

1 Samuel 29:1-11 | “Silent, Surprising, Merciful”  
*Preached on May 29, 2022 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to 1 Samuel 29, as we are in the final chapters of the book of 1 Samuel. *[pause]*

Do you remember rewinding VHS tapes and the loud noise it would make to do so?

For those of you who are younger, you may even be wondering, “What is a VHS tape?”

But rewinding VHS tapes was always interesting because let’s say you pushed the ‘stop button’ and you rewinded it, you had to guess when to stop it.

You hoped that you guessed right, and you’d play the movie to see if you got the right spot that you wanted to be at.

Or maybe you were one of the people who had one of those special VHS rewinders that was a lot faster and apparently were better for the tape. *[pauseee]*

But rewinding the tape was a way to go to a past event or moment in the movie.

Well in this section of 1 Samuel, it’s like the writer has used the fast-forward and rewind buttons on us in the story.

He began telling us about David’s dilemma in chapter 27.

David, out of fear of Saul, had fled to the Philistines for refuge.

He had deceived Achish, the Philistine king, into believing that he was this loyal, pro-Philistine convert.

And then Achish told David that David and his men were to go fight on the Philistine side in the battle against the Israelites.

And all of a sudden, the writer fast-forwarded to the day before the battle, when Saul went to the medium at En-dor.

And we learned all about Saul’s dilemma there last week, but now in chapter 29, the author uses the rewind button to get us back to David. *[pause]*

So this is before Saul’s visit to the medium, this is before the Philistines make it up to Shunem, as we find that they are still at Aphek.

But now that we have been rewinded back to David’s dilemma, the writer pushes ‘play’ and we see what happens.

Let’s START READING. *[read 1-5]*

We are told at the beginning about the location of the two armies.

Israel is up in Jezreel, which is near Gilboa, where they are stationed the day before the battle.

And the Philistines are in Aphek, which seems to be a place where all the Philistines meet in order to start heading up towards Shunem. *[pause]*

Since all the Philistine commanders are together, they notice David and his men with Achish.

And when they see David, they are like, “Wait a minute. What are these guys doing here?” *[pause]*

Here they are gathered as Philistines going to fight Israelites, and Israelites are with them.

And Achish responds to the Philistine lords in probably the worst way, for you know he wasn't the most discerning of guys.

For, listen to how he tries to defend David, and just act like you are a Philistine commander hearing this...

He says, “Is this not David, *the servant of Saul*, king of Israel.” *[pause]*

Achish is like, “Oh yeah, that's David the servant of Saul, the king of Israel, who we are about to fight.” *[pause]*

He also notes that, “Oh and by the way, he deserted to me.”

Well, if he deserted to you, don't you think he might desert you? *[pause]*

The other Philistine commanders can't believe this, and become angry.

They don't get why Achish doesn't see the folly of taking David to fight Israel.

They know how big of a risk that is, for David could easily turn against them in battle, and if he did so, it would be bad, for David is on the rearguard of the army.

That means that if David turns against the Philistines, the Philistines would be trapped between David and Saul. *[pause]*

Another possible reason that they don't want these Hebrews among them as they go into battle is because the Philistines have some experience with deserting Hebrews.

Back in 1 Samuel 14, when Jonathan attacked the Philistines, some Hebrews who had been with the Philistines turned against the Philistines and joined the Israelite forces.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Samuel 14:21.

So these Philistine commanders are not going to risk having another “1 Samuel 14” incident, and demand that David be sent back to Ziklag. *[pause]*

They are like, “Hello?! Isn’t David the one who people sing about as the one who has killed tens of thousands of us? And yet you are going to trust him to not turn against us?”

They know that David could easily kill them, take their heads to Saul, and be reconciled to Saul for such a feat, for he’s the very one who cut off Goliath the Philistine’s head.<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeee]*

So after having all the other Philistine commanders tell him to send David home, Achish’s hands are tied, for he has to send David away, no matter how much he doesn’t want to.

And he has to go tell David the news.

Let’s pick up READING in verse 6. *[read 6-11]*

Achish tells David the news that he can’t go with them into battle.

And he tries to reassure David that this isn’t his decision, for in his view, David hasn’t done anything wrong and should be going to battle with them.

But in order not to make the other Philistine commanders upset, David must go home. *[pause]*

What’s ironic is that Achish has been deceived by David, and though Achish thinks that David has been honest, David hasn’t been.

If you remember, David made raids against people groups that were in Israel’s promised land, and then he would tell Achish that he was fighting these other people groups instead.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Achish still trusts David fully, albeit naively. *[pause]*

Now you would think that David would respond with joy, for now he gets an easy way out of fighting his own people, but that’s not how he acts, at least outwardly.

He asks what he has done that he can’t go fight “against the enemies of my lord the king.”

Now that is sort of ambiguous.

Does he mean the enemies of my lord the king Achish OR the enemies of my lord, the king Saul? *[pause]*

Certainly David’s response here to being sent home is confusing, but there are at least two options...

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<sup>2</sup> See 1 Samuel 17:51,54.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Samuel 27:8-12.

One is that he is faking being upset about being sent home, and he is actually relieved he doesn't have to fight Israel, but he must keep up the act in front of Achish, acting like he truly wanted to go.

But secondly, he may be actually upset that he can't go because he saw this as a prime opportunity to turn against the Philistines in war, and use this to help Israel's cause. *[pause]*

Either way, whether he faked being outraged, or if he wanted to go and turn against the Philistines, he is sent home nonetheless.

Achish can't change the decision, for the rest of the commanders outvoted him - David must leave at first light, and he does so. *[pause]*

*So now that we have the story fresh on our minds, let's unpack its significance, and one thing we notice in this story is...*

### **I. God's silent providence.**

In this story, we are told what people do.

We are told what the Philistine commanders think and say.

We are told what Achish thinks, does, and says.

And we are told what David thinks, does, and says.

Yet there's no talk of what God is doing - He's silent.

In fact, the only mention of God is from the mouth of Achish, the Philistine king.

But though God is silent when it comes to the details of the story we read, He is still at work through His *silent providence*. *[pause]*

Now if you need a refresher or you just don't know what God's providence is, let me explain...

Providence is the truth that God is continually involved in the world by maintaining, directing, and governing it to fulfill His purposes. *[pause]*

How do we see God's providence in this story?

David is providentially prevented from going to battle against Saul and the Israelites.

And that's a big deal because God had promised that Israel would lose and Saul would be killed in that very battle. *[pause]*

So get this: David never has to fight his own people, and therefore tarnish his ability to be their future king, and also, David has an alibi when it comes to Saul's death.

David had no part in the killing of Saul, but he was sent back to Ziklag before the war began.  
*[pause]*

So no one can claim that David fought with the Philistines and killed off Saul, and took the throne.

Instead, God is seen as the one displacing Saul, and replacing him with David. *[pauseeee]*

So when you understand what happens next in Israel's loss and Saul's death, you can see how this story here is so critical.

Though David didn't quite understand why he was being sent home, he could look back and see God's silent, yet providential hand at work. *[pauseeee]*

Many of you may have been to Sight & Sound, you know, the place in Lancaster that brings the Bible to life by having amazing shows, which depict different Bible stories.

Well at Sight & Sound, they have these spectacularly-built sets and props.

And one such show had a ship that moved along in a fake sea.

And when you sat in the audience, all you could see was the water and the ship moving across the stage.

That's all the audience can perceive, but there's something quiet and hidden at work.

There's some sort of mechanism underneath the ship that moves the ship along the stage, so that it appears to be moving like a ship would on water. *[pause]*

Though that mechanism is silent and unseen, it's guiding and governing the ship to go where it should go.

That's what God's silent providence is like.

We see the ship moving, that is, we see the reasons and way David is sent away from the battle.

Yet underneath it all, God, like that mechanism, is the one moving David away from the battle.  
*[pauseeee]*

You see, God's activity is not always obvious and apparent, but sometimes it's unseen and quiet.

And just because something is silent doesn't mean that it's not active. *[pause]*

Just because you can't directly hear or see something working doesn't mean that it's not working.

The person sewing in the next room quietly is still sewing nonetheless.

Quiet talking is still talking, so also, silent providence is still providence.

Therefore, we must never proclaim that God is not doing anything, or else we will end up being an ignorant fool, saying things that are untrue. *[pauseeee]*

What is it that prevented David from going into the very battle that Israel would lose and that Saul would die in?

**It wasn't David's craftiness or deception that got him out of going to battle.**

It wasn't luck or coincidence, and you can't put it on the Philistine commanders who were just trying to mitigate the risk to themselves.

**The credit goes to God alone! *[pauseeee]***

Earlier this week, the kids were in bed, and Kate and I were sitting downstairs in the living room.

And all of a sudden, both my wife and I heard the door make a noise, and so we thought, "Ah man, here we go again, the kids are getting out of bed."

So I went to the steps, looked up, and saw our bedroom door closing slightly, as if someone just went in there.

**I walked up the stairs, looked around in our room, and there was no one.**

And here what I found was that because the window was open, the wind kept opening and closing the door, so that it made it sound like someone was going through the door.

**I had blamed it on the kids, when it was the wind.**

And we often pin the credit for something on the wrong thing, when God deserves the credit.

To God be the glory for the things *He* has done.<sup>4</sup> *[pauseeee]*

In this event, God's quiet goodness was on display, directing David away from the war.

**The Philistines didn't know what was going on.**

David didn't quite understand it all at that moment, but God did.

**And let me tell you, there will be many moments in your life where you won't know why something happened, but God does.**

You might even want the opposite thing to happen, yet we need to trust God's silent providence. *[pause]*

**Those times of redirection might be blessings in disguise.**

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<sup>4</sup> An allusion to the hymn, "To God Be the Glory," by Fanny Crosby.

Those periods of delay might be grace-filled gifts wrapped with “wait” stamped on them, which lead you to praise later on. *[pauseeee]*

**Think back on your own life.**

Are there times where you look back and say, “I’m glad God told me to wait.” Or, “I’m glad God said, “No,” and sent me elsewhere.”?

**So don’t you think His silent providence is doing such things even now in your life?** *[pauseee]*

We need to start looking at the situations of our lives through “silent providence” colored glasses.

**And though many times we won’t know what God is doing.**<sup>5</sup>

And though many times we won’t even perceive that God is working.

**We trust that He is working, and that He is working something that is purposeful, and in the big picture - good.** *[pause]*

So let’s praise Him!

**God’s quiet work deserves just as much praise as his overt work.**

And we should trust Him at all times, not just in the times that we see His “God-at-work” sign lit up in our lives. *[pauseeee]*

**Maybe you’re here and you’re thinking, “But why doesn’t God just work in obvious ways and show His providence in clear, apparent ways?”**

May it be that sometimes He wants us to *discover* His providence at work? *[pause]*

**It’s one thing to tell someone that you are doing something, it’s another thing when they get to discover what you are doing for themselves.**

It makes a profound, memorable impact.

**So when we start to perceive and trust the Lord’s silent providence in all of life, it brings joy and worship, as we stand in awe of our great God.**

He is truly the God over all details, who works His will, even in very quiet ways. *[pauseeee]*

*Not only do we see God’s silent providence in this story, but we also see...*

## **II. God’s surprising providence.**

God providentially prevents David from going to battle against Saul and Israel, but how?

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<sup>5</sup> Remember Ecclesiastes 11:5!

Did He just speak and say, “David, run away! I don’t want you to go to battle, for I’m going to kill Saul!”

No, look at what He did.

He used something, or more specifically *someone* surprising, for He uses Philistine commanders to do His bidding. *[pause]*

I mean think of it.

Here were the leaders of the archenemy of Israel, and the Lord used them to aid the future king of Israel, who would later defeat them time and time again. *[pause]*

It’s a good thing that these Philistine lords were discerning and outvoted Achish, and Achish’s folly didn’t mess up God’s plan.

But this just goes to show that God can use anything.

I mean he used a donkey to talk to someone,<sup>6</sup> so don’t you think he can use the earthly wisdom of Philistine commanders? *[pauseeee]*

Doesn’t God just love to surprise and startle?

He likes to confound the wise, surprise, and amaze us with the way He works.<sup>7</sup>

These surprising ways of God show us that God is nowhere near dull and boring.

Yes, He may work sometimes in the ordinary, but His surprising ways shake us out of our low view of Him, so that we stand amazed at His creativity and power. *[pause]*

Here is the Lord, showing off His power-packed wisdom, demonstrating that He can use the enemy thinking they are wise to propel His purposes forward for His own people.

God can surprise us by *who* He uses. *[pause]*

One commentator, Dale Ralph Davis gives this story...he says...

“A Christian woman, alone and out of food, was telling her plight to her heavenly Father and asking for her daily bread.

Somehow a neighbor, an agnostic or an atheist, overheard the woman praying and decided it was time for a little divine fun.

He went and purchased two loaves of bread and left them at her door.

Upon discovering them, the woman burst into a devout and grateful prayer of praise.

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<sup>6</sup> See Numbers 22:22-35.

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.



But her neighbor accosted her to demythologize [*demyth-o-lo-gize*] the incident, informing her that he had happened to hear her praying, that he bought the bread, and he had placed it on her step.

**It was not, then, God who had answered her prayer.**

But the lady was “armed”: “Oh, yes, it was the Lord who answered my prayer—even though he used the devil to do it.”<sup>8</sup> [*pause*]

**If He can use enemy commanders and atheists to fulfill His purposes, then who can He *not* use?**

Don’t ever count God out of a situation.

No situation is beyond His control, no circumstance too bleak, no incident too hopeless. [*pause*]

Unlike Achish, God’s hands are never tied.

**He’s never outvoted by others, so that He can’t do His own holy will. [*pauseeee*]**

Hasn’t God ever surprised you with who He used?

**Hasn’t He used an evil person’s intentions to do a good thing in your experience like He did with Joseph’s brothers?<sup>9</sup>**

Hasn’t He used someone in your life, who when you first met them, you never thought they would make an impact on your life?

That’s our God, who astonishes us constantly with His surprising providence. [*pauseeee*]

Not only did God surprise with *who* He used, but also *when* He worked. [*pause*]

**David is on his way to the battlefield, he’s among the other soldiers.**

His sword is ready, his armor is on, he’s getting mentally prepared for what’s to come, and all of a sudden: God intervenes.

**The Lord sends him home via the Philistine commanders, sort of at the last minute.**

This is, “Just in the nick of time providence.” [*pause*]

That’s how sometimes God likes to surprise.

He likes to surprise us at the last moment.

**He likes to work when you think it’s a done deal, and that there’s no chance of something else happening.**

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<sup>8</sup> Davis, D. R. (2000). *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (p. 306). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.

<sup>9</sup> See Genesis 50:28.

When everyone is just bracing themselves, waiting for the inescapable, God provides the way of escape. *[pause]*

Many of you know the teen ministry that we support called, “The Door”.

So often they experience this sort of thing.

They are in need of money or food or supplies for the ministry to continue on, and at the last moment, God provides.

He provides a bus driver when they need a bus driver.

He sends some money in the mail on the day that they need it.

He puts it on the heart of some organization to give them 20 chickens just when they need food.

The examples could go on and on of God’s surprising, last minute providence. *[pause]*

Has this ever happened to you?

At the last minute, God provided something.

In the nick of time, you heard news that changed everything. *[pause]*

God sometimes works using surprising providence, whether he surprises us with who He uses or when He works.

But why?

Why not just use people we would expect?

Why not just work before the last minute?

Because by surprising us, it causes us to see His glory and leads us to worship. *[pause]*

He shows off His power when He uses the enemy to unwittingly aid His people.

He shows off His power when everyone thinks it’s a lost cause, and He shows up. *[pause]*

O we of little faith!<sup>10</sup> We are such faithless people!

May we trust His surprising ways! *[pauseeee]*

*So we saw God’s silent and surprising providence, but thirdly, we see...*

### **III. God’s merciful providence.**

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<sup>10</sup> An allusion to what Jesus often says of us. See Luke 12:28 as an example (KJV).

A couple weeks ago, when we studied 1 Samuel 27, we saw that David's lack of faith and his fear of Saul led him into this position.

That is, he was in a position where he was en route to have to fight Saul and the Israelites because out of fear, he ran to find refuge among the Philistines.

So David's inconsistent faith put himself in this not-so-good position, yet what does God do?

God prevents David from going to the battle.

That's the mercy of God!

David didn't deserve to be taken out of this situation, yet God in His mercy providentially helped David escape it. *[pause]*

What love of God!

There are many times in our lives where in our sin and foolishness, we put ourselves in tough situations.

We really deserve to face the consequences of our sin, but our merciful God steps in and helps us to avoid those consequences.

Now He doesn't always do this, for sometimes He wants us to learn and grow from facing the consequences of our sin.

But there are other times where in mercy He wants us to learn and grow by seeing His loving mercy. *[pause]*

David could look back at this event and think, "Wow God, you were merciful! I deserved to go into that battle, yet you worked it so that I didn't have to!" *[pause]*

Think back on your own life.

Are there times where you did something foolish or something sinful, and you realized, "That could have turned out so bad, but God was merciful."

Praise Him!

What a merciful God that we have!

Trust Him even in situations that you did something foolish, for who knows whether God will show off His mercy?

It's always the right time to trust Him and look to Him. *[pause]*

We know that He's not obligated to be merciful, for we deserve the consequences of our sinfulness, but when He shows mercy, we fall to our knees in gratefulness and worship.

Are you grateful for when He shows mercy or do you take His mercy for granted? *[pause]*

*What a great God that we serve, and we see from this story of David that...*

**Sometimes God in His providence works in silent, surprising, and merciful ways in our lives.**

In what ways are you counting God out of a situation?

In what situations are you thinking, “God can’t do anything with this.”

Remember His silent, surprising, and merciful providence. *[pause]*

I find that in so many situations, we lack trust in God’s providence.

We think or say, “It’s hopeless.” Or, “Nothing good is going to come out of this.”

We mark things up as luck, chance, or coincidence.

We act like atheists in our minds, when we are followers of the Lord of the sovereign control of all things.

**Will you trust Him?**

Will you remember that He truly works all things together for good for those who love Him?<sup>11</sup>

Will you trust the One who in His silent providence quietly set all the details in place to bring Christ to the Cross to pay for our sins?

Will you trust the One who in His surprising providence stunningly used evil men killing His Son so that we could have life?

And will you trust the One who in His merciful providence lovingly sent Jesus to take our place, dying the death that we deserved? *[pause]*

While Achish thought he could say “I have found no fault” in David, it was actually Jesus, the better David, who Pilate could accurately say, “I find no fault in him.”<sup>12</sup>

**For the perfect Son of God was slain for our sins, so that we could be forgiven and receive eternal life.**

He’s the One we trust with the salvation of our souls, and He’s the One we trust everyday to work in our lives, though sometimes in silent, surprising, and merciful ways.

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<sup>11</sup> See Romans 8:28.

<sup>12</sup> See John 18:38.