



Studies in the Life of David

Text

First Samuel 23:14-29

Topic

With King Saul pursuing, David chooses to flee into the Wilderness of Ziph

Title

suggest a title!

Introduction

This is one of those times when the Lord made the lesson He was teaching David extremely obvious.

David was in the Wilderness of Ziph. Your *Strong's Concordance* tells you that the word "Ziph" means *to liquify; to soften, as asphalt in the hot sun.*

Commenting on the region, A.W. Pink writes, "Possibly the mountain there was rich in minerals and at Ziph there was a smelter and a refinery."

I don't see how David could miss the lesson! He was the precious commodity whose circumstances were God's smelter. God was turning up the heat in order to spiritually refine His future king.

God's refining of His people is a familiar theme in the Bible. The apostle Peter put it this way, in First Peter 1:6-7,

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

1 Peter 1:7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Job came to understand what God had been doing in his life. He said,

Job 23:10 But [God] knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

It can take us a while to realize the situation we are in is God's smelter and that we are being refined. But when we do, we understand that these refining moments present unique opportunities.

We'll take a look at David's refining moment in order to learn something about our own. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Refining Moments Are Opportunities To Encourage Your Strong Hold On God, and #2 Refining Moments Are Opportunities To Experience God's Strong Hold On You.

#1 Refining Moments Are Opportunities To Encourage Your Strong Hold On God (v14-18)

Is it true that a metal smith knows when the ore is refined because he can see his reflection in it? Turns out, it is. I got the following from the website of a silversmith:

In refining silver, one needs to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames are hottest so as to burn away all the impurities. You must keep your eyes on the silver the entire time it is in the fire. If the silver is left even a moment too long in the flames, it will be destroyed. The silver is fully refined when the smith can see his image reflected in it.

David's situation was the smelter. God had His eyes on him the whole time. He was looking to see His image revealed by David.

In verses fourteen through eighteen, the emphasis is on the ministry of Jonathan to David. David was in a refining moment and Jonathan took the opportunity to encourage his friend. Before we look at ourselves in the

smelter, we're encouraged to see others in the smelter and to strengthen them.

1 Samuel 23:14 And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.

1 Samuel 23:15 So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest.

“Every day,” without any rest, David’s enemy relentlessly pursued him, putting his life in danger and his future on hold.

That either describes you, or it describes someone you know. If you aren’t currently in the smelter, a Christian you know is.

1 Samuel 23:16 Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God.

Before we look at the characteristics of being a Jonathan, let’s say a word about the phrase, “strengthened his hand in God.” I can’t help but think of a little child, holding his or her father’s hand. Or, in my case, their grandfather’s hand. Now kids don’t always want to hold your hand. Sometimes CJ will only hold my finger! But when something scary is afoot, they want to not just hold your hand, they put a death grip around you, hugging you.

Someone who might be hanging on to God lightly, by a finger as it were, may suddenly find themselves in the scary smelter. They need to be encouraged to strengthen their hold upon God.

That’s what Jonathan did for David. So let’s discuss a few of the characteristics we see in him.

Saul and his three thousand men could not find David. Jonathan knew exactly where David was.

God will show you the people He wants you to encourage. Sometimes it’s all too obvious as someone you know is diagnosed with a condition, or suffers a setback, or is living through a nightmare. But sometimes it’s

subtle as a person is walking around in a more subtle smelter of sadness or grief. The Holy Spirit can put them on your heart.

1 Samuel 23:17 And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that."

Jonathan's statement is based on the revealed Word and will of God. The prophet Samuel had anointed David the next king of Israel. Nothing could keep David from ultimately wearing the crown.

You know, one day you and I will wear crowns. They are among the possible rewards Jesus will give out at His Reward Seat.

It is incumbent on us to direct Christians in the smelter to remember they are being refined. They are being conformed into the image of Jesus. God began a good work in them and He is pursuing its completion. The fire is part of the process.

On the surface it sounds like Jonathan included some misinformation. He said, "and I shall be next to you." Did he mean that he would be David's right-hand man? In fact, this was the last time Jonathan and David would meet. Jonathan would die in battle with his father.

The word "next" can be used to denote subordination. It could be that Jonathan was saying, "I'll be your second in command." Or it could simply be a way of saying that he was subordinate to David. In other words, even though Jonathan was still in line to be king after Saul, he had long ago submitted to God's plan to make David king and overlook him.

In other words, Jonathan was in a place in his own life where he was living-out the very things he was encouraging David to do and to be. He wasn't simply throwing Bible verses at his friend. He was walking in them, in their power, in their humility.

The best way to be a Jonathan, in fact the only way, is to daily humble yourself before God. God doesn't send you to encourage someone because you're so strong. No, He sends you because you realize in your

weakness He is made strong. He sends you when Christ in you is your only hope of glory.

1 Samuel 23:18 So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.

Jonathan encouraged David. Still, he went home. David remained in the smelter.

It's important to be a Jonathan. But in the end all a Jonathan can do is direct you to God. **Don't let go of your strong hold on God if no Jonathan comes to you!**

#2 Refining Moments Are Opportunities To Experience God's Strong Hold On You (v19-29)

Jonathan's visit was undoubtedly a great blessing to David. But after he was gone, the situation intensified. It got worse, not better. God turned-up the heat to remove a few more impurities.

1 Samuel 23:19 Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?"

1 Samuel 23:20 Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand."

Their motive for ratting him out may have been fear. After all, look what Saul had done in Nob, killing all the priests, their families, and their livestock, because he accused them of aiding David.

Or the Ziphites may simply have seen turning over David as a way of gaining some favor with Saul.

For whatever reason, the Ziphites did not like having David around.

Sooner or later, people don't want the Christian around. Your life is too convicting to them. You find yourself at odds with them, even though

you've done them no harm. In fact, you are trying to do them good by sharing the Good News.

1 Samuel 23:21 And Saul said, "Blessed are you of the Lord, for you have compassion on me.

1 Samuel 23:22 Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where his hideout is, and who has seen him there. For I am told he is very crafty.

1 Samuel 23:23 See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides; and come back to me with certainty, and I will go with you. And it shall be, if he is in the land, that I will search for him throughout all the clans of Judah."

Saul was in no place to give a blessing from God! And the Ziphites were in no place to receive one!

When people turn on you for no reason you've given them, they always can find ways to justify their behavior.

In Philippians 2:14 & 15 we read, "do all things without complaining and disputing... [being] blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked generation, among whom you shine as lights..."

If you are walking like that, and people turn on you, you can be sure you are in God's smelter. *Count it all joy!*

1 Samuel 23:24 So they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. But David and his men were in the Wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon.

1 Samuel 23:25 When Saul and his men went to seek him, they told David. Therefore he went down to the rock, and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon.

1 Samuel 23:26 Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them.

David wasn't at Ziph when Saul arrived, but he was still in the vicinity. Smelling blood, Saul sought him and began to encircle him, going for position so there would be no escape.

What good is a smelter if it has a leak? The really good trials leave you no way of escape apart from the Lord's intervention.

1 Samuel 23:27 But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!"

1 Samuel 23:28 Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape.

Talk about waiting until the last possible moment! God is a master story teller. He knows drama.

Just like that, the immediate danger was over. You'll experience smelters that end suddenly. But you might also experience ones that seem more like a slow burn. Maybe a chronic condition, or a tragedy that will effect you all your life.

The thing that sticks out about David's time in the wilderness was that God never relinquished His strong hold on David. His hold was just as strong at Ziph as it was at Maon as it was at Jeshimon. And neither will God relinquish His strong hold on you.

Think of yourself as a particular kind of precious ore. Whereas silver or gold have certain properties, so do you. You require a different type of smelting.

- You may need a series of quick burns at high temperatures.
- Or you may need long, slow burns at a constant temperature in order for the Lord to finally see Himself reflected in you.

What kind of reflection was God refining for in David?

For one thing, He was refining for compassion. In our last study we saw David go to the aid of the city of Keilah when the Philistines were raiding them. He wasn't king yet; he had no obligation to go. But he had compassion upon the plight of those people.

For another thing, God was refining for mercy. The men of Keilah would have turned David over to Saul - even after he had saved them. The Ziphites openly opposed David. But he took no revenge upon them; he didn't even take any spoil from them that we read of. He showed mercy upon them - the kind of mercy God shows upon men in rebellion against Him.

I'd encourage you to go back through these verses and discover other spiritual traits God was developing in David.

Looking at just those two - compassion and mercy - we see that certain conditions must be present in order for God to see them in you, for Him to perfect them in you.

- As to compassion, you must face a dilemma in which compassion is called for. Take, for example, the story of the Good Samaritan. A man was beaten and robbed, left for dead. Three men came upon him along that road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Only one showed compassion. In only one of them can you see God reflected.
- As to mercy, it is most commonly defined as "not getting what you deserve." In order for you to show mercy, you need to be mistreated so that you can respond by not giving the offender what he or she deserves. Only then can God see His reflection in you.

You are either in God's smelter, or you know someone who is, or both things are true at once.

Take a strong hold on God and realize He has His strong hold on you.