



BEWILDERNESS

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The year is 2029. The rulers of the earth decide they want to change destiny by going back in time and destroying a woman named Sarah Connor, whose unborn child will play a major role in the future. By killing the boy off, they believe they can take over the world. So they send Arnold as the Terminator to hunt her down.

If you saw any of the Terminator movies, you know that what made them so intense was the fact that Arnold was relentless. Apparently it's pretty tough to stop a "cybuhnetic ohgahnism". Even if you didn't stoop to seeing the movies, you have heard his famous line: "I'll be back." And he always was. No matter where Sarah Connor went, Arnold tracked her down. The woman eventually ended up in a psych ward. But that gets into Terminator 2...

When the movie came out in 1984 it sounded so far fetched and futuristic. But the writers weren't nearly as original as they thought, because the plot comes straight out of the life of the man we've been studying.

David had some amazing experiences. We already saw how as the least likely candidate, God hand picked him to be the king of Israel. The little boy from out in the sheep fields becomes a national hero when he single-handedly killed the giant that nobody else was brave enough to face. He became part of the royal family and became best friends with the king's son, Jonathan. Last week we talked about how unique that friendship was, and how the two of them were able to speak truth to each other and say the hard things that needed to be said.

Jonathan had some tough words to say to David, warning him to run away because his life was in danger. King Saul was just like the rulers in the Terminator, thinking he could change destiny if he eliminated David. And he was almost as relentless as Arnold in pursuing him.

It's easy to read Bible stories in a somewhat detached way, but as I read our text for this morning, I'd like you to keep in mind the anxiety and fear Sarah Connor felt when she was being chased. Because David's situation was equally frightening, and you can sense his desperation in what happens. We pick up the story immediately after Jonathan had

informed him that he had to leave at once to escape from Saul.

1 Samuel 21:1-15

David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest.

Take a look at Nob on the map. It was just to the northeast of Jerusalem. It would be like going from Meeker to the SeaTac Mall. What was significant about Nob is that the Tabernacle was there. At this point, a permanent temple hadn't been built in Jerusalem. But the Israelites still had the Tabernacle, called the "Tent of Meeting" that had traveled with them out in the wilderness for 40 years. It was the closest thing they had to a holy place to meet with God, and it had been parked in Nob. So David heads there.

Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"

Remember – David is royalty at this point and should have had an entourage. Ahimelech knew something was up.

David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."

But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here -- provided the men have kept themselves from women."

David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!"

So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

The consecrated bread consisted of 12 loaves that were always placed before God as a reminder of the way he provided for his people in the desert. New bread was baked every week. After it was replaced, the old bread was reserved for the priest and their families. Ordinary people weren't normally supposed to get that bread. But Ahimilech sees the need and decides it is okay to bend the rules, as long as the men were at least ceremonially clean.

Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd.

The evil villain secretly overhears everything. It's just like in the movies, and it will come back to haunt David later.

David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent."

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."

David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath.

David knew he needed to put more distance between himself and Saul. Do you remember Gath? Let's take a look at the map again. Gath was the hometown of Goliath. It was in the land of the Philistines. David decides to take a calculated risk to get outside of Saul's reach.

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'?"*

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

Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"

David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam.

Here's the map one last time. Adullam was to the south – back inside the borders of Saul's territory. You can actually still visit the caves of Adullam. Groups even sometimes sleep in them overnight to see what it felt like for David.

When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?" So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold.

Okay...That was interesting. What in the world is going on here? David is exhibiting some bizarre behavior, and he's literally all over the map. That's why I made up this word bewilderness to describe the story, because it seems to describe the space where David is at. What has happened to our main man? He's lying. He's afraid. He's running around. He's pretending he's something he's not.

Can I give a quick commercial for the Bible here? I love the restraint this writer shows when describing these various scenes. There aren't any little aside comments. There's no explanation as to whether or not David was doing the right thing. Was it a sin for him to lie? Was it wrong for him to go to Gath? Should we all act like we're crazy when we get in a pinch, because that's what David did? The text doesn't say. All the author does is record the events. It's what you could call the difference between "prescriptive" and "descriptive." Some parts of the Bible are prescriptive – telling you what you should do. Other parts are descriptive, telling you what happened, but not necessarily saying it's a good thing or a bad thing. It's just the way it went down.

What that does is force you to deal with the questions on your own. It makes you dig into the story deeper and turn it over and over in your mind. You have to do your homework. And when you do that, exciting things start to happen. You begin to find connections with your own life and see all this depth to the story that you wouldn't have discovered if everything was explained for you.

This bewilderness that David is experiencing is so different than what we read about him the last couple of weeks. Everything was crystal clear when God said he was the chosen one. David had such complete confidence when he went out to fight Goliath. Now, several years have gone by and everything seems fuzzy. This stretch is harder to decipher, harder to see what God is doing.

We all have patches of bewilderness in our lives. Some of you may be experiencing one of those moments in time where everything about God is new and clear and strong and exciting. But others of you may have moved out of that into muddier waters where it is slow going and feels like you're just plodding along. Maybe you're uprooted and dislodged like David, and you're scratching for your next directions. Maybe you're looking for an escape route, whether it's from your past, a current situation or old patterns of behavior.

Much of life is lived in these kinds of trying circumstances, where it is hard to see God's plan clearly. Several years ago, Stephen Curtis Chapman had that song that said "Sometimes he comes in the clouds, sometimes his face cannot be found." What are the big lessons for those times? Sure, David's a great example in a few key events out of his life, but what does he have to teach us out of these experiences? Because quite frankly, when I read about how he acted here, I don't see a lot that I want to copy. So what does God want us to learn?

Here's another cool thing about the Bible: It's all interconnected. Different parts of Scripture can shed light on each other. In this particular case, we have a direct

connection with the book of Psalms. Because the little introductory note to Psalm 34 says it is the psalm David wrote after pretending to be crazy. We actually have a peek into his mind and the lessons he took away from it all.

If we cut straight to the last verse of that psalm, I think we get David's summary statement of what he felt he learned:

Psalm 34:22

The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

Looking back, David could see that God had rescued him. The word that I'd like to reflect on this morning with you is that word he used: "refuge." Because as I see it, that's the identity of God we most need when we are lost in bewilderment.

He's our refuge. What comes to mind when you think of that word? It's a safe place isn't it? You get a sense of strong protection. The author of 1 Samuel called the cave where David ended up a stronghold, and that seems like a good word. When God is our refuge, we are untouchable.

The definition of finding refuge in the Bible is "to flee to someone or somewhere for protection." We may think of the word refuge with very warm, positive feelings, but at the heart of it is another, more sobering fact. People don't seek refuge unless they're in trouble. Refuge implies danger. David is looking for refuge because his life is in jeopardy. He needs a safe place to hide.

So when he knows he can't stay in Jerusalem any longer, he starts looking for a hiding place. We play hide and seek in our house, and it gets harder and harder as the game goes on. If you don't want to be found, you can't pick the obvious places, and you can't hide in places where you've hidden before. (Although when the kids were little, they didn't quite get it. If they found you in what they thought was a good hiding spot, they would hide right there the very next time). David has hidden from Saul before, and he knows he needs a new place. He can't go home, because that was the cover story Jonathan gave King Saul. It would be the first place he would look. He can't go see Samuel, because that's where Saul found him last time. So he heads to Nob.

But when he gets to Nob, he does something very strange. He lies to the priest about what he's doing. Either he's afraid Ahimilech will turn him in, or he thinks he's protecting Ahimilech by not being completely honest with him. Whatever the case, he didn't want to admit his current condition.

This ended up having disastrous consequences. Remember that guy Doeg who was listening in on the conversation? He reported everything back to Saul, who came and killed all the priests in Nob for helping David. David's desire to conceal the truth ended up being a very costly decision that he lived to regret.

Perhaps it's obvious, but **finding refuge in God begins with admitting we're refugees.** We can't downplay our desperation. We need God and need to come clean about it.

Right after Katrina hit, a few newspapers used the term "refugees" to refer to the victims who were displaced by the flooding. There was a big uproar over the use of that word. People felt it was degrading and that they should be called "evacuees." The word refugee became emotionally charged.

We don't like the label because it sounds so helpless, but there's no more appropriate word for someone who needs God to be a refuge. We have to come to a point where we can set aside our pride long enough to be honest about our situation.

Becky Pippert tells the story of her friend Ann who was a therapist. This friend was counseling Mary, a hard core kleptomaniac, stealing all the time. She had been to see a number of counselors and nothing was working, but she thought she'd try this Ann because Ann was religious and might give her different advice. As they met over a number of weeks, Ann felt like they were just skimming the surface. So in one session she asked, "Mary, do you believe in God?"

Mary said, "Oh I'm not very religious. But I know that I'm really a good person and if there is a God, I'll be okay."

Ann said, "Wait a minute. You've just been telling me how much you want to change your addiction. You have said you're ashamed of how often you've been arrested. You hate it that you're not even allowed to go into certain stores anymore. Do you truly believe it when you say you're a good person?"

Mary was stunned by that and said, "Tell me the truth. I mean I know I'm a klepto, but do you think I have a deeper problem? Do you think I'm not okay?"

Ann had a great response. She said, "No, I don't think you're okay. And do you know why I know you're not? Because I know that I'm not either and that no one else is. Mary, one of the reasons I am a Christian is because Jesus refuses to lie to me. He tells me I'm in trouble. I may not struggle with the same symptoms as you do, but we all have the same underlying problem of sin. And our sins drove Christ to his death to make amends for us, and to make us right before God. Scripture tells us that if we stop playing games and admit the truth, Jesus can help us become who we're meant to be."

It was a revelation for Mary. She said, "You know what? I always knew I wasn't okay. You are the first person to ever tell me my problem is sin and that that problem is deeper than my symptoms. Isn't it funny that I knew it all along? I just needed someone to help me face it."

We all need to face it. When we don't, it interferes with our ability to experience God's refuge, because refuge is for refugees. David's choice to cover up the problem ended up

costing those priests their lives. When David heard what happened to Ahimilech, it shook him up. In the same psalm he wrote after these events, Psalm 34, David said this:

Psalm 34:11-13

Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.

The hard-earned words of a man who carried the weight of his own deception. Who knows how things may have turned out differently if David had been truthful about his situation? How many problems could we avoid if we were honest with ourselves and other people about our own need for God? Finding refuge begins with admitting we're refugees.

Finding refuge also begins with **discovering God's provision**. By the time David left Nob, Ahimilech had given him three things. First, he gave him that special bread. Technically, David didn't even have the right to eat it, especially when he lied to get it. And yet, Ahimilech gave it anyway. It wasn't a lifetime supply, but it would be enough to keep him going for a few days.

God does the same thing for us in our journeys. He finds ways to sustain us. Even when we don't deserve it, he gives us what we need to keep going. Shortly after Karin and I moved up to Washington, we were both battling depression. Things weren't turning out the way we planned. I didn't like the job we moved here for, we had no friends, we couldn't find a church we liked. I remember we took a walk and we were talking about how we didn't know what to do to get out of our situation. When we got home, there was a message from a friend in California who said she just really felt like she was supposed to be praying for us and she didn't know why.

That message was like a bite of holy bread to me. It wasn't much, but it was enough to fill me up. It was enough to let me know that God saw us and hadn't forgotten us, and that he would take care of us.

David saw God's kindness in taking care of him even when he was weak and fearful and lying. And I bet he remembered that special bread when he wrote

Psalm 34:8

Taste and see that the LORD is good.

God fed him and sustained him in his bewilderment. He hadn't reached refuge yet, but God showed his provision in that bread. We've said before that Jesus is the bread of life. He's the special bread we didn't deserve, but God provided for us anyway. He sustains us and fills us up for the journey ahead.

Ahimilech also gave David the sword of Goliath. David had run off so quickly that he hadn't even had the chance to grab a weapon. In this battle for his life, he needed to be

ready to fight. God equipped him, and he equips us for the fight as well. Stories like David's are actually some of our weapons. The Bible is called a sword for a reason. So many times in life the words in it have exactly what we need to hear – comfort, encouragement, or a kick in the backside. Like David said about Goliath's sword, there's nothing like it. It's one of a kind.

I said though that Ahimilech gave David three things. The third wasn't an object. It was a reminder.

“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.”

The sword of Goliath is here. The giant you killed. The giant you killed with a rock. Remember that? Remember how God took care of you in that scary situation? Without saying much, Ahimilech points David backward to see God's faithfulness in the past. In the middle of his fear, David is reminded that God has gotten him through tough times before.

God reminds us of his history with us. Testimonies are so important. I don't know if you happened to catch any of Oprah's Legends Ball on Monday night. Karin was watching it, I'll have you know. I only HAPPENED to see a few very brief moments at the end. On the show, she honored some of the most influential elderly African American women, such as Maya Angelou, Shirley Caesar and Coretta Scott King. She hosted hundreds of people on her estate for a weekend.

As I said, I caught the tail end of it, which happened to be an outdoor Sunday morning church service. Gospel singer Bebe Winans was up front leading a song called “I've been changed”. All of a sudden he spontaneously handed off the mic to Shirley Caesar, who sang an impromptu verse about how God had changed her life. Then she handed it off to someone else. One after another of these great gospel singers stood up and testified in music about what God had done for them.

Everyone else there was floored. One after another, people without any church background commented on just how powerful and spiritual that morning was. Oprah literally described it on ABC by saying “Jesus showed up.” It was so great to see such a public demonstration of the effect it has on people when we can remember what God has brought us through.

David need to hear that from Ahimilech, to be reconnected with his history. We all need to hear that as we walk into unknown territory. When we're in that spot, we can count on God to provide for us, equip us and remind us of where we've been.

Eventually, David would testify himself:

Psalm 34:6

This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

David takes his new provisions and heads to the southwest, toward Gath. No one really knows what was in his mind at this point. Maybe he hoped to form an alliance with King Achish to fight Saul. Maybe he thought he could establish his own kingdom by force. Maybe he believed the old saying, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Often our strategy for coping with difficult situations is to end up running to an old enemy. How often do we try to take things into our own hands only to make them worse by putting ourselves in a worse situation than we were to begin with?

As soon as he gets to Gath, David realizes he’s in trouble. Everybody there remembers the story of Goliath, only they remember it from the other side. David is no hero to them. He’s the one that ruined everything for them and drove them out of Israel. Now he’s come back. He can’t be trusted. And the king’s men are ready to take him out.

It was a foolish move, and David knows he walked straight into it. And here he sinks to his lowest point in this whole saga. He is beyond lying. There’s no story he can tell that will be believable. His only recourse at this point is to feign insanity. It’s sad and pathetic. He’s scratching at the walls. He’s drooling. It’s dehumanizing. It fools the king, but I’m sure David must have felt like he lost all his self esteem in that moment.

That’s what our experiences can do – rob us of who we are. Make us feel like we’re dirt. That’s why I’m so glad David wrote these words in Psalm 34:

Psalm 34:4-5

I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

Another step in finding refuge in God is realizing that **God takes away our shame**. Think of shame as a shadow cast across us. But as we look to God and his light shines on us, it erases the shadow. David had every right to feel ashamed of his behavior. He had the right – but not the need. The focus was on the fact that God had saved him. And if God had saved him, that meant he had worth and value to God. There was no place for shame.

When we seek him, God takes away our shame. He sees us as worth his efforts. Although we often end up in messes we make ourselves, God still rescues us and doesn’t shame us for it. That’s the kind of safe place he is. That’s the kind of refuge he is.

And I believe that it is at this point in the story that David begins to realize something. Up until now, he’s only been running FROM something. But seeking refuge is running TO something.

If you’ve ever wondered why God allows the bewilderment times, I think part of it is this change in perspective that needs to happen in each of us. Through difficult circumstances, he is chasing us toward himself. We’re not just running FROM – we’re running TO. And at some point, we see that the goal is not just to escape whatever our

problems may be, but to actually run toward God and what he offers us. The incentive is in front of us rather than behind us.

David once again hits the road, but this time he heads back into the kingdom of Saul. He's running again, only this time in the other direction and toward a place of real safety. God brings his family to him to come alongside and comfort him. He knows that he needs to be seeking God's plan, and he knows he needs to do it in a much more straightforward way. Listen to how directly he talks to the King of Moab:

"Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?"

There's no deception. There's no trickery. Just a sincere request. And the king is happy to comply. And David begins to earnestly seek God and wait on him for answers. There's a new quality to his words.

Something else happens too:

All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader.

Once David has seen that God is his refuge, God uses him to reach other people who are also seeking refuge. A little glimmer of God's plan begins to become clear. God's care for us becomes care we can give to others. I love the way the author calls those others out: Those who were in distress or in debt or discontented. That's such a good summary of who needs refuge. We know what it is to be in distress. We know what it is to be in debt. Even just being discontent is enough for God to call us into his care.

David probably spoke or sang words of Psalm 34 to those men:

Psalm 34

My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together...A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.

That's the key David knew. Being a righteous man didn't mean he could avoid trouble. Being a Christian doesn't mean we will have an easier time. We still walk through the bewilderment. We still create our own messes. But the Lord delivers us from them all.

Rather than our normal questions at the end, I just want to pray this morning. I know that a lot of you are looking for refuge in one way or another today. Maybe you fit into one of those three D's we just talked about – you're distressed, in debt or discontent. Maybe you're facing your own bewilderment and it's daunting. If you are feeling the need for God to be your refuge this morning, and you want to run to him, would you just slip up your hand?