

Can't Figure It Out - 2 Samuel 5:17-25

I. INTRODUCTION

A. James & Shelley's 5th

1. It was James & Shelley's 5th Wedding Anniversary.
2. Things were a bit tight, so Shelley, who was a *romantic*, got off work early, went to the store & bought fixin's for a nice candlelit dinner.
3. The *ever practical* James had been saving up to get her what *he thought* was a *special gift*.
 - a. Shelley had often remarked on how they needed a new vacuum.
 - b. The one they had was an old hand-me down that had seen better days.
 - c. So James had purchased a brand new vac.
 - e. He was so excited to give it to her.
4. When he walked into the front door of their apartment that evening after work, there was his beautiful bride, all dressed up, sitting at the dining room table, candles lit, and a beautiful place setting.
5. She said, "Happy Anniversary, Hon."
6. He grinned, "Happy 5th, Shell." Then he handed her the large gift-wrapped box & said, "For you!"
7. She set it down & tore the paper away to see the label for a vacuum cleaner.
 - a. She was surprised all right! But it wasn't the surprise Jim had hoped for.
 - b. It was shock! She said, "You bought a *vacuum*. For our *anniversary*, you got me an *appliance*."
 - c. James was confused – he *assumed* she'd be delighted with it.
 - d. After all, it's something she'd been asking for, and he'd picked out a really nice one.
8. The rest of the evening did not go as *either* of them had hoped.

B. The Danger of Assuming

1. James made a mistake common to many young husbands – he *assumed* he knew what his young wife wanted.
2. Such assumptions can be dangerous because men & women often think *differently*.
 - a. What seems practical & like common sense to a one can be read *totally differently* by the other.
 - b. *Successful* couples know you need to check in with each other *often* to make sure things haven't changed & they're still on the same page.
3. In marriage, there's a real danger in *assuming*.
4. The same is true on our relationship with God, as today's story illustrates . . .

II. TEXT

A. Set the Scene

1. David is now king over all Israel. He's conquered Jerusalem and made it the new capital.
2. For the past 8 years, the Philistines had dominated Israel; ever since crushing Israel's army in the Battle of Jezreel where Saul died.

3. But they realized a new Jewish King posed a threat to their control of the land.
4. That the new king was David made their concern all the greater.
5. It was under his military leadership years before that Israel had just about broken the Philistine grip on Israel.
6. They knew they needed to do something quick lest they once again lose their advantage.

B. Vs. 17-18

¹⁷Now when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. And David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. ¹⁸The Philistines also went and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim.

1. Though Jerusalem was David's new headquarters, he kept it secret from Israel's enemies until he'd had time to build up its defences.
2. Wanting to draw the Philistines away from the city, he marched his men to one of their old hiding places several miles to the west—the Cave of Adullam.
3. When David & his misfit army had first hid out there, they'd reinforced & made a refuge out of it.
4. The Philistines knew they couldn't attack the fortifications at Adullam because the setting strongly favored the defenders.
5. So they went to the Valley of Rephaim not far away. The parallel story in 1 Chronicles 14 says they began *raiding* the villages & towns there –
 - a. Trying to goad David into *leaving* his refuge & face them where *they* had the advantage.
 - b. This valley isn't very wide but it's flat & perfect for their chariots which had been so effective in the *previous conquest* in Jezreel.
6. David knew what their strategy was & what they were hoping he'd do.
7. What they didn't count on was what he DID do. We find that in v. 19 . . .

C. V. 19

¹⁹So David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?” And the LORD said to David, “Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand.”

1. David knew it would be *foolish* to take the enemy's bait.
2. But as the king God chose to lead His people, David understood he was to take his directions from God, not merely his own counsel & experience in battle.
3. So he called for the priest to come and inquire of God what they should do.
4. The answer was clear – “GO! The victory's certain.”
5. Last Sunday we saw one of the main evidences of David's back-sliding was his *failure* to seek God about what to do and where to go.
6. **When he returned** to the Lord, the *first thing* he did was seek God's counsel about his next step..
7. Though eight years have passed, he's still walking in that place of dependence on & submission to the Lord.
8. If he was taking his *own* counsel, he *never* would have moved against the Philistines at Rephaim because, according to man's wisdom, it was certain

defeat to do so.

D. Vs. 20-21

²⁰So David went to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there; and he said, “The LORD has broken through my enemies before me, like a breakthrough of water.” Therefore he called the name of that place Baal Perazim. ²¹And they left their images there, and David and his men carried them away.

1. I get a kick out of watching young children at the beach learn the lesson countless of their predecessors have learned;
 - a. No matter how elaborate, glorious, complex, or strong you build a sand castle,
 - b. When that inevitable wave comes, the castle's coming down.
2. That's the idea here - The victory was so quick & easy, it was like a stream of water breaking through a dirt wall.
3. David named the site where the battle began, Baal Perazim = “Lord of Breakthroughs.”
 - a. By this time in history, the word ‘Baal’ had become a generic label for ‘god.’
 - b. Literally, it meant ‘lord/master.’
 - c. 200 years ago, if you said “God” nearly everyone in this Country would immediately think of the God of the Bible, the Christian & Jewish God.
 - d. Today, the word ‘god’ is so generic it means different things, depending on who you're talking to.
 - e. Though Baal was originally the chief deity of the ancient Canaanites, the word eventually just meant “Master” & was applied to different deities.
 - f. David uses it in that generic way here to memorialize God's favor in allowing Israel to smash through the enemy lines like water through broken dam.

4. When the Philistines came to Rephaim, they brought their idols with them, thinking they'd provide a powerful advantage.
 - a. Israel made a similar error a hundred years before when they carried the ark of the covenant into battle against the Philistines.
 - b. It was nothing but superstition & God corrected them by allowing their defeat & the capture of the ark.
 - c. Here at Rephaim, it was a case of “turn-about-is-fair-play.” The superstitious Philistines were so badly whupped they ran for their lives, leaving their idols behind.

5. The men of Israel gathered them up, then as 1 Chr. 14 says, ***burned*** them.

6. When the Philistines captured the ark a century before, they took it back to their main temple as a trophy.
 - a. God taught them Who was really in control by sending a plague that ravaged the city.
 - b. When they sent it to another of their cities, the plague broke out there too.
 - c. ***Wherever*** they sent it, the plague followed.
 - d. Finally they sent it back to Israel & the plague lifted.

7. I'll bet the Philistines expected the same sort of thing would happen now that Israel had burned *their* idols.
8. Certainly their gods would be *steamed* at such blasphemy & would allow Philistia to *trounce* them. So . . .

E. Vs. 22-25

22Then the Philistines went up once again and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim.

1. 'The Battle of Rephaim - Part II' • But now – take careful note of this -

23Therefore David inquired of the LORD, and He said, “You shall not go up; circle around behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees. 24And it shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall advance quickly. For then the LORD will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines.”

2. An interesting thing happens at mid-day in this location.
 - a. A breeze from the Mediterranean sweeps up the plain toward the central highlands.
 - b. As it does, it sets the large leaves of these trees fluttering.
 - c. They make a sound a bit like marching feet.
3. The Philistines, emboldened by the thought their angry gods would empower them to defeat the Israelites for abusing their idols,
 - a. Arrayed their formation to counter the attack David had used so successfully before.
 - b. Since it had proven so effective before, they assumed David would do the same thing again.
 - c. But whenever you set your formation to deal with a threat *from one direction*,
 - d. You open up weaknesses toward an attack from other directions.
4. God knew what the Philistines had planned, & sent David around to attack from the back where the enemy was most vulnerable.
5. The key to springing the trap was that Israel needed to be able to *come close* to the enemy position *without being heard*.
6. So they came from the same direction as the trees, when the breeze from the Med set the leaves rustling.
7. The Philistines didn't hear them until it was too late.

25And David did so, as the LORD commanded him; and he drove back the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.

8. Say the first part of that verse with me . . .
9. Victory was theirs because of this: “David did so, as the LORD commanded him.”
10. That's one of the great keys to success – To do as the Lord commands.
 - a. How very different our lives would be if this could be said about everything – “He/she did as the Lord commanded.”
 - b. How different the world would be if this was the operative norm – “They did as God said.”

11. Because David followed God's instructions, Israel was again victorious, & the Philistines were driven out of a huge part of the region they'd taken in the Battle of Jezreel.
12. These 2 battles at Rephaim were the turning point in Israel's long war with her long time nemesis.
13. From here on, the Philistines are steadily removed from Israel & confined to a narrowing strip of land along the coast.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Don't Assume*

1. As we end this morning, I want to ask you to take special note of **v. 23**.
 2. The Philistines appeared to pull ***an exact repeat*** of their prior attack.
 3. David had already asked God what to do & God had told him to go straight up & attack.
 4. Such a great victory was secured, it's easy to assume the ***same strategy*** would be used.
 - a. Why bother asking God ***again; surely*** He's going to give the same reply.
 - b. ***Common sense*** dictates we've already discovered HOW God works & what He wants done.
 - c. So why bother asking? Let's take the initiative & go for it!
 5. That's what most people would do. But it's not what David did, & it's a good thing too.
 - a. Because if he'd failed to seek God for a new plan,
 - b. If he'd ***assumed*** the same command from His Captain applied, He'd have led his men into a trap.
 6. David understood something important about his relationship with God –
 - a. He knew God didn't just want him to come for orders;
 - b. He wanted David to come to Him—for Him; for ***fellowship, friendship, sharing***.
 - c. David understood God wasn't just ***using*** him as a ***pawn***, as a ***tool*** to get things done.
 - d. He knew God loved him & wanted to pour on Him mind-blowing favor & blessing.
 7. So he didn't see going to God for direction as a bother, as difficult, or as a waste of time.
 8. It was a ***delight!*** As so many of the Psalms he wrote make clear – David saw fellowship with God as the sweetest thing of all.
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9. In high school, a bunch of the buds got together to play football.
 - a. It was full on tackle, but without any pads.
 - b. Yes – we were idiots – as the numerous injuries that resulted from it proved.
 - c. But we kept at it because we had such a great time.
 - d. The best part wasn't the plays we ran, although that was fun. The best part was the ***huddles***.
 - f. There was no time limit—& we usually spent a while on both sides deciding what we were going to do.
 - g. Because there were no pads, we had to change the way we played & made

- it far more about *strategy* than brute force.
- h. So we huddled & made elaborate plans.
 - i. That's what was the most fun –
 - 1) the jokes we told,
 - 2) the ribbing we gave each other,
 - 3) the praise for a good run or catch,
 - 4) the sarcasm when someone would mess up;
 - k. If it wasn't for the fun of the huddles, we never would have played.
10. The great joy of the Christian life is *huddling w/God*, getting our plays from Him.
- a. Sure it's fun to blast through some spiritual obstacle,
 - b. Or score a goal by leading someone to Christ.
 - c. But the sweetest thing of all, is the huddle – it's hanging with God, enjoying Him & letting Him enjoy us.
11. Christian – it's all about the huddle – it's all about staying in intimate touch with God, checking in with Him *constantly* for direction for today, for this hour, for this moment.
12. Yesterday's manna is no good for today.
- a. You can't live off yesterday's experience of God. It has to be fresh every day.
 - b. What happened to manna that was left over from Monday to Tuesday? It got wormy & stank.
 - c. They had to collect *fresh manna* from God each day – & so must we.
13. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day, our daily bread." Then He said, "I am the Bread of Life."

B. Can't Figure It Out

- 1. I titled this message, "Can't Figure It Out" because that's what we sometimes say about God & what He's doing in our lives.
 - 2. God does something *big*, teaches us a *major* lesson, & we think we finally have things straight – that life is going to be a breeze from here on out because we've figured God out.
 - 3. But then, *everything* we thought we knew is thrown upside down & God becomes a huge mystery again.
 - 4. God doesn't like boxes; He has a terrible aversion to the safe little pigeon-holes we put Him in.
 - 5. You see, the problem with boxes is that we tend to store them away.
 - 6. God won't sit quietly on the shelf we assign Him – He has a way of breaking out of our boxes.
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- 7. One of the things people notice when reading all 4 of the Gospels is how Jesus never healed people the *same way* twice.
 - a. Each healing was unique. He did that for good reason.
 - b. The goal of the disciple is to be just like the rabbi.
 - c. Jesus knew if He used the same method when healing, the disciples might think it was the words He spoke or the exact position of His hand, or some other thing he did that was the key to healing.
 - d. They would think the power of God comes through some formula.

- e. By always changing the mechanics of how He healed, Jesus made it clear healing doesn't happen by some special ritual; it's the grace of God Who is HERE-NOW!
- 8. Some years ago, it was a big thing for Christians to attend a healing clinic, seminar, where you could go and learn how to operate in the healing ministry.
 - a. People were taught how to hold their hands, how to pray, how to diagnose what the need was.
 - b. A little less time at such seminars and a lot more time reading the Word would make it clear all that is silliness.
- 9. God heals! Our need is to check in with Him to see what He wants to do.

C. Bill

- 1. Bill was a committed agnostic. He didn't believe in God and had no interest whatsoever in dealing with spiritual things.
- 2. Several of Bill's relative were believers who prayed for him often.
- 3. One year, his Aunt Maggie was diagnosed with cancer & given a little over 6 months to live.
 - a. The Christians in the family rallied round her and began praying for her healing.
 - b. With only 2 months left before she was expected by her doctors to die, she made a complete & dramatic recovery – a complete healing that all admitted was a miracle – all except Bill.
 - c. Though his relatives tried to convince him he held to the belief it was just some fluke; maybe the original diagnosis had been wrong.
 - d. Nothing would persuade him.
- 4. Four months after Aunt Maggie's healing, Bill's 19 year old niece Kaitlyn, was in a terrible car accident that left her in a coma.
 - a. A freshman in college, Kaitlyn was a straight A student, and an All-State goalie on her school's soccer team.
 - b. Though young, she was one of those remarkably bold believers who had a genuine, solid walk with God.
 - c. 5 of her fellow students in the Campus Christian group she led to Christ.
 - d. **Again** the relatives gathered in her hospital room to pray; they prayed round the clock.
 - e. But 2 days later, her heart stopped and they were unable to revive her.
- 5. The Christians in the family were **baffled** –
 - a. Why would God heal Aunt Maggie but not heal Kaitlyn?
 - b. Maggie was older & had lived a long, good life.
 - c. Kaitlyn had such promise; her whole life was in **front** of her.
- 6. In their grief over Kaitlyn's death, some of them exchanged angry words, giving expression to their frustration with God for not performing as expected, as Aunt Maggie's healing had led them to believe He would do for Kaitlyn.
- 7. But at the funeral, it all became clear. Bill was there
 - a. He listened as many of Kaitlyn's friends got up and talked about how her life and made a difference in theirs.
 - b. He heard Kaitlyn's pastor give a message about the hope of the believer because of the work of Christ.

- c. The pastor finished by reading a letter Kaitlyn had written 2 years before after coming home from Summer camp where she'd re-committed herself to the Lord.
 - d. It was written for such a moment as this – just in case she ever were to die suddenly, she wanted everyone to know what her life was about and how much she hoped they'd come to know God's love & forgiveness.
8. After the funeral, the relatives noticed Bill had gone up to talk to the pastor privately.
- a. They all assumed Bill was arguing with him, angry about Kaitlyn's death and attacking the bold way the pastor had used the funeral to share the Gospel.
 - b. But as they watched, they saw Bill bow his head, the pastor put his hand on his shoulder and lead him in a prayer.
 - c. Several of them quietly walked over to hear what was going on.
 - d. They arrived to hear Bill repeating the words of a sinner's prayer.
 - e. When he said Amen and looked up, there were tears streaming down his cheeks but a smile on his face.
 - f. He turned to his relatives and said, "When Aunt Maggie was healed – I chalked it up to chance, a fluke, whatever. I refused to attribute it to the power of God.
 - g. But when Kaitlyn died, I realized how short & uncertain life is and it scared me. No matter what I did to rid myself of fear, I couldn't.
 - h. I was bothered by that because if when I die there's nothing more, that's the end of the story, what's there to be afraid of? That I could not shake my fear of death made me dig deeper. I realized that deep down inside I knew that death isn't the end – that there's more after death.
 - i. Then today when I heard Kaitlyn's letter, it all became clear. I realized God is real, what Jesus did was for me."
9. In our thinking – it's a miracle of healing that convinces the lost while the death of a young one raises all kinds of questions about His love & power.
- a. And for some, that's the way it is.
 - b. But for others like Bill, it's the other way round.
10. God knows best. The key for us is to stay connected to Him.