



Studies in the Life of David

Text

First Samuel 21:1-15

Topic

Fearing King Saul, David flees to Philistine territory where he pretends to be crazy for fear of King Achish

Title

“Still Crazy After All These Fears”

Introduction

Fred Demara was, among other things, a civil engineer, a sheriff's deputy, an assistant prison warden, a doctor of applied psychology, a lawyer, a Benedictine monk, an editor, and a cancer researcher.

Trouble is, **he wasn't credentialed or even qualified for any of those jobs**. He simply impersonated someone who was.

Demara's most famous exploit was to masquerade as a trauma surgeon aboard a Royal Canadian Navy destroyer during the Korean War. He managed to successfully improvise major surgeries.

Demara never really hurt anyone impersonating a doctor. The same can't be said for Gerald Barnes. Barnes stole the identity of a licensed medical doctor in 1976 and worked steadily as a physician in Southern California for the next few years. In 1979, his negligence and lack of medical knowledge contributed to the death of John McKenzie, a 29-year-old undiagnosed diabetic. Barnes pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter.

In our text in First Samuel we'll see David do a series of impersonations:

1. In the house of the Lord at Nob, he impersonates a servant and a soldier on a secret mission for King Saul.
2. In the house of the Philistine king, Achish, he tries to impersonate an average Philistine to avoid being noticed and ends up impersonating someone who was insane.

David's impersonations will have severe harmful consequences. Eighty-five priests and their families and their livestock will be massacred when Saul finds out David was helped by them.

The question I want us to consider today is this: "As Christians, do we ever impersonate someone we are not?" I think after studying these verses you'll see that the answer is "Yes."

- There are times in our serving the Lord that we are only impersonating a servant.
- There are times in our battling for the Lord that we are only impersonating a soldier.
- And, if we're not careful, we can find ourselves out in the world impersonating the behavior of a nonbeliever.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Doing A Spiritual Impersonation In The House Of The Lord Won't Help You To Grow, and #2 Doing A Worldly Impersonation In The Houses Of The Lost Won't Help Them To Know.

#1 Doing A Spiritual Impersonation In The House Of The Lord Won't Help You To Grow (v1-9)

David was on the run from King Saul. But where would he go to find help in his time of need? To the Lord, of course, and to the Lord's servants.

Would to God that believer and nonbeliever alike would flee to the Lord and to His servants when they need help. It makes it incumbent upon us to

remain in a place, spiritually, where we can - both personally and corporately - provide the kind of help they need.

David went to Nob. It wasn't a bad choice. The Tabernacle of the Lord was pitched at Nob and there were eighty-six priests serving their course there. The Lord and His people were there, ready to help.

1 Samuel 21:1 Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one is with you?"

Ahimelech knew right away that something was very wrong. A national hero of David's stature would not be traveling alone, unarmed, without comrades in arms.

1 Samuel 21:2 So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place.

When David fled to Samuel, he told him the truth. Now his situation had worsened. He had learned from his friend, Jonathan, that Saul was intent on killing him. The additional pressure brought forth a lie from the heart of the psalmist.

Maybe that's why trials are sometimes allowed by God to persist. I think I've met the pressure of the situation with a spiritual response. I'm feeling pretty good about myself. But just a little more pressure and I fall back into something fleshly.

Faith needs this kind of testing. Here is how Alan Redpath describes it:

So often the providences of God seem to run completely counter to His promises, but only that He may test our faith, only that He may ultimately accomplish His purpose for our lives in a way that He could never do if the path were always smooth.

David didn't just lie, as bad as that was. **He pretended to be something he was not.** He impersonated a servant on a mission for King Saul - *which he certainly was not!*

As Christians, we *are* the Lord's servants. But there are times when we can be more like impostors in the way we approach serving Him. I'll explain what I mean in the next few verses.

1 Samuel 21:3 Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found."

Read that again, carefully, and you'll see it was a demand. David declared that he was a servant to the king and now he demanded what he felt he deserved.

It ought to humble us in the extreme that the Lord of glory, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, would allow us to do *anything* in His name and on His behalf. Along with John the Baptist we must believe that we are not worthy to stoop down to loosen the strap of Jesus' sandals.

Yet sometimes I think and act as though I deserve something for serving Jesus. Otherwise why would I ever grumble or complain or grow discouraged? When I begin to grumble and complain and grow discouraged in my serving the Lord, it is proof that I think I deserve something. I still serve, but I'm an impostor because all the grace is gone.

Also like David we can demand certain things. Things like recognition or reward. Things like promotion and position. They may be alright in the world, but they are not alright in the house of the Lord.

Deserving and demanding should not be in our vocabulary as the Lord's servants! Those things make me an impostor.

1 Samuel 21:4 And the priest answered David and said, "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women."

In the Tabernacle was a table upon which, each week, the priest would arrange twelve loaves of holy bread, called shewbread. The loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel. When the old bread was replaced with fresh bread, it was to be eaten only by the priests, and even then certain rituals of ceremonial cleanliness had to be observed.

1 Samuel 21:5 Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day."

1 Samuel 21:6 So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.

Jesus will refer to this incident when the religious leaders give Him a hard time about His followers supposedly breaking Sabbath laws. The Lord will speak favorably of Ahimelech's showing mercy to David and his men rather than sticking to the letter of the ceremonial law. Ceremony is always trumped by the moral obligation to help others in need. Rituals can and do change. Mercy is a constant.

1 Samuel 21:7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul.

Think of this, for now, as a footnote. The importance of this information will become clear in chapter twenty-two. Doeg will report back to Saul. Saul will declare everyone at Nob traitors and will order Doeg to kill all the priests, their families, and their livestock. Only one of the eighty-six priests escapes alive to speak of the massacre.

1 Samuel 21:8 And David said to Ahimelech, "Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste."

1 Samuel 21:9 So the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

See if this quote sounds familiar to you: "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel..."

Those were David's words when he faced-off against Goliath. Now, instead of trusting in the Lord, he would trust in the sword of the enemy he had slain.

It wasn't as a soldier, with armor and a sword, that David had won his most famous victory. It was as a shepherd, with a sling. But now David would impersonate a soldier.

We, too, are the Lord's soldiers. But the weapons of our warfare are *never* physical or fleshly or worldly or carnal. They are spiritual. When we find ourselves seeking after or depending upon things that are not spiritual, we are impersonating someone we are not. When utilize the methods the world uses, we are impersonating something we are not.

Never borrow the weapons of your enemies! It's like going to a gunfight with a knife. The spiritual resources at our disposal are always more powerful.

I don't do any impressions of celebrities. It's pretty hard to do them unless you have lots of talent.

But unlike celebrity impressions, doing impressions of a servant or of a soldier are easy for a Christian. In fact, it can be easier to do the impression than to be the real thing.

Let's be the real thing - servants and soldiers depending upon the empowering of the Holy Spirit to serve with joy and to fight with spiritual weapons.

#2 Doing A Worldly Impersonation In The Houses Of The Lost Won't Help Them To Know (v10-15)

David went from bad to worse. He left the house of the Lord and went to the houses of his enemies, the Philistines. It can picture for us our lives out among nonbelievers.

1 Samuel 21:10 Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

Gath? You've got to be kidding me. Gath was the hometown of Goliath and his five brothers. Strolling into town wearing Goliath's sword was the equivalent of going into a rival gang territory today wearing the wrong colors.

I can't even imagine what David might be thinking! For our purposes, he was a believer trying to blend-in among nonbelievers without causing any waves. He was just another young guy, wearing a Philistine sword like everyone else. David was impersonating a Philistine.

1 Samuel 21:11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands'?"

The nonbelieving Philistines had a better grasp of God's plans for David than he did! Nonbelievers aren't always correct in their assessment of what it means to be a Christian. But they usually know when we're blowing-it.

As the world gets worse, we have a tendency as Christians to follow it at what we think is a safe distance. We're still 'better' than the world, we still have boundaries. But those boundaries keep moving away from holiness and towards worldliness.

1 Samuel 21:12 Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

1 Samuel 21:13 So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard.

1 Samuel 21:14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me?"

1 Samuel 21:15 Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

The diagnosis for a person acting insane was that he was troubled by an evil spirit. It was not the kind of thing you wanted to mess around with. You couldn't risk getting the evil spirit upset with you. Better to leave him alone and encourage him to go elsewhere.

Here was David, the giant-killer of legend and song, the man after God's own heart upon whom the anointing of the Holy Spirit had come. He was impersonating a Philistine and, when that failed, he acted as if an evil spirit troubled him.

A Christian impersonating a nonbeliever, becoming more-and-more worldly, looks insane to nonbelievers, and certainly to Heaven. The worse part is that the nonbeliever is left without a testimony of the power of the Lord to save.

The old cliché still applies: Be *in* the world but not *of* the world. Look back upon your walk with the Lord. Are you more or less worldly than you were a few years ago? Have you relaxed your standards to be more like those of the world? Have you adjusted the boundary lines?

No sincere Christian wants to be an impersonator. Occasionally we need to let the Lord search our hearts to show us what it means to be His servant, His soldier, His saint.

Take a moment as we close to think:

- Think about your attitude as a servant. Consider it a privilege to serve your King. Replace any grumbling with grace. Destroy any thoughts you deserve anything. Disown all demands. Defeat discouragement to serve Him in His power and strength.
- Think about your attitude as a soldier. Abandon every carnal weapon in your arsenal in favor of the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual resources that are promised you in abundance.
- Think about your separation from the world. Retreat to the boundaries you may have crossed that blur the distinction between you and nonbelievers. Determine to let others know you are a believer, and to share Christ with them.

If you are not yet a believer, yield to the conviction of God the Holy Spirit Who is even now prompting you that you are a sinner in need of Jesus as your Savior.