

The Life of David

Long Live the King

Study 5 | 1 Samuel 21:1-9

News and Needs

Upcoming Events:

- **Prayer Night**, Thursday, May 13, 7:30 PM at the church.
- **Potluck**, Sunday, May 23, immediately following the service.
- **Prayer Class**, Sunday, May 30, immediately following the service in the sanctuary. The topic will be: *Notes from the Field*.

Opportunities to Serve:

- **Easter Sacrificial Offering**, Throughout the Easter Season, we will be collecting a special offering to support our mercy ministries. Please see the website for more details.

“Bread for the King”

1. What are the circumstances for David and his men in this scene? What do we learn about the identity and role of David when he is allowed to eat this holy bread? Did the priest do the right thing to share the bread of the presence with them? What were the results of this event?

Remember that David has just run away from the palace after his meeting with Jonathan. He is now officially a fugitive from an irate and illegitimate king who has determined to find David and put him to death. So David is an outlaw on the run, gathering to himself an entourage (cf. 22:1-2). Similarly to the experience of Jesus and the disciples, David and his men are itinerant and dependent upon the hospitality of others.

There’s actually a lot going on theologically in this event. In the Law there was a distinction made between common bread and holy bread, and one would have to be ritually clean in order to partake of holy bread. Sexual purity (refraining during battle, as one example) was a large part of ritual cleanliness. Beyond even ‘normal’ holy bread, though, there is the Bread of the Presence which sits inside the Tabernacle in God’s holy “presence”. This is where Yahweh’s meal with his priests take place, and only priests are allowed to eat of the Bread of the Presence. And then only when they bake fresh bread and remove the likely stale bread from God’s presence, which they can then eat. The Priest at Nob bends certain of God’s written rules here in order to fulfill God’s other written requirements for mercy and hospitality. He also makes the judgment here that David is special as a representative of the King on urgent business. The priest may even be casting in his lot with David as God’s own chosen king, anointed by the priest Samuel. Furthermore, as David is a unique figure in that he is a covenant head, or representative, of God’s people. In that he shows himself to be a Prophet (his writings, speaking for God), a King, and in this event: a Priest. So the Priest at Nob is making a theological confession in his act here, rather than just ignoring God’s rules. The Priest will pay dearly for this, as he and all the other priests are brutally massacred by Saul’s order. See 22:6-23.

2. Read Mark 2:23-28. How does Jesus interpret this event? What do we learn about the identity and role of Jesus as he applies this to himself? How does he apply it to those who challenged him?

Leaders, feel free to be more brief on this section of questions as it is not our primary text. But part of what we’re attempting to do in this sermon series is draw out all of the ways, explicit and implicit, in which the story of God’s

work in the world even before Jesus was designed by God to pre-figure the life and character of the Christ. So Jesus endorses the actions of the Priest at Nob and the actions of David. In the context, it's quite a pregnant argument. Jesus and his disciples are put in the role of the persecuted and traveling David and his men. They are in need and take some grain from the fields to snack on. Notice first of all how less controversial this is than David's event. Jesus is not eating from the Temple; they are simply eating grain from a field. And they break no law of God's; instead they are merely not observing a man-made rule of the Pharisees'. And the Pharisees aren't even willing to 'bend' their own application. They're choosing to entrap and attack Jesus rather than show him mercy or hospitality. Jesus points them to the Priest at Nob as an example they should follow. In using this argument, Jesus is setting himself up as a new King and a new Priest in the vein of David.

3. What do we learn here about the relationship between God's laws and his call to mercy in our lives? What is one concrete area where you struggle to show mercy to others? What do we learn from these passages about our identity, duties, and privileges as God's present priestly and kingly people?

These are three really different questions. Please be sure to at least do the second one if you do not tackle them all. If you do the first one, I would caution you to not allow the conversation to end with a dichotomy between law and mercy. The Old Testament as a whole makes it abundantly clear that God's law is itself merciful; it is instruction in the path of life and the means of relationship with the God of mercy. However, it's also true that the Law functions as a type of basic grammar for life, and life often calls for us to operate in the realm of poetry. To put it another way, sometimes we have to choose between two goods or the lesser of two evils or emphasize one command of God over another. That is what the Priest had to do here, to ascertain "the weightier matters of the law," such as love, mercy, and justice. So the question is not whether we might ignore or relax one of God's laws (for example, the command to not marry an unbeliever) for ourself or others in order to show them our idea of a kinder and gentler "mercy" (e.g. encourage them to marry whomever so they're not lonely anymore). That is exactly the type of logic that will by no means fly from this passage. To choose to overlook a personal offense rather than make it public and take the offender down would be a more appropriate application.

The New Testament as well as the old calls God's people Priestly and Kingly. After reading about David and Jesus, what do you learn about who we are together, what sort of privileges and responsibilities we have? How do these two passages specifically inform our discipleship?

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