

# **IN THE MESS**

## **SLOUGH OF DESPOND**

### **1 Sam. 27 -30. The Slough of Despond.**

**Readings: 1 Sam 27: 1 - 12, 29: 3, 9 - 11, 30: 1 - 25**

**These are difficult portions of Scripture. In Chap. 27, David listens to David - he backslides in a big way.**

**In Chap. 29, Prayerless conduct leads to Powerless consequences.**

**In Chap. 30, Despondency in the wrong place turns to Dependency with the right perspective.**

**The story so far:**

**Many of us would relate to the expressions “Having a mountain top experience with God” and also “Feeling that were at the bottom of the valley”. That was David’s experience - one day he’s on the mountain, the next he’s down in the valley and then up on the mountain top again -and so it continues.**

**In Chap. 23 - David saves the city of Keilah from the Philistines, but they were planning to turn him in - to Saul. He and his 600 men left and went wherever they could go. He was in the valley.**

**In Chap. 24 David showed mercy on Saul even though he had a chance to eliminate his enemy once for all. He was riding high on the mountain top.**

**In Chap. 25, even though David displayed tremendous patience and self control in Chap 24, he went off in his revenge mode at a fool’s insult. Yet, God was gracious to stop him from achieving revenge in his own hands through a quick thinking, beautiful woman named Abigail. David was in the mouth of the valley.**

**In Chap. 26, David is again showing courage, humility and self control against Saul - sparing his life again. Once more on top of the mountain.**

**With all these ups and downs, David was in constant communion with his God. God protected him and kept him from doing anything wrong. But now we find David listening to David.**

**Look at Chap. 27 v. 1: David said to himself! - literally ; in his heart.**

**Let's be very clear here. There's nothing wrong with talking to ourselves. But where David goes astray lies in the comment : "One of these days Saul will destroy me." David, instead of asking for God's guidance was acting upon his own decision. He's determined to protect himself and his men from the constant threat from King Saul.**

**You see, David was in this wilderness being chased by Saul for quite some time. He is tired and weary. He's fed up with it all and feels he needs a break. He's talking to himself and not to God and what's more is only listening to himself.**

**You won't find David praying in this chapter - not even a brief petition. After such a great victory over temptation in refusing yet again to take the life of Saul when he had been given the opportunity, David should have been very guarded about temptation, for temptations often come after great victories in our faith. However, David did not understand this and so now we see that he succumbs to temptation and makes a grave error here, one for which he pays dearly.**

**Saul's going to get me! That was the focus of his thoughts. He is in such a vulnerable spot right now. His faith begins to fail as he doubts God's promises to him. What ever happened to inquiring of the Lord? Remember, for a while David always inquired of the Lord before he acted. However, now he's going headlong into unbelief and chooses rather to take matters into his own hands.**

**If relying on his own wits was not bad enough, David completely ignored the promise of God for him in Chap 16, that he would be a king of Israel after Saul someday.**

**We can perhaps understand David's dilemma. He was under ever**

increasing anxiety and pressure over his circumstances. Saul's continuing pursuit of him. The responsibility to lead his men with all their wives and children. His own two wives and possible children and to provide for all their needs. It's easy to imagine that the light at the end of the tunnel was not there for David. He perhaps, in this valley experience, thought that he would never see the end of his trials. Seeing his situation from his own limited and human point of view, David missed God's perspective and lost his trust in Him. All of a sudden Saul loomed larger than Goliath and became twice as menacing.

That's how we can be affected. All Satan wants is for us to take our eyes off the ball - to ignore God's promises and His faithfulness.

God promises that He will never leave us, nor forsake us.

God promises that He will provide all of our needs according to His riches in glory.

God promises that no one can snatch us out of His strong and mighty hands.

God promises that He would give us lives more abundantly.

And God's promises go on.

But the devil wants us to forget all of those wonderful promises, and turn our eyes upon the circumstances and our own strength. It doesn't take much for us to go that way.

Yes there are trials and difficulties. Yes times can be tough and unbearable. Yes there are times when not only is there no light at the end but often we can't even find the tunnel.

One of the things that we as Christians need to realise is that all trials in our lives only last for a while and that, as far as our relationship with Christ is concerned, that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

*1 Peter 5:10 - "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you"*

David not only followed his own wits and ignored the promises of God, but he also decided that it would be safer for him to go into enemy

**territory than stay with God.**

**Would we come up with the same kind of dumb logic? Yes we would and probably have done so many times already.**

**And the progression is so simple!**

- 1. Subtle beginnings, almost innocent with a simple thought of listening to himself.**
- 2. Ignoring God's promises and faithfulness.**
- 3. Making a decision to move into enemy territory to be with them.**

**Peter's downward spiral in the courtyard of the high priest started so simply.**

**Lot, in Gen. 13 only lifted up his eyes - the valley of the Jordan looked so good -then he pitched his tent, became a somebody in Sodom and was eventually willing to give his own daughters over to wicked men. It started with a wistful look! Let's be ever so careful.**

**Sometimes temptation appears and we long to take a short cut. David tried that. He wanted so much to be king and would so easily have cut corners to get there. He didn't want to go and live by faith. He didn't want trials and testing to be his lot in order for God to build character in his life. All he wanted was the throne and who wouldn't want that? However this was not God's plan for him. God wanted a king who was after His own heart and one who would wait constantly on the Lord's leading and seek to glorify God in all that he did. Saul had become selfish and self-centred and ungodly and the Lord did not want a repeat performance.**

**We Christians can sometimes be tempted to also begin to serve on our own terms or just begin to compromise certain areas of our life. We listen to ourselves and conclude that a little bit of acting like the people of the world and allowing certain sin into our lives will make life easier. And it will for a while. However the end result will be frustration and walking into God's "permissive will" for our lives.**

**David, rather than continue to trust his life to the Lord to be his protection, moves his group to Gath - Philistine territory - and now places his life in the “permissive will” of God rather than the “perfect will” of God, and as a result he will begin to experience the chastening hand of the Lord in his life.**

**Gath was Goliath’s hometown, a centre of pagan idolatry. Here, among some of God’s vilest enemies, David and his followers made their home. He becomes friends with Achish but at a price! Here is the future king of Israel calling himself a servant of this godless man. He’s way down in the valley now and a period of awful compromise, lies and double standards becomes his experience.**

**David, the man after God’s own heart, the one who has been anointed by the Lord to be the next king of Israel, now serving and protecting the enemy of the Lord and Israel.**

**Does not the life of the backslider become very complicated. Not only that David dragged others down with him. We need to remember that our sins don’t just affect us. The damage of our sins reaches to the people around us.**

**David’s terrorist activities resulted in every man, woman and child being killed and then he lied to Achish as to what he had been doing. Later on as king David wanted to build a temple to the Lord however the Lord rejected him from being able to do so because he was a man of bloodshed. Prayerless conduct leads to powerless consequences!**

**In Chap. 29 we observe David about to go to war against his own people. God’s providence steps in and it’s the Philistines who prevent this from happening. Achish sends him back.**

**We can learn from this dramatic turn of events in David’s life.**

- 1. In the Christian life there is no such thing as standing still. We are either progressing or regressing.**
- 2. We are no longer welcome in the world with our identity as the children of God.**

**3. God's faithfulness for us is displayed in the midst of our sins. We start in Chap. 30 with a huge blow for David. As they return home they see in the distance the palls of smoke. As they got closer they realised that all was lost - a ghost town with nothing but burning rubble and no voice of any survivors. Every thing lost.**

**Then David and all those with him wept and wept and wept. All David had was gone - his family, his possessions, his home. But at least he thought he was with friends in a similar plight. Not so, his so called friends think about stoning him. David is as low as he can be - at rock bottom. He's so far backslidden - he's like the prodigal in the pigpen.**

**Every means of support is gone, except the Lord. This is not such a bad place after all.**

**In v. 6 the lights come on. David strengthens himself in the Lord. The Lord has been waiting all these months for this.**

**The vital part of this is that David made an effort to strengthen himself in the Lord. God is more than willing to give us His strength, but we have to come to Him with willing hearts.**

***James 4:8. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."***

***Deut. 4:29. "But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul."***

**For the first time in 16 months, David looks up. Sometimes God puts us in a situation where we cannot do anything except completely rely on Him.**

**Verses 9 - 20 give us the account of the Egyptian who was sick and had been left behind. See here how God provides David a way to find the captors who took the families. Lets learn also that if we rely on our God, He will take care of all the details.**

**Everything that the enemy had taken, David took back and even more.**

**God gave him a complete victory, because David strengthened himself in the Lord his God, he inquired of the Lord, he did what God told him to do, and to top it off, he showed kindness and care to the Egyptian man.**

**My friends, lets seek to apply some of what we have looked at this morning to ourselves.**

- **We need to seek God's strength, not our own. If we rely on our own strength, we will fail every time and will be empty. But if we rely on God's strength, He pours out His strength on to us, so that we may go on doing His work.**

***2 Cor. 12:9. And He said to me, " my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.***

- **There is a huge contrast between Chaps 28 and 30. Saul had departed from the Lord and therefore had no divine guidance(28:6), while David looked to the Lord for courage and direction(30:6-9). Seek the Lord while He may be found was a warning that Saul did not heed.**

**God's help is never far away, as long as we keep looking up.**

**If you are feeling down, maybe at your wits end, take heart. God is with you and will sustain you. If you ask Him, He will give you peace in your heart, so that you may be protected from all doubts. That is where true strength comes from.**

**When we depend on God for His guidance and wisdom, we get more than we can possibly expect. When we came to Christ, we not only received eternal salvation in Christ Jesus, but also will receive our heavenly rewards according to our work on the earth. God is so gracious to us and always willing to give us more abundantly. All we**

**have to do is to seek Him and depend on Him.**