David finds strength in the LORD his God

1Samuel 29:1-30:31

Key Verse: 30:6b "But David found strength in the LORD his God"

 Today's passage is the record on event that happened just before David became King. David's life was constantly filled with troubles and difficulties. Many times, he was situated on the verge of a cliff. So one step taken by mistake would make him fall to a bottomless pit. David made many mistakes while he struggled to survive. However, God was faithful to save him and shape him to be a leader of Israel. When we hold onto God's promise in Jesus Christ, we can find the strength and wisdom to overcome any kind of frustration and difficulty as David did. May God bless us to find that blessing through today's passage.

**I. The first wave of trouble ( Ch 29: 1-11)**

 In chapter 28, we read about the war between the Philistines and Israel. David was under the king Achish, who was one of the five kings of the Philistines. This time, war between the Philistines and Israel was not a local combat. It was a full scale war between two nations. David and his men were also engaged in this war as one of the forces belonged to the Philistines. King Achish said to David, *"you must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the Army."(1sam 28:1b)*. David responded to Achish by saying, *"You will see for yourself what your servant can do."* Achish was well pleased with David's response and appointed him as his bodyguard for life in battle. Achish trusted David fully and that was the result of David's activities in the Philistines. However, David, who is supposed to be the King of Israel, happened to fight his own people. If David fights against his own people, how could he become a king of his own people?

 David had gone too far away to return. Soon, he would end up fighting against Israel, and his life would end as a servant of King Achish forever, as King Achish predicted.(1Sam 27:12) What did David do to avoid this situation? He didn't do anything, because he couldn't do anything. He might have felt like an ox to be slaughtered. Was falling into this situation a part of God’s plan? No, it was not the result of God's leading.

 First, God didn't say to David to go the Philistine area. That was his own idea. David was tired of being chased from King Saul. David thought that the best thing he could do was to escape to the land of the Philistines. (1Sam 27:1) At that time, he didn't inquire of God about moving to the philistines because he didn't want to ask.

 Second, it was because of his activities in Philistines. In order to live under Achish, he needed to gain trust from King Achish. He ended up killing many people and lied to King Achish. His plan could be successful. He could have a stable life in the Philistines by gaining full trust from Achish. But Achish trusted David too much and took him to the war against Israel. David's human wisdom and lack of prayer led him to the worst situation, a Dead End. David did not know that he was sinking to a bottomless pit while everything went well in his own eyes.

 Most of us act like David. When we face troubles, our smart brain starts to work to find the best solution to avoid the situation. We act like an AI, Artificial Intelligence. As a result, we might see that a situation could improve and satisfy temporarily. However, if we continue to act this way, God cannot lead us anymore because we would follow our own thought all the time. The best way to overcome troubles is to come to God first and try to listen his direction with much prayer.

 Look at verse 29:1. The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel. Aphek was the base camp for the Philistine army. When they marched from Aphek to the place where they would encounter the army of Israel,the philistine commanders found David and his men, following the army at the rear of the procession. They asked Achish, *"What about these Hebrews?*" Why are they following us? Achish tried to explain by saying, "Oh, he is David, who was the officer of King Saul. He was kicked out by Saul. He became my servant more over a year ago. He is very able and reliable." However, the Philistine commanders were angry with him. "What are you talking about? Are you insane? Don't you know Israel's best dance song, "Permission to Dance", subtitled as "thousands for Saul, Tens of thousands for David?" What if he attacks us from behind to regain his master's favor? Send them back, right away!

 Achish persuaded David very politely that he couldn't come with him to battle because of the disapproval of the Philistine commanders.(29:6) Achish said in verse 6, *"as surely as the LORD lives.*" Here the LORD is written as "Yahweh." In verse 9, he said, *“You have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God (Elohim)*." Achish was a person who showed respect to the God of Israel. David pretended that he wanted to fight. But he was dismissed. God was faithful and merciful to David. Here we should remember two things.

 First, God is able to achieve his will in the midst of David's mistakes. Second, God will provide us a way out in the midst of troubles. Let me read ICo 10:13, ***"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful' he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."***

**II. The Second wave of trouble (30:1-6)**

 It didn't take long for word to get out that the Philistines were headed north to wage a major attack against Israel. The Amalekites, who seemed to make their living by raiding Philistine and Israelite towns, could not have received better news. Since the men of fighting age had gone to war, few or none were left behind to defend the Israelite and Philistine towns, including Ziklag. While David and his men were passing with the Philistine army, the Amalekites were plundering Ziklag. These raiders took all the cattle and possessions, kidnapped all the women and children, and burnt the city to the ground.

 When David and his men approached the city of Ziklag, they were horrified to see that the city had been destroyed and their families taken captive. No one was killed, but every living soul had been taken. It was of little comfort that their families were still alive. Each man imagined what was happening(or would soon happen) to his wife and children. At best, they would become slaves and be treated cruelly.

 These 600 fighting men were greatly distressed by what had happened to their families. They wept until they had no sobs left. Then, they began to think about how this came to pass. It had been David's plan to bring them to the land of the Philistines(27:1-4); it was David's request that they live in this remote city of Ziklag(27:5,6), and it was David who led them off to fight with the Philistines, leaving their families vulnerable to such an attack. Some were so angry that they started to talk of stoning David.

 David was also greatly distressed due to the people's reaction on top of his own sorrow. In times of trouble, people's sprits become bitter. Then, they try to find someone to blame. Or if they can't find someone, they usually blame God. As a matter of fact, this was the worst disaster they ever experienced thus far. They are still fugitives in the land of the Philistines. They lost their parents, wives, sons and daughters. They lost their houses, including all their possessions. Nothing was left to them. They had no meaning to live anymore. They began to release their anger and frustration by blaming David.

 However, David found strength in the LORD his God. How could David be different from others? I think that David was able to meditate on God's grace, not only on the hopeless situation. When all the hopes cease on Earth, heaven is still open for us. He began to think. "God knows my situation. God is able to handle anything." He remembered his poem, "***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."***He struggled with his God. He neither tried to argue with the people, nor tried to persuade them. He meditated on God's grace in his life.

 Once, Buddha said, Life is like "**the sea of suffering**." That is true, but only half true. There is God's grace also in our lives. In times of trouble, whether we meditate on the sufferings only or meditate on God's grace, that makes our lives different.

**III. Hot pursuit; Cold Trail (30:6-10)**

 Since chapter 23, there is no record that David inquired of the LORD. As is often the case, tragedy turns David's heart toward the Lord. David first asked, ***"shall I pursue this raiding party?"*** Wait a minute! Isn't it strange asking this question? Isn't it so obvious that he should pursue the raiders? If I were David, I would not ask that question, but start from the second question, which is “Lord I am going to pursue them day and night. Will you give me success? ***"Will I overtake them?"*** But, soon I understood why David asked that obvious question. **David realized that he didn’t inquire of the Lord since he moved into the Philistines**. Instead, he acted up by his own understanding. I am sure that he deeply repented of his attitude of self reliance. He must have decided to ask God's direction although it appeared to be very obvious to him in order not to rely on his own understanding or his will. From that time on, David asks God **all the time like a child**.

 Let me show you the examples; when Saul was dead, he asks to God, ***“Shall I go up to one of the town of Judah?”, “Where shall I go?” (II Sa 2:1)***, After he became a king, Philistines invaded, he inquired of God, saying ***“Shall I go and attack the Philistines?”*** Later, Philistines invaded to the same place, the valley of Rephaim. David could use his past experience because it was the same situation. **But**, ***David inquired of the LORD again***. This time, God gave David a different direction. (II Sa 5:19, 23) Asking God like a child might be a one of the reason that God called David as “a man after God’s own heart.”

God assures David he will not only overtake this band, but he will also completely rescue all that has been taken.

 Here, we need to remember the physical and mental condition of these men. They have just traveled nearly 60 miles from Aphek back to Ziklag, pressing hard to get home as soon as possible. Then, finding their loved ones kidnapped, and their city destroyed by fire, they wept whole-heartedly until they had no strength left. Now they are off in hot pursuit of the enemy. The enemy raiding party has a substantial lead, and the trail is getting hard. Traces can easily disappear into the wilderness. If they are to be overtaken in time to rescue their loved ones, David and his men must move quickly.

 I imagine that David and his men were marching with double speed. As time passes and the heat of the sun works on David and his men, they grow weary. When they came to the brook Besor, a third of the men simply couldn't go on. Two hundred men collapsed there by the brook, unable to press on. Even if they do go on, they will only slow the rest down. So, David and the other 400 men press on, leaving much of their gears behind with the 200.

**IV. A Man left for dead gives new life to David's pursuit (30: 11-15)**

 The trail was indeed cold. It seems that David and his men do not even know who the raiders are. We are told in verse 1 that the raiders were the Amalekites, but David didn't know. David and his men must have wondered what direction their pursuit should take. At this critical moment, they just "happened" to come across a man who had been left half-dead in a field. The man was so weak that he couldn't talk. It was a "waste of time" for David and his men to stop and render aid to this man. Whether this was out of pure compassion or not, their efforts were well rewarded. They gave him water to drink and food to eat. And this brought him back to life.

 Do you remember what kind of food and how much of it they gave him? The Bible clearly records it; **a** piece of **cake** of pressed **figs** and **two** cakes of **raisins**. Whenever I read these kinds of records, a question comes to my mind. Is it that important to know what kind of food or the quantity? I don't think so. Then, what is the purpose of writing these things in detail? This is significant because it **reveals** God's special helping hands in detail. Without this help, David and his men had no idea where to find the raiders in such a vast area. It tells us that we should remember that God's helping hand is so mysterious, and that helping others is always not a waste of time.

 When the man finally has sufficient strength to speak, David begins to question him. He told David that he was with the Amalekite raiding party that plundered Ziklag. He was willing to cooperate, in exchange for David's assurance that he would not be killed or handed back over to his master. This half-dead servant gave new life to David's search for the Amalekite raiders.

 Thanks to the Egyptian slave, they were guided to the Amalekite camp. They found the Amalekites were totally vulnerable. The Amalekites were spread all over the land, implying that they were not tightly assembled, which meant that their defense was very weak. One of a military strategy is "**divide and conquer**." They themselves were already divided by spreading out. On top of this, they were eating, drinking and dancing. The drunken state of the Amalekites made them easy prey. David and his men attacked and slaughtered the raiders until the evening of the next day. Everything and everyone the Amalekites had taken from Ziklag was recovered. David and his men suffered no losses at all. The author is very specific, saying "Nothing is missing." David brings it all back, just as God indicated.

**V. God's Gifts are a gift, not something we earned. (30:21-31)**

 In fact, not only did David and his men recover everything they lost, they gained a whole lot more. They gained the spoils that the Amalekites obtained through their raids on the Philistine and Israelites towns. These spoils now presented David with another problem. Some of the 400 men who defeated the Amalekites refused to share any of these spoils with the 200 men who stayed behind. The Bible calls them as evil men and troublemakers. Their claim was from nothing but greed for material benefits. Not all 400 men felt this way, but those that did seemed to be taking charge. Their reasoning went like this: only 400 men did the actual fighting; the other 200 had no part in the battle or the victory. Therefore, these extra spoils should be divided only among the 400. That sounds fair. But their refusal was based on these faulty assumptions:

1) They assumed that the victory was indeed **their victory**, something for which they could **take credit**.

2) They assumed that the 200 men had **no part** in this battle or victory.

3) These men are not asking but **demanding it**. They are not asking for David's leadership

David does not let these wicked men prevail. David showed them why they were wrong in what they demanded. This is David's reasoning:

1. They have not earned these spoils, as they supposed. The victory and the spoils are a gracious gift from God. David clearly declares that these are what God had given us, not earned. How then can these men claim the spoils, as though they earned them?

2. The victory is a team victory with each member playing a different role. 200 men stayed with the baggage of the 400 men so that the 400 men could move quickly without exhaustion. The 400 men might have done the work that required more effort. But 200 men also contributed to the victory as well. Their victory is a collective victory.

David refused to let these "wicked and worthless men" spoil the victory God had given.

 In verses 26-31, David took another action regarding on spoils God had given to him. He shared them with some of the Israelite towns. These towns may have been attacked by the Amalekites and suffered loss. Some of the towns were supporters of David and his men.

 David faced many moments that he need to make a decision. In the heat of the moment, most people make decisions, depending on the situation and seeking the imminent benefits. However, David mostly made a decision based on the principle he had, not based on the situation. I want to say that his principle was "**Do the right thing before God."** To him**, seeking the honor of God was always the right thing to do**. When he faced Goliath, he did not evaluate the situation, but he thought of the honor of God first. When God gave him perfect chances to kill Saul, he could finish his misery by taking the chances God had given him. But, he didn't kill him because Saul was God's anointed. When we don't have principles in making decisions, we easily become a people pleaser, following the person who has a bigger voice or influence. If we don't have a principle, we make decisions based on the benefits, not based on righteousness.

 “Whether we seek the benefits first or the right thing first” would be a great principle governing our lives. Most people don't hesitate to do unrighteous things, as long as it benefits them. But Christians are people who don't do what benefits them if it’s not right. This is not my idea. This is what Jesus commanded; ***"but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Mt 6:33)*** Here all these things represent the benefits that we are always tempted to seek first. This is a great principle we should remember whenever we face the moment of decision making. Are we men and women of principle?

 I have two personal principles I always try to remember. 1) Do not worry. In all things, God works for the good. 2) Do not judge, just say Yes or No.

 Look at verses 24,25; ***"The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike. David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this.*"**

 David made this **a law** to apply to all generations in Israel. **"All will share alike."** This sounds like a communism motto. David pronounced this as law because it contains two very important principles.

 **First, the Principle of Grace.** The victory David and his men won over the Amalekites was really God's victory. Men played a part in it, but it was God's gift. Men dare not claim the credit for what God has done. We ought not to take credit for those things which are of God. Paul clearly taught this principle as it applies to the spiritual gifts God gave to individual members of the body of Christ. He said, ***"And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1co 4:7***) Grace means that we do not have to work for God's forgiveness, salvation or blessings. All we have to do is to receive what God, in grace, has provided for us. Grace also means that we dare not take credit for it as though we earned it. We shouldn’t claim God's grace as our own, but to share it with others.

 **Second, the Principle of Plurality( or membership).**While God has given the victory, all 600 men were a part of battle. If the exhausted200 men came along with the 400 men, they would have slowed down the 400, because they were weary. If the 200 men did not guard the baggage, the 400 men would have been laden down. The 200 staying behind served the best interest of the 600. Every single one of the 600 made a contribution to the cause. It was a team effort. Every member of our physical body is dependent upon the rest of the members of the body. Our foot, hand, stomach, or brain cannot exist alone or take credit by itself. Everything is inter-dependent. No one is unimportant. And all members share the benefits alike.

 In conclusion, I want to mention about **God's providence on David's life.** The providence of God is God's unseen hand in the events of life, assuring His purposes and promises. God protected and provided a specific help for David at the exact time. When David was accompanied with Achish for battle, he could not avoid the battle against his own people. God provided a hand, so that he could come back to Zklag. If he was not dismissed in a timely manner, he and his men could lose the chance to chase the Amalekites, and lose their family members forever. In the middle of the chase, they didn't know who the raiders were and where to go, but God provided an Egyptian slave, who led David to the Amalekites directly. In the providence of God, David obtained not only their own goods back, but also the goods of many others. David shared this spoil with a number of Israelite towns in Judah, so that they would prepare their hearts to welcome David as their King soon. One more thing, Ziklag was burned to the ground. Yet this loss was instrumental in causing David to return very quickly to the land of Judah, where he was made King of Judah. All things work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Ro 8:28) This is why we can find strength in God all the time. Let’s trust him absolutely as our God. And be a man and woman who acts based on Godly principles.