devil's masterpiece is to create a culture of lies within yourself, your family, a church community, even a society.

Who is the devil? Father of lies. What is his native language? Lying. What is his greatest tool? Deceiving us away from the truth. But what do we believe about God? He's the Father of truth. What is his native language? The Truth. Jesus says in that same conversation **John 8:32 "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** Lies bring bondage, truth brings freedom! Satan has a plan- lie, believe the lie, live the lie. Jesus has a plan, believe the truth, confess the truth, live in freedom!

And what I've seen in my own life, lies never deliver what they promise. If I keep something from my wife or not tell her the truth thinking I'm protecting myself, or her, what it will actually do is put distance between us. The best marriages and relationships are built on truth and honesty. What I have experienced is that God rewards personal integrity. He will get us where we need to be, not always where we want to be, for his own purposes in our relationships, our career, our finances. We don't need to bend things to make that happen. We will not regret telling the truth.

I started with the story of Richard Wurmbrand but I didn't tell you how it ended. Eventually he was released for a ransom paid by a Christian organization. And he and his family fled to the United States where he founded **The Voice of the Martyrs**, an organization dedicated to taking the gospel to the most hostile places on earth and supporting persecuted Christians worldwide. Untold numbers of people have come to Christ who would have otherwise never heard the good news of Jesus, at least in part because Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand refused to lie.

Christianity offers you a relationship with God that is so powerful that he can cause you to shine a light in this world without compromising your integrity, even if it means you don't get what you want in the short-term.

Are you tired of hustling, lying, deceiving, compromising, hiding? Do you live with that burden and guilt of justifying your lies? The amazing thing about the God we have is that he offers forgiveness in a saving relationship with Him. David didn't always get it right. But David time and time again experienced God's forgiveness in the security of God's covenant love for him. Psalm 107:3-4 *If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.* How can David say that? Because of the promise that God would provide a way for sins to be forgiven once and for all through a substitute for our sin. That's why Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for many. All who believe.

1 John 1:9 *If you confess your sin he is faithful and just to forgive you of sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.* You can find healing in the light with Jesus. James 5- *Confess your sins to one another and be healed.* Is there someone you need to be honest with?