

Sermon Title: “When All Is Stripped Away”

Series: Seeking God’s Kingdom, Part 28

Scripture: 1 Samuel 29-30

Main Takeaway: When life changes without warning, real strength is found in the LORD when we simply come to Him.

Today’s Scripture made me wonder:

How would we react if we were attacked and lost everything?

Amanda, Morgan and I were watching an episode of Castle the other day.

The main character’s wife was taken... and it’s like a switch flips in him.

Normally he’s not a violent guy...

But he’s desperate.

The police were doing everything they could to find his wife.

But it didn’t seem like enough.

So he took matters into his own hands.

And it got pretty violent!

And while we’re watching this, the girls asked me what I’d do in that situation.

I immediately said: *I’d do whatever it takes.*

But after I thought about it for a few seconds...

I walked it back a little...

I said: *I’d do whatever it takes... within reason.*

I wouldn’t want to do something that Amanda wouldn’t want me to do.

But you know...

Now that I think about it...

I *didn’t* say I’d pray about it first.

That should’ve been my first reaction.

So this morning we've just heard a little bit from 1 Samuel 30.
David found himself in a similar situation...
He lost *everything*...

His family...
His home...
His friends...
His entire town was literally burned to the ground.

And as readers, we're left to wonder:

How's he going to react?

Will he take matters into his own hands,
and do whatever it takes to get them back?

And what about us?

[SLIDE 1] When all is stripped away, how will we react?

We've actually seen David face this kind of decision before.

In chapter 25, Nabal insulted him and David's first instinct was violence.

But the LORD used Abigail's wisdom to reorient his heart.

Then in chapter 26, David acted in wisdom by not taking Saul's life.

But some time passes.

When we get to chapter 27,
David becomes convinced that one day Saul will kill him.

So he takes matters into his own hands.

He takes all of his people to live among the Philistines.
They live there for about a year and a half...

Then, in chapter 28, the Philistines begin preparing for war against Israel.

And Achish, the Philistine king, said to David:
"You do understand that you're coming with us, right?"

And David appears willing to fight alongside the king.

So then in chapter 29...

We see David and his men marching in the back of the Philistine army.
They're marching alongside Achish.

He trusted David.

But the Philistine commanders...?

Not so much.

They thought David might turn on them as a way to regain Saul's favor.

Achish tried to calm their fears...

But they insisted that David and his men go back home.

Achish wanted to keep his commanders happy...

So he ordered David and his men to turn back in peace.

David protested a bit...

But Achish insisted.

And you know...

I wonder what was going through David's mind here?

I wonder if David planned to *actually* fight against the Israelites?

Like... *Was he really willing to kill his own people?*

Or were the commanders right?

Maybe David was planning to turn against the Philistines?

We'll never know.

The text doesn't say.

All we know is that God had other plans.

I imagine being forced to leave was difficult.

Because the outcome of this battle would impact David's future.

This moment was now out of his control.

He couldn't fix it.

He couldn't make sure of a certain outcome.

**All he could do...
Was accept the uncertainty.**

And so...
David and his men left in the morning.
It was about a 60 mile journey home.
And when they arrived...
What they found was devastating.

[SLIDE 2] 1 Samuel 30:1-2 - David and his men reached Ziklag [their home] on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 30:3-4 - When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.

[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 30:5-6a - David's two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.

Think about what's been taken from David.

As far as he knows...
His future is uncertain...
His family was taken...
The families of his men were taken
His town was destroyed...
His men were now talking about putting him to death...

This is rock bottom.

This is the darkest moment of his life so far.

Everything is stripped away.

So how will he react?

Will he take matters into his own hands?

Will he take up his sword in revenge?

Or will he remember Abigail's wisdom?

It's interesting we don't have to wait long before we get our answer.

The text just says...

[SLIDE 5] 1 Samuel 30:6 - David was greatly distressed [*teser*]... But David found strength in the LORD his God.

Let's pause on this and talk about **David's distress**.

This is more than sadness or depression.

The Hebrew word is *teser*...

It paints a picture of David being *pressed in on every side*.

He's trapped and unable to move forward...

Because he's tightly strapped down to circumstances beyond his control.

And at this point, he and his men are crying out...

Just... *wailing*...

Until they had no strength left.

And his men blamed David.

They were angry because their families were taken too.

In fact they were so angry that they started talking about stoning David to death.

Their rage was being driven by their grief.

Think about it...

Who made the decision to live in Philistine territory?

David.

Who led them away?

David.

Who promised to protect their families?

David.

Who was supposed to be their future king...
Yet kept refusing to kill Saul?

David.

And now...
Here they are...
In a foreign land...
Away from their Hebrew people...

And instead of going to war against Saul...
They're ordered to walk away from the battlefield...
Only to find everything they cared about...
Was gone.

The pressure David felt must have been unbearable.

And yet...

David found strength in the LORD his God.

How?

All we know is that in all the turmoil...
David didn't take up his sword...
He didn't act on impulse...

**Instead, he found strength...
When he simply turned to the LORD.**

This is different from chapter 27 when David decided to leave Israel
and live with the Philistines.

It's different because in chapter 27...
There's no mention of David turning to the LORD.

All it says is...

"David thought to himself."

He thought...

One of these days, Saul's going to kill me!

He figures the best thing he can do,
is escape to the land of the Philistines.

So what we have here are two different postures from David...

In chapter 27, he didn't go to the LORD.
He just reacted out of his own fear.

But now, in chapter 30...
The first thing he does is turn to the LORD.

Look at verses 7 and 8...

[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 30:7-8 - Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelek, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him, and David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."

Wouldn't it be nice to get direct answers from God like that?

But... I think that's part of the point.

Remember back in chapter 28 when Saul was in distress?
He actually did go to the LORD,
But the LORD didn't answer.
So he ran to the witch of Endor for answers.

Yet here,
When David's in distress...
He goes to the LORD...
And the LORD answered him right away.

So why the difference?

Why did the LORD answer David and not Saul?

It's because Saul's heart wasn't aligned with God.

Saul rejected Yahweh long ago.
And God's Spirit left him long ago.

And, in God's eyes, the kingdom had already been torn from Saul.
And so at this point...
It was only a matter of time before it actually happened.

And so in that way,
Yes... Saul went to God...
But God had already answered Saul's question.
He just wasn't willing to accept it.

When David seeks the LORD...
He's loyal to Yahweh...
He hadn't rejected Him...
And God's Spirit was with him...

In his brokenness...
David shows that he's a man after God's own heart.

This is what wisdom looks like.

David could have told everyone to take up their sword
and take revenge against the Amalekites.
But instead, he prayed for the LORD's direction.

And the LORD answered.

So now, having heard from the LORD what they should do...
David and his men went after the Amalekites.

All 600 of them made the 15 mile trip to the Besor Valley.
In total, they've now traveled about 75 miles since they left the Philistine king.

And once they arrived in the valley,
200 stayed behind because they were exhausted!
The other 400 kept going.

They eventually came across an Egyptian who was a slave of the Amalekites.
He was part of the group that raided and burned David's hometown.

But on his way back...
He got sick and was left for dead in the fields.

So when David found him...
Instead of killing him, David asked if he'd lead them to the Amalekites.
He agreed, and they kept going...

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 30:16 - He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah.

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 30:17 - David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled.

This is extraordinary...

David and his men *had* to be physically and emotionally drained...
Yet they had the strength to fight for about 24 hours straight!

Think about that...

We're talking about a group of 400 men...
Going up against an enemy so vast,
That verse 16 says they're "scattered over the countryside."

And out of all the Amalekites...
Only 400 survived the battle...
And that's only because they ran away on camels!

And so David was able to recover everything that was taken.

All the people...
All the livestock...

In fact, verse 19 says that "**Nothing was missing.**"
All the women and children were safe.

Again, I find that remarkable.

How did David and his men pull this off?

Well, *they* didn't.

It's just like David said before he faced Goliath...

The battle is the LORD's.

Without the LORD...

They wouldn't have stood a chance.

But the LORD was with them.

He gave them the strength they needed for victory.

And when the battle was over,
they took everything that was stolen,
and headed back to the valley where the other 200 men were.

Some of David's men didn't want to share with those that stayed behind...
But he put a stop to that.

Look at verses 23-24...

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 30:23-24 - David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the raiding party that came against us. Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike."

Again, David gives all the credit to the LORD.

The LORD is the One who protected them and made their victory possible.

And so...

To honor the LORD...

They shared what they took with the 200 who stayed behind.

But more than that...

When they arrived back in their hometown,

David sent a portion of what they took to *all* the towns and tribes of Judah.

Look at verses 27-31...

The list of places is actually important.

These were the places David spent a lot of time running and hiding from Saul.

[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 30:27-31 - David sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa and Rakal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athak and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where he and his men had roamed.

These are the tribes of Judah...

They're who David would eventually become king over...

In fact David would be crowned as their king in Hebron...

The last place mentioned on the list.

That's not by accident.

The author is showing us that David's influence is spreading throughout Judah.

And you know...

What's interesting is that David didn't plan any of this.

Less than a week ago he was prepared to go fight against Israel.

I don't know exactly what his plan was...

But my guess is that he was thinking...

One way or another, this is where Saul falls.

But plans changed.

Suddenly David was forced to leave the battle before it started.

So now the outcome of the battle is out of his hands...

He's not sure what will happen...

And he's completely unaware of what was waiting for him back home.

David experienced what many of us experience...

[SLIDE 11] Life can change without warning.

You know...

One of my favorite verses has always been Philippians 3:12 where Paul says...

[SLIDE 12] Philippians 3:12 - “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

I preached that passage 2 years ago...

And that same afternoon...

Our lives completely changed.

And I have to ask...

[SLIDE 13] When life changes without warning... How do we find *real* strength in the LORD?

I've found that His strength comes...

When we simply come.

It reminds me of the song we sometimes sing called:
Heart of Worship.

The first lines say it all...

[SLIDE 14] Heart of Worship

“When the music fades.”

We could say...

When uncertainty sets in.

When the future isn't what we expected.

When the answers don't come.

That's when the music fades...

[...]

“All is stripped away.”

Life changes without warning...

Suddenly we're in great distress...

And like David, we're grieving what we just lost.

And when all is stripped away...

What do we do?

The song says...

"I simply come."

That's it.

[...]

David found *strength* in the LORD...

By simply *turning* to the LORD.

And notice...

His strength didn't come *after* his people were rescued.

The LORD strengthened him during his darkest moment.

And so...

The invitation for us is the same...

Don't wait until everything is okay.

Turn to the LORD now.

Come to the LORD in your distress.

Come grieving.

Come in the uncertainty.

Come exhausted.

Jesus simply says...

Come.

In fact, He says in Matthew 11...

[SLIDE 15] Matthew 11:28 - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

When we come to Jesus...

That's where we find His strength to press on.

And honestly...

I've found that to be more than just a devotional cliché.

When Jesus gives His strength...

You know it.

It's one of those moments when you know it's not possible you're moving forward by your own strength.

You know...

Years after David discovered that when his hometown was destroyed...

He reflected on moments like these...

And he said in Psalm 34...

[SLIDE 16] Psalm 34:18 - The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

These words aren't wishful thinking.

They're grounded in wisdom and truth.

David experienced the truth of these words.

Because when everything was stripped away...

He knew the LORD was near.

And so...

May we do the same.

When we need the strength to press on...

May our strength be found in Jesus our Lord.

Let's Pray