

Pursuing the Living God or Pursuing Dead Dogs

1Samuel 24:8-22

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-9-2011

Introduction (vv. 14-15; Ecclesiastes)

What is it you pursue in life? That's the question for today. I'm not asking, "What things are you involved in?" David and Saul were involved in very similar things. So if you were to look at them outwardly you might think that they were both pursuing the same thing. David is trying to survive; Saul is trying to survive. David kills Philistines; Saul kills Philistines. David ate breakfast that morning; Saul ate breakfast that morning. And even the difference that we see in this chapter might just seem like an inconsistency if you looked at it from the outside. This chapter shows Saul trying to kill a rival king and it shows David sparing a rival king; refusing to kill him. So today we are not just looking at the outward. The question is not, "What things are you involved in?" or even "What ministries are you involved in?" The question is, "What is it that you pursue in life?"

Throughout this period of his life David pursued God with all his energies. It didn't matter what he was doing, he was pursuing God in the doing of it. He said

O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."

In that Psalm he said that even in the night watches he remembered God and he said, "**My soul follows close behind You.**" He was pursuing God so tightly that the word used in Hebrew indicates that he is clinging to God. It's like he is grabbing God's clothes as he is running after Him. God was David's passion, David's treasure, and the one thing that David chased relentlessly. And that vision gave him perspective that Saul had almost completely lost.

Saul pursued a whole series of things that were lesser than God, and they left him unsatisfied. And in many ways it reminds me of what happened to king Solomon when he backslid. Solomon began his life pursuing God (what Ecclesiastes says is seeing everything as under heaven; as under God's throne). But over time Solomon's vision began to shift from heaven to earth; his treasure began to shift from heaven to earth; until he came to the place where everything was vanity because everything was done under the sun (S-U-N). And I think if you read Ecclesiastes with those two phrases in mind

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(“under heaven” versus “under the sun”), a lot of it will make more sense. If your highest reference point in day to day living is the physical sun (rather than God’s throne), you are a humanist, even if you are a Christian. And Ecclesiastes tries to convince you that everything under the sun is vanity and meaningless and will leave you empty. But the same book says that when you fear God and obey His commandments and have a constant awareness of His presence and purposes in your life, then everything has a purpose, has meaning, and leaves you feeling satisfied. In fact, *exactly the same things* that had lost their meaning for Solomon when he was backslidden (and let me list them - power, riches, work, physical pleasures, wisdom, achievements, family, sunsets, and food – those things that were meaningless now) became a part of enjoying God when he regained that ability to see them under heaven, that is, under His throne, and in relationship to God.

And I see the same contrast between Saul and David. Verse 14 describes Saul’s most important goal in life right now (to kill David) was about as significant as a dead dog or a flea. How would you like your chief goals in life to be summed up as being equivalent to a carcass or a flea? In contrast, though David seems to have lost everything, he sees himself as having the Judge of the universe on his side in verse 15. Saul’s pursuit of things under the sun left him with fears, insecurities, and an empty existence. In contrast, David sought God’s presence, God’s strength, God’s favor, and God’s protection. But ultimately He was seeking God.

And even though I have preached a sermon on these verses related to the conscience, I want to cover this same ground again and look at what a difference it makes whether you are pursuing the living God as your greatest goal or whether you are seeking dead dogs.

I. Pursuing the Living God (though unseen, God is the most important aspect of life). This eternal perspective:

A. Gives courage (v. 8a)

First, supernatural courage. The Psalms David wrote during this period show that seeking the living God gave David a courage that was amazing. He could have continued to hide out in the cave once Saul left, and probably not been found. But verse 8 says, “**David also arose afterward, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul, saying, ‘My lord the king!’**” This might seem like a bad move to you. But I believe he was making a bold gamble – that confrontation of the king and quickly showing the 3000 men

the evidence of his innocence would cause the king to be shamed in front of them and would make him back off. It could have backfired, but it was a well-executed gamble that paid off. But however you interpret David's intent, it still took courage to do it.

The more you bask in God's presence (as David did in the Psalms written during this period), the more courage your heart will gain. David wrote Psalm 27 in the wilderness – a psalm that gives several secrets to gaining supernatural courage from the Lord. It's an incredibly encouraging Psalm for those who are down and out. But one of those secrets is pursuing Him. David said, **“Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!”** Do you have anxieties? Do you have discouragement? Then press deeper into your relationship with God. God can give you courage that on a human level does not make sense.

B. Enables us to honor those who don't deserve it (v. 8b)

A second thing that letting go of the world and clinging to the Lord enabled David to do was to honor those who didn't deserve honor. Verse 8 continues: **“saying, ‘My lord the king!’ And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down.”** He is showing respect and honor to a person who didn't deserve it. God may be calling some of you to show respect to people who don't deserve it. And it may grate on you to do it. And you might think, “It's not fair. Why should I respect that person when he or she doesn't show respect for me?” But you can switch your focus to God and say, “Lord, I'm not doing this for him. This is my gift to you. I'm going to love him and respect him as an act of love for you.” And the more difficult and grating it is to you to respond graciously to that other person, the greater the gift you are offering up to God. And amazingly, as your focus becomes heavenward, it becomes less and less grating. When you link the Psalms together with this passage it becomes clear that David was doing this for the Lord.

C. Preserves from self-deception (v. 9 with vv. 4-6)

Thirdly, pursuing God kept David from self-deception. Contrast David and Saul when it came to listening to advisors. In verses 4-6 David ignored advice that must have seemed very attractive, but he ignored it because it was unbiblical. This would not have been intuitive. In contrast, look at verse 9. **“And David said to Saul; ‘Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Indeed David seeks your harm?’”** Why would Saul be willingly deceived by these men?

Naiveté and deception come because we have embraced a wrong reference point. It doesn't have anything to do with IQ. I've known people with incredibly high IQs do stupid things and be naïve like Saul was. Common sense is not the reference point that God calls us to have; the Scripture is. Science, Sociology, Psychology, and any other wisdom of man is not the reference point that God calls us to have; Scripture is. While other things may be true, only Scripture is truth. Jesus said, "**Thy word is truth.**" That is completely different from saying, "Thy word is true." If we say, "Thy word is true," then our minds become the standard by which Scripture is judged. This was the temptation that Satan gave to Adam and Eve. God had warned them about what would happen if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That should have settled it because God's word is truth. But Satan wanted Eve to judge independently – to test God's Word to see if it is true. Well, that no longer makes God's Word the highest authority, does it? Satan wanted her to make her mind as the standard of truth, independently of God. Satan wanted her to think, "You know, it doesn't make any sense for such beautiful fruit to be this dangerous." And all deception in the 6000 years since then has come because we have traded God as the ultimate reference point for something in creation. Do you want to avoid deception? Then you must pursue God in His Word.

D. Gives God's perspective on tough questions (v. 10)

Verse 10 shows that pursuing God as your goal gives you God's perspective on tough questions. "**Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.'**"

David had to make an instantaneous decision in that cave. He didn't have time to whip out a Bible and study the question. And it was a tough decision for him. Just like Satan gave Eve all kinds of pragmatic reasons why eating was a good idea, his men had given him some rather good reasons why he should partake of something forbidden. Just like Satan, they told David what *they* thought God wanted. How do you know what God wants?

You've probably seen the bracelets that say, "WWJD" – What Would Jesus Do? And it is astonishing to me how many times on the internet Christians try to figure out independently (from their own heads) the answer to that question, "What would Jesus do?" And they come up with crazy answers because they aren't looking to Christ's Word, the Scriptures. They

are reasoning independently. They were asking, “What Would Jesus Do? You know, He would say kill Saul. It’s just self-defense.” They were using a WWJD approach to life rather than a WDSS (what does Scripture say) approach. It is as you seek God in the Scriptures and meditate on his word day and night like David did, that you begin more and more to have God’s perspective on tough questions. So when I talk about pursuing God, I am not talking about pure mysticism unanchored from the Bible. I am talking about WDSS. It is after the hard work of developing a Biblical worldview that you can make those snap decisions that honor God.

E. Keeps us from running ahead of the Lord (v. 10)

The fifth thing that this will do is that it will keep you from running ahead of the Lord. It makes sense, right? If you are pursuing the Lord, you are following Him rather than running ahead of Him. Verse 10 shows the temptation to run ahead of the Lord’s timing. His friends urged him to kill Saul. That’s an easy way to get rid of the problem right now. We’ve already looked in the past as to why that would have been unbiblical. But David has patience to wait for God’s timing to make him king because he had already learned how to wait on the Lord in his devotional life and in every area of his life. I’ve already read from Psalm 27 where he tells himself to wait on the Lord. Psalm 56, which had been written in chapter 22, connects this waiting on the Lord with his handling of Saul. Impatience is an action of unbelief and it always runs ahead of the Lord and gets us into trouble. All of these points are an apologetic of why you should pursue after the Lord. It’s really a one-point sermon being looked at from different angles.

F. Keeps us from sin and gives us the boldness to confront sin (v. 11)

Verse 11 gives us a sixth benefit of pursuing God. Such pursuit of God kept David from falling into sin and gave him the boldness to confront sin. **“Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it.”**

Sometimes confronting the sins of others can be even harder than avoiding sin yourself. Confronting a *king* for his sin is even harder. And confronting a king for his sin *when he is hunting you down* might seem almost suicidal. Yet David’s pursuit of God enabled him to see life clearly enough to call sin what it really was. Sometimes fathers are too timid to

confess their own sins or to call sin, “sin” in the lives of others. How does the pursuit of God enable you to do this?

I think Vance Havner said it well in his book on preachers. He said, “When you are accustomed to standing before God, kings don’t matter much. Big potatoes are just small potatoes when you have been standing in the presence of the Most High.”¹ I remember when I was a kid being very much afraid of one bully and his gang. I had been beat up so many times that I tried to find a different way home from school each day. But one day I was walking with my dad and saw the bully, and I had no fear whatsoever. Well, in the same way, I have been in some pretty dangerous situations in other countries, yet the sense of God’s presence with me kept fear at bay.

G. Is not Deistic and gives us confidence in a higher authority (v. 12)

The seventh benefit of pursuing God is that God becomes the most real thing in your life. When you are a Peter looking at the waves, the waves become the most real thing in your life and you start sinking. When you are a Peter and you look at Christ, He can be the most real thing in your life. And we tend to vacillate back and forth, don’t we? When Elijah was on Mount Carmel God was the most real thing in his life. It wasn’t the cloudless sky; it wasn’t the power of king Ahab. It wasn’t being outnumbered by the priests of Baal. It was God. And he was able to perform miracles. But one day later Elijah’s vision was so intensely focused on Jezebel’s hatred for him, that she became the most real thing in his life, and he feared and fled. Fear killed his faith.

And what did God do to help Elijah? It’s pretty interesting. 1 Kings 19 says that God sent some illustrations. It says, “**a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; and after the fire a still small voice.**” Which is most real: the hurricane or the still small voice? Well, if you’ve never learned how to pursue God, obviously the hurricane is the most real thing. When you have a hurricane wind that does odd things like tearing rocks apart, you have a tendency to see that as the most real thing. But it wasn’t the most real thing. That was God’s point. He wasn’t in that wind. Next came the earthquake, and that was not the most real thing. Next came a fire. And last of all came a still small

¹ Vance Havner, *Just a Preacher* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 131.

voice. And the Lord was in that. And when you have the Lord quietly with you, even the biggest things of life shrink. What God was showing Elijah was that he had allowed himself to be overwhelmed with what his vision said was the biggest things of life, and that he must not neglect the power of God that is invisible and almost inaudible. Faith alone enabled Elijah to once again see that God was the most real thing in his life.

That's what is going on in verse 12. Saul's soldiers might have laughed at David warning Saul of his danger. That's ridiculous. But David doesn't care what people think. He said, "**Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you.**" When God is real to you, you don't have to take revenge. You don't have to fix providence, as if God did something wrong. God is real to you and you take matters to your courtroom of heaven and watch God work on your behalf. If you have not been taking things to the courtroom of heaven, God is not the most important thing in your life.

H. Gives integrity (v. 13)

Pursuing God gave David integrity. Verse 13 says, "**As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you.**" As one version put it, "One wrong begets another." But David will not do wrong simply because Saul did wrong. Pursuing God kept him from succumbing to pragmatism. He did the right thing even though everyone else could have excused an assassination. He did the right thing because his focus was on pleasing God. Do you want to be known as a man or woman of integrity? You've got to pursue God like David did in the Psalms. You can easily lose your integrity when your passion is pursuing the things of the earth. It's so easy to lose your integrity.

I. Gives perspective and humility (v. 14)

Verse 14: "**After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?**" David doesn't need to puff himself up. He is quite comfortable seeing himself as nothing. Walking with the awesome God of the universe made him realize that he was nothing and could do nothing apart from God. It gave him perspective and humility. And with humility, the Lord lifts you up.

J. Gives Hebrews 11:1 faith (v. 15)

And the last point under David is that pursuing God gave David a Hebrews 11:1 kind of faith. David said, "**Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and**

deliver me out of your hand.” If atheists were watching they would consider David rather naïve. But those were not empty words. They were words of faith that could see something others could not see. He was using a nuclear weapon by calling down God’s judgment on Saul. And I want to distinguish David’s faith here from three counterfeits that we often confuse with faith.

First, faith is not hope. Now hope’s a good thing, but it’s not the same as faith, and if you have substituted hope for faith you will not receive the answers to your prayer requests. For years I prayed with hope, but not with the confidence of faith. I would plead with the Lord over and over with no confidence that He would answer. I finally came to the conviction that I needed to take His Word at face value, ask, and thank God for His answer. And I remember the day that I switched to praying with faith for wisdom, and watched God from that time on coming through. I still have some things that I don’t pray with faith; I pray with hope. But I’m growing. So don’t confuse faith with hope. David had an absolute faith that he would survive this day. And we will see why in a moment.

The second and third counterfeits are sight and presumption. Let’s go to Hebrews 11:1 first, because this is a passage that defines faith, and many have misunderstood it. One of my teachers in Bible School used to teach that faith was a blind leap in the dark. That is a liberal definition, not a Biblical one. He claimed that since faith is defined as the evidence of things *not seen*, it must be a leap in the dark. But let’s read what it really says, “**Now faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen.**” It’s not leaping without knowing. In fact, the two Greek terms used here are the polar opposites of that.

The first legal term that is used in verse 1 is ὑπόστασις (which means reality, substance or title deed). The second one is ἔλεγχος (which is the legal term for proof or evidence). Let’s think of the title deed first. When you buy a house, you may make an offer on the house, but until the title deed is signed, you are not sure that you will have it. You hope, but you don’t know. The time leading up to the signing of the title deed is the time you hoped for something, but with the title deed in hand, it is yours even if you have never seen the house. Believe it or not, Kathy entered into a purchase agreement on our last house without ever seeing the house, and she did so based on the evidence I presented (the second word). She hadn’t seen it, but she knew it was ours. With a title deed in hand, the house is yours even if people say it is not. It is yours even if people challenge your right to

have that home in court. That is the nature of faith. It has the confidence of a title deed. John Calvin said that confidence is of the essence of faith.

The second Greek word that is used in Hebrews 11:1 is evidence. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. This was the word used to describe court evidence. If you were a juror, you would have heard accusations brought against a given person, but the problem is, you were not at the scene of the crime. How can you judge the case? You didn't see what happened. The only way that you can make a binding decision is based upon evidence of things not seen. It's not a blind leap in the dark. Faith is always based on evidence, but it is evidence of things you didn't see or witness. You are basing your court judgment on other people's testimony.

So, did David have title deed to survival and sitting on the throne? Yes he did. God promised it in chapter 16. Did he have evidence of things not seen? Yes he did. In fact, it was far more reliable evidence than anything that we get in a court of law. And God allowed Saul to chase David to bring David's faith to the place where it truly banked on that title deed and that evidence of things not seen. Do you wonder why God puts you through impossible situations like David was facing? It's to test your faith and to test and strengthen your resolve to pursue Him.

So faith is not hope; faith is not sight. The third counterfeit that is exposed in Hebrews 11:1 is presumption. And this is perhaps the most dangerous counterfeit. You might think that David is being presumptuous here, but he was not. Sometimes people *are* confident of things of which they have no basis for confidence. They presume upon things that do not exist. Presumption is not faith. Let me illustrate: A friend of mine from South Carolina was believing God for a particular colored car and he was going to bring that car into existence by his faith. He had read some name-it-and-claim-it book. Now if God had promised that car, he could have asked for it in faith. But God had said no such thing. So he was eventually disappointed because time showed that he didn't have the power of creation. He was not God. Only God can create things. All our faith can do is lay hold of what God has said exists in His decrees. Everything that God has decreed is as good as done from the foundation of the world. But our faith lays claim to it and brings it into history.

Remember that verse 1 says that “**faith is the title deed of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” It's plural participles. In the realm of the invisible eternal, those things are already in existence. They were determined from before the foundation of the world that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 says, “**For we are His workmanship, created**

in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Why can we have faith that we will be able to conquer besetting sins? Because those good works were already created before there was time, and our faith lays claim to these good works as things that exist. We are not creating something out of nothing. We are laying hold of God’s sure promise. We refuse to believe Satan’s lies that we can’t do them. We don’t just hope. By faith we step into God’s decrees. So faith takes those things created before the foundation of the world and brings them into visible manifestation in space-time history. They transition from being decreed “things” (real things) to historical things. Faith is not a blind leap in the dark. And David’s faith just kept growing and growing because he was pursuing God with all of his heart. God was the most real thing in life.

II. Pursuing Dead Dogs (though seen, the blessings and dangers of earth are insignificant compared to God’s favor). This earth-bounded perspective:

Saul was different. His vision was dimmed toward heavenly things and he was driven, driven, driven by the things of this earth – things like the emergency of the previous chapter, and the threat of David to his throne. But Saul’s earth-bound and time-bound perspective led to six sad situations.

A. Elevates the opinions of men above God’s (v. 9)

First, in verse 9 we see that Saul was constantly swayed by the wrong opinions of those around him. And it makes sense. If God rarely comes into your thinking during a day, the ones you do see are going to become much more influential than God. Your husband’s sins will loom a whole lot bigger than God will. Peer pressure will loom a whole lot bigger than God and you will cave in to their expectations rather than standing strong for Him. Evolutionary theories will loom a whole lot bigger than God, and you will compromise in order to appear wise in the eyes of the world. So verse 9 deals with Saul elevating the opinions of the men around him higher than God’s.

B. Makes us blind to our vulnerability (v. 10)

Second, it made Saul blind to his vulnerability. In verse 10 he had no idea how close to danger and death he really was. He is this close to being killed, but he has no idea. In Jonathan Edward’s sermon that Rodney alluded to last week, he pictured men as hanging over the flame by a spider’s web. They have no idea of how vulnerable they are. And in the same way, Saul was blind to true danger and true security.

C. Skews our judgment (v. 11)

In verse 11 we see that it skewed his judgment of what was important in life. Saul was consumed with a passion to hand on an earthly kingdom to his sons. That's why he is constantly trying to kill David. Fame, success, empire, riches – these things are nothing if you don't have God.

In fact, in James Boice's book, *Call to Discipleship*, he gave an interesting story. He said that Donald Grey Barnhouse was counseling a young woman on the sidewalk in front of the church after the evening service. She said she was a Christian and that she wanted to follow Christ. But she wanted to be famous too. She wanted to pursue a stage career in New York. But he could see that she was willing to make compromises. And at one point in the conversation she revealed her heart by saying this: "After I have made it in the theater, I'll follow Christ completely." Barnhouse took a key out of his pocket and scratched the mailbox that was in front of the church. And then he said, "That is what God will let you do. God will let you scratch the surface of success. He will let you get close enough to the top to know what it is, but He will never let you have it, because He will never let one of His children have anything rather than Himself." Years later he met the girl again, and she confessed that this had indeed been the story of her life. She had dabbled in drama enough that she got her picture in a national magazine one time. But she had never quite made it. She told Barnhouse, "I can't tell you how many times in my discouragement I have closed my eyes and seen you scratching on that postal box with your key. God let me scratch the edges, but He gave me nothing in place of Himself."² Brothers and sisters, our judgment is skewed when we do not make it our life's goal to know God and to pursue Him. Anything else is pursuing dead dogs unless it is given to God. And Mark 10 says that when we give everything to God, He gives back the same things as a stewardship trust. If we give everything to God, He makes us first. But if we pursue things in their own right, He makes us last.

D. Manifests itself in wickedness (v. 13)

Verse 13 is a great proverb of wickedness inevitably coming out of the wicked. It takes God's grace to restrain it and to produce righteousness. So when we don't pursue God, we lack the grace to keep ourselves from that downward slide. Only God can be the source of any righteousness, so if you are not pursuing God, automatically your wickedness is going to increase.

² J.M. Boice, *Christ's Call To Discipleship*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 154.

Romans 7:18 says, “**I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.**” You are not going to get righteousness from any other source than God. So if you are not pursuing God, you have only one other source for your actions. As David said, “Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.”

E. Inflates our goals beyond their true significance (v. 14)

We’ve already dealt with verse 14, but a failure to have God constantly in our vision inflates our goals beyond their true significance. David wipes away Saul’s goals as worthless. In the same way, if our ultimate goal is success on our job, it is worthless. If we are taking herbs, vitamins, medicine, and exercising our bodies as our ultimate goal, it is worthless. Of course, all of those things are fine activities. David and Saul were engaged in similar activities. But if our earthly goals are not part of our pursuit of God, they get inflated beyond their true significance.

F. Makes us blindly walk into the judgment of God (vv. 12,15)

The last thing that I see in Saul is that he was blindly running from God’s love and grace and in his fear and desperation was running toward the judgment that verses 12 and 15 guarantee were coming his way apart from repentance.

James Hewett told the story of a lady driving home in the dark one night. And she noticed a semi behind her that was driving uncomfortably close. She stepped on the gas to gain some distance, but the truck sped up and was right on her tail. Slowing down didn’t help because he wouldn’t pass her. The faster she drove, the faster the truck drove. She was starting to get really nervous, so she exited the freeway. But nervousness gave way to full blown fear when the truck followed her. She turned up a main street hoping to lose him in the traffic, but the truck ran a red light and continued the chase. Almost at the point of hysterics she whipped her car into a service station jumped out and ran into the building screaming for help. The truck pulled into the service station, opened the back door of her car, and pulled a man out whom he had seen hidden in the backseat. It turns out that the truck driver had spotted a would-be rapist in the back seat and had been trying to signal her to pull over. She was running away from the wrong person.

And this was what Saul had been doing now for years. He was running away from what he perceived as threats to his security, his kingdom, his children’s well being. David, God, and all of the people that he was seeing as the enemy, and that he was seeing as trying to kill him were really his friends. And ultimately he was racing his car away from the semi truck

of God. And in the process he ran over some priests with his metaphorical car, almost killed his son, and was doing everything he could to get God off of his tail. But he was running from God's true help. If he had stepped down from the throne in chapter 13, God would have honored him. But fear had clouded his vision so that he couldn't see God's love and grace. If he had done like Jonathan did in chapter 18, and had told David "I want you to be king," God would have honored him. But panic made Saul run from the wrong things and pursue the wrong things.

Bothers and sisters, some of you have been running from God and from the voice of God speaking through His people. I would urge you to get out of the car and let God deal with your flesh. There are so many things that keep us from stopping and letting God have his way. With Saul it was insecurity, fear, earthly aspirations, pride, and demonic thoughts that made all his problems everyone else's. But ultimately, his problem came because he stopped pursuing God. I'm not saying that he stopped being religious. He was very religious. No, he stopped pursuing God.

Conclusion

I would like to end by challenging each of you to stop pursuing dead dogs and start pursuing the living God. If you get upset with God for His providences, you will end up with nothing like Saul did. God's providences may be your husband, your wife, your children, your money. But let me repeat that if you get upset with God for his providences, you will end up with nothing like Saul did. But if you hold onto God as the most important and the most real thing of your life, even when times get bad (like they did with David), you will be able to respond with faith and joy as David did. God doesn't promise us a bed of roses. He does promise us a life of love, joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment if we will pursue God like David did.

That was the testimony of George Matheson. It would have been easy for him to get bitter. He had a passion to serve God in the ministry, but he started losing his eyesight at the age of fifteen. Like David he was probably thinking, "Lord, why would you call me to the ministry and then endanger the ministry with these obstacles?" But he trusted God's call upon his life and redoubled his efforts to finish school before he completely lost his sight. He graduated from the University of Glasgow at the age of nineteen and started his seminary studies. And partway through seminary he completely lost his sight. His sisters helped him through the rest of his seminary by reading to him, and helping him to write his papers. That was quite a

sacrifice on their part because they had to learn Greek, Hebrew, and theology right along with him. But they helped him finish his studies.

But his second heartbreak came when his fiancée broke off the engagement because she said she couldn't live with a blind man. In fact, it was a pain he carried with him for the rest of his life. He never married, but he did become a very famous, well-loved preacher in Scotland. At some point during his pastoral ministry his sister came to him excitedly telling him about her engagement. And that was a fresh opening of that wound as he was tempted to feel sorry for himself about his fiancée's broken engagement. But he resisted that, and was immediately comforted by the character of God's love, writing these words (and I think you will recognize these words as soon as I say them):

O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.³

There are a lot of things in life that will let you down. You could lose loved ones. You could lose your spouse. You could lose houses, finances, health, and so many other things. But if you will make Paul's life goal your life goal, you will never be let down by the matchless love of God. Let me read you Paul's life goal in Philippians 3:

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

He was willing to give up pursuing dead dogs. He goes on...

Philippians 3:8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

He is saying that everything in life is like a dead dog or a flea or rubbish in comparison to gaining Christ. In verse 10 he says that his one pursuit in life was this:

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

In verse 12 he admits that he has vacillated between Saul and David on doing this. Sometimes he had pursued the wrong things. But every time he had fallen down, he got back up and kept pursuing Jesus. He said,

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

So there is a sense in which the very one whom Paul is pursuing has been pursuing Paul; the very one whom Paul clings to has been clinging to Paul.

Philippians 3:13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

Philippians 3:14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

That's what David was doing in this chapter. And I would urge you to stop pursuing dead dogs and to start pursuing the living God with all your heart. Amen.

³ I got this illustration from a sermon by Stephen Sheane, What is Love, 2/15/2011

Pursuing the Living God or Pursuing Dead Dogs

1 Samuel 24:8-22

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-9-2011

Introduction (vv. 14-15; Ecclesiastes)

- I. Pursuing the Living God (though unseen, God is the most important aspect of life). This eternal perspective:
 - A. Gives courage (v. 8a)
 - B. Enables us to honor those who don't deserve it (v. 8b)
 - C. Preserves from self-deception (v. 9 with vv. 4-6)
 - D. Gives God's perspective on tough questions (v. 10)
 - E. Keeps us from running ahead of the Lord (v. 10)
 - F. Keeps us from sin and gives us the boldness to confront sin (v. 11)
 - G. Is not Deistic and gives us confidence in a higher authority (v. 12)
 - H. Gives integrity (v. 13)
 - I. Gives perspective and humility (v. 14)
 - J. Gives Hebrews 11:1 faith (v. 15)
- II. Pursuing Dead Dogs (though seen, the blessings and dangers of earth are insignificant compared to God's favor). This earth-bounded perspective:
 - A. Elevates the opinions of men above God's (v. 9)
 - B. Makes us blind to our vulnerability (v. 10)
 - C. Skews our judgment (v. 11)
 - D. Manifests itself in wickedness (v. 13)
 - E. Inflates our goals beyond their true significance (v. 14)
 - F. Makes us blindly walk into the judgment of God (vv. 12,15)

Conclusion

