

Life happens so fast... and it changes so fast... And when we find ourselves settling down into a season of celebration or rest... it can become very easy to have our attention move away from God and his desires... towards the very good things that we're experiencing or looking forward to.

David is about to inherit his kingdom and enter into this new season... But before he does... anything and everything is going to happen that will attempt to derail him... Once again though, he shows that he will be a different kind of king... He will be a king that is concerned for the Lord... who continually goes to the Lord... EVEN, if God chooses to take his time in sorting out the details and revealing his plans.

Today, I want to look at this period of time immediately following Saul's death as David steps into his kingship... and I want us to see two points –

- 1) The Machinations of Worldly Power  
(OR Scheming your way to the top)
- 2) Leading in the Kingdom of God

After Saul's death, David inquires of the Lord- *OK, what do I do now? Where do I go?* The Lord tells him to go to Hebron... So David takes his whole entourage... and when he arrives, the other leaders there, they recognize this is significant... and they anoint David as King of Judah. Not all of Israel yet... King of Judah...

What happens next, is yet again, a drawn out example of the contrast between the house of Saul and the house of David... even AFTER Saul's death.

Not all of Saul's sons are dead... there is one, a man who is about 40 years of age, named Ish-Bosheth... who is not very impressive... but we're told another man, who IS impressive, Abner... sets Ish-Bosheth up to be king.

We've seen Abner before in the story... he was the commander of Saul's army. He's Saul's cousin. He was present when David killed Goliath... a regular part of Saul's inner team... Abner is the strength remaining in Saul's house... and he devises the plan to prop up Ish-Bosheth as the king of Israel, continuing Saul's house... The problem is, remember, God said, Saul's house would not continue to hold the throne... so, we're headed for a problem here. Ish-Bosheth becomes king of the other tribes of Israel, and Saul's home tribe of Benjamin.

David should be stepping into his era, his reign... and now there's an imposter, a rival, challenging him... and this is going to take some time to sort out.

## 10.17.21 – 2 Samuel 2-4

**Title: “Exploitation, Violence, and a New King”**

**From the Series, *David: The Once and Future King***

**Phil Letizia**

We are looking at the life of King David. Last week we came to the half way line in David’s story, and the half way point of the biblical account we finished 1 Samuel, and began 2 Samuel...It was the turning point because Saul has died. His sons, including Jonathan are also dead... And, as we saw, David’s reaction to this new reality by grieving and mourning the loss is quite unusual. Remember, Saul had been hunting David for a decade. He was driven to madness over David...

So, now, what happens? Well... as we just read, this portion of 2 Samuel is wild. Chapters 2, 3, and 4, are full of sabotage, political subterfuge, scheming, backstabbing, civil war, gladiatorial combat... It’s all here.

Imagine, after years of struggling... running and hiding... the threat of Saul is gone. One would think David would be letting out a long sigh of relief... the burden lifted off his shoulders. Now, finally... he can step into the future God had promised him... The time is now... all has been fulfilled... right? Not so fast my friend... *As Eugene Peterson says... we still got some boneheads in the picture.*

We’ve all had times in our lives where we’ve come through a painful season. Maybe we’re healthy for the first time in a long time... perhaps we finally graduated from law school, or a medical program... Maybe you’re retiring after many years of hard, and sometimes grueling and unrewarding work.

I just a few months back, defended my PhD Dissertation. Six years I have been working on this... and of course you build this event up in your mind, you look forward to it... you can hardly imagine that the day will ever come... And then it does... and you know what? As great as it is... the next day was still Wednesday. My world didn’t radically change...It was almost disorienting how little things changed.

Some of you have entered the retired years... it’s something you look forward to and build up... but then when it comes... being retired can bring its own challenges and problems you never foresaw. It can be uncomfortable and disorienting in its own way. It certainly can take some time to get used to.

Then, and we didn't read this part due to time... Abner and a group of his soldiers... come across some of David's soldiers at Gibeon. Not just any soldiers of David, but this is Joab and his brothers... *the sons of Zeruah*. These are David's nephews... Strong, fighting men who have been with David for a long time.

They come together at Gibeon, and the best way to describe what happens is that they choose 12 fighters from each side and tell them to engage in gladiator games... In the ancient world, representative combat was a practice. You would choose a champion to fight on your behalf... here each side has chosen 12 fighters... Now, whether this was meant to be a competition, or it was meant to be deadly, I'm not sure... What we know, is that it gets out of hand quickly and becomes super-deadly. All 24 are killed in a bloodbath... and it turns into a full-scale battle... One of David's nephews, Joab's brother is killed by Abner, who is trying to run for his life... finally Abner cries out for a truce... and everyone departs to fight another day... but now blood has been shed. Brothers have been killed... It's bad.

Chapter 3 begins by telling us that this leads to a long war between the house of David and the house of Saul... We had that before when Saul was alive... now it's still going on for years after Saul's death! As this war goes on though, *David's house is getting stronger, and Saul's house is fading*.

Abner, continues to make himself the real power in Saul's house... and for whatever reason, whether it was jealousy or insecurity, the puppet-king, Ish-Bosheth, accuses Abner of taking advantage of one of Saul's concubines...

A serious charge, and Abner does not take it well... he responds in 3:8 – *“Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not give you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman...”* – then Abner flips – *“God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and Judah...”* And the exchange ends as we read, *“Ish-Bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.”*

Abner then, follows through and defects to the other side... The most powerful man remaining in Saul's house makes arrangements to come over to David's side... And, David, perhaps surprisingly, receives him. They make a covenant together... Abner will now work to politically maneuver the rest of Israel over to David's control.... All is well! Not so fast...

Joab, and his brothers... the dudes that like to brawl were out raiding... they come back, unaware of what has taken place... but they hear, Abner is in town... you know, the guy that killed one of our brothers... Joab is furious with David for even considering working with Abner... So, without David's knowledge, he goes after Abner... He sends messengers for Abner and he's brought back and Joab says, hey, let's go talk over here quietly, privately... and when they're alone, Joab strikes him in the stomach... and kills Abner.

Word of this travels back to David and he condemns Joab... He curses Joab... he lays the fault completely with him... He makes Joab and his brothers to publicly mourn for Abner... But, he keeps Joab around... which is going to be a problem down the road...

The section ends with David saying, a prince and a great man has died (speaking of Abner)... I have been gentle, even though I am king... but these men, my nephews... they are more severe than I... *The LORD repay the evildoer with wickedness.*"

Chapter 4 then tells us of Ish-Bosheth's death... the weak king of Saul's house... Two of Sauls' men who fought with him... perhaps thinking it's time to defect to David, get on the right side of this civil war that's coming to an end... They burst into the king's rooms and slaughter him...

And then, they do what a lot of people in the last few weeks have done with David... they bring the head to David... thinking that he would be pleased by this... Remember, the young Amalekite did this with Saul's crown... Joab has done this with Abner... now these two are doing it with Ish-Bosheth... Each time, David responds by saying, No, no, no... this is not the way. It's not right... You boneheads... are taking these special men... these "righteous" men, and harming them, thinking it will bring me pleasure.... And in each case, David punishes the culprits.

Now, let's take a step back... Everyone around David, on both sides is playing out their own version of a James Bond movie... Or a political thriller... All these different people think they are helping David by killing someone, or... desperately trying to hold onto some failed dream of Saul's legacy... Abner is a schemer, an opportunist with political savviness. Joab is a brute... a prototypical strong man who kills first and asks questions later.

What are we to make of all of this? Why is this all necessary?

Eugene Peterson wrote, *“why is so much space in the Bible, three chapters in this case, devoted to these boneheads?”*

In fact, it seems to be a running theme throughout God’s story... throughout the movement of God’s kingdom and Church.

Here we have the Sons of Zeriuah causing all kinds of problems for David.. playing defense against him...

It reminds me a bit of another set of sons... the Sons of Thunder...

Remember Jesus’ disciples... another group of people who didn’t often have Jesus’ best interest in mind... James and John arguing over who will be the greatest in Jesus’ administration...

And Jesus is like, “What on earth!?” You think this is what I’m about?”

Peter cutting off the ear of the servant in the garden of Gethsemane...

“what on earth? You think this is what I’m all about?”

Judas upset over the expensive perfume used to anoint Jesus...

“We could have given this to the poor! When really he wanted it for himself...”

Jesus continually says... man, you guys don’t get it...

This is about the Lord of Lords, dwelling among you... and you don’t see it.

David, is saying... you guys don’t get it...

This is about the Lord’s anointed... this is about the Lord doing what he desires in the world... with his chosen people.

All the machinations of worldly power... all the scheming to get to the top... to build something for yourself... none of that works. None of it is of the Lord. And in fact... all of it has ruined you...

This is the way God works. This is who he works through. The bible is filled with page after page of people that seemingly do not deserve for an instant to be included in God’s plans, let alone in God’s Holy word... But here they are for all of God’s people to see.

Why? Because that’s where we often see ourselves... We see people maneuvering for power, trying to position themselves for gain... Trying to be socially more relevant... Maybe if I can just get a little ahead of this other person, my colleague... my neighbor...

It’s not just an ancient Israel problem... it’s not just a problem with the disciples of Jesus, who were scheming to get to the top... It’s been a problem in the church for centuries.

In the Middle Ages, Pope Urban II put a plan in motion to rescue the Holy Sepulchre, a historic Christian site in Jerusalem, from the control of the turks... At the Council of Clermont, he urged Christians to take up arms and capture the site by force... He even offered remission of sins and eternal life to anyone who took up the sword... Military conquest. the spoils of war... Christians would gain all of it... and the first Crusades were underway. The battle cry of the Crusaders became, "*God Wills it.*" Over the next year, soldiers moved across the Rhine Valley, killing thousands of Jews actually and Muslims.... All because Christians were attempting to rescue and usher in the kingdom of God. Now, that may seem extreme... But it's actually very similar to David and Saul's civil war, 2,000 years prior.

You see... sometimes it's easier when the enemy is easily definable. We read about Goliath... we get it... he's the clear-cut enemy, the giant standing across the battlefield... But in this passage... the enemies, are... all Israelites? The enemies are family... Joab and his brothers... Old allies and friends... Abner...

How do we make sense of this all in our own lives? Many times, in my life I can say with confidence, that I have gotten out in front of God. Attempting to accomplish something I thought was good or right... Thinking that "God wills it..." Only to find that I actually don't know what God's will is... because I had entirely neglected to seek his will... or allow him to patiently lead me.

How many times a day do I start to let my mind think of all the ways I'm going to do what needs to be done. To do what's right... to be busy and achieve... To even serve the Lord... like Martha? We tend to get ahead of Jesus... and before you know it, we've taken out our sword and cut off the ear of another.

And then we hear Jesus say... "what are you doing? You think this is what I'm about?" All this striving? All this trying to secure for yourself safety and security... you want to win the world for me? And you're scheming your way to the top... raiding others and claiming you know what's best? Not so fast my friend...

- 2) There's a different way to lead in the kingdom of God. There's a different way to live in the kingdom of God.

Again, David shows us this different way... The very first verse of chapter 2... before ALL of this mess. All of this civil war and political intrigue occurs... verse

one says... *“After this (the death of Saul), David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said to him, “Go up.”*

And in one verse, tells us David’s approach... He is concerned with the LORD. He inquires of the LORD. What should I do? Where do you want me to go? And the LORD answers him.

No one else in these three chapters, save for David, does this. They all... follow their own will, and their own schemes... David knows that he will need the LORD’s wisdom... and so he seeks it. This is the key difference between the House of David and the House of Saul... David, regularly lives with a dependence upon the LORD... Saul and his house take matters into their own hands.

For David, he knows that even though He is King... Israel is the LORD’s. The Earth is the LORD’s and everything in it. David is just a viceroy... just a steward of what God has given him... and this preserves him through the crisis. It also leads him to continually show grace.

Later in chapter 4, after all the dust has settled... All of Saul’s house is destroyed... we hear mention of one that remains... a son of Jonathan, a young boy with a disability, named Mephibosheth... A few chapters from now we will see David, longing to show anyone from Saul’s house and family kindness... to show them grace... David’s dependence on the LORD does not lead him to take up the machinations of the world, but to extend grace even to his enemies.

If you’re familiar with David’s story... you know, there is coming a time, when David will take things into his own hands. Where he will fall prey to the trappings of temptation and worldly power... We even get a glimpse in this section, early in chapter 3, where the writers lists all of the wives and sons that David has bore. Some he took because he loved beautiful women. Some he took because they were politically advantageous to take...

But having a bunch of sons from a bunch of women... where do you think that will lead? What type of problem will that raise? How about a succession problem? Who exactly, is the first born?? And this will come back to HAUNT David in ways he could never imagine.

You see, the typical human approach to change, to the turning of events, or an opportunity... is to seize it. To choose it and take control...

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are given everything they could need to live a dependent life on God. To be creative and excel, all while being dependent for his provision... And yet, the serpent presents his view of reality to them—convincing them that what God has given is not enough... that in fact, what they desire and want— their will could bring about a better future than whatever God has planned... In the end, they choose their own will over God's.

A day finally came though... when a Son of David... from his line, a Messiah... would also find himself in a garden... this time however, unlike Adam and Eve, he would not give in to his own will... but instead, would deoedently submit himself, and do the will of His father.

David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD directed Him.

Even greater than this, the LORD Jesus Christ inquired of His Father...

and accomplished the will of the His Father so that you and I can participate in His purposes for the world today and for all eternity.

Ish-Bosheth, Sauls' son, the puppet king—his name actually means, “Man of Shame.”... The story is about our shameful tendencies leading us away from God... yet, because the truly righteous man Jesus Christ, was shamed on our behalf... we now live as sons and daughters of God.

We do not have to be governed by exploitation, like the Abner's of the world... or violence, like the Joab's of the world... we are governed by Jesus Christ.

Some of you here today, might be entering a really good season in life...

and you're ready – you're fired up to make some moves... and the LORD may be asking you to wait... to be patient... to let him clear the way for you.

Some of us might be in a hard season... and we have boneheads around us that will not leave us be... and God may be bringing you to a place of utter dependence... to patiently wait for him to clear the way for you...

Leading and living in the kingdom of God is to believe that God's plans end in Jesus Christ. His death, resurrection, and his coming again... So let's wait with patience, as he clears the way for us to see his will and purposes clearly.

Amen. Let's Pray.