

Rebellion Within the King's House

2 Samuel 15:1-37

The Sixteenth Sermon on Second Samuel

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The Lord Jesus Christ once responded to the accusations of religious elite that he was casting out demons by the power of the devil by saying, “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (Matt. 22:25). Not only is that true in the spiritual realm but we all know it is true in our temporal lives. A couple cannot come to an agreement on a big decision. Surviving siblings have an estate to inherit and manage. A team that is divided in its loyalty to its coach. A nation divided over slavery, as Abraham Lincoln used Jesus’ words in one of his speeches.

What we see in 2 Samuel 15 is the division within David’s house but also within the tribes of Israel. It’s what the Lord said would happen in chapter 12 because of David’s sin and what we’ve seen come true in chapters 13-14. And you can see clearly that the focus is on two characters: Absalom and David, son and father. And what they’re actions reveal to us are their hearts, and in them, a picture of the two kinds of hearts of humanity. There is an unbelieving heart and there is a believing heart, and that’s what I want to see here this morning, before I conclude with how this reveals to us the person and Jesus Christ.

1. *A Wicked Heart*
2. *A Wrestling Heart*

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May the Holy Spirit lead us into the truth of his Word today.

A Wicked Heart

How could David's own son rebel against him not only as his father but as his king? Behind all the political machinations and maneuverings, we see *a wicked heart*. We have to always remember what Scripture says about sin in general and our sins in particular. For example, this story illustrates for us that dreadful saying of the prophet Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). That's why Absalom does what he does. So he's been in Jerusalem two years, shunned by his father David, as 14:28 says, no doubt plotting a *coup d'etat*. Now he gets to work.

Power

First, he **got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him** (v. 1). In all the stories about Israel wanting a king, and then in the stories of their kings Saul, David, and now Absalom trying to be king, which Old Testament passage have we turned to over and over again? Deuteronomy 17. And one of the things the Lord warned Israel about when they would have a king was that "he must not acquire many horses for himself" (Deut. 17:16; cf. 1 Sam. 8:11). Absalom wants to act like a worldly king; and people are actually following him! Our hearts are wicked too.

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Politics

How did he get people to follow him? That's the second detail. He not only used the power of military, but he used the persuasion of politics. We read that **Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate**, that is, just outside Jerusalem as people were traveling into it. Absalom particularly was on the lookout for the desperate and disaffected—isn't that what politicians are good at finding and rousing? **And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?"** In other words, "What party are you?" **And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel"** (v. 2). Did you catch that? Remember that before David came to power there was the tribe of Judah that was loyal to David and the rest of Israel loyal to Saul. Absalom was on the lookout for those not from Judah. And if a person was from another tribe and had some dispute he would pull out his best, "I feel your pain" empathetic voice: **"See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you"** (v. 3). It reminds me of the 1972 movie with Robert Redford, "The Candidate." He starts off telling people the truth but as he is being decimated in the polls he changes to what people want to hear. His slogan becomes generic: "There's got to be a better way." It means nothing because he never explains what that better way is. And after he wins, he asks his campaign manager, "What do we do now?" Then the movie ends. Absalom is a great politician who preys on people, pretends to be a helping hand, and then props himself up: **"Oh that I were judge in the land!**

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Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice” (v. 4). And he made himself out to be the common man’s king, as instead of people bowing to him **he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him** (v. 5). And in doing all this **Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel** (v. 6).

Piety

The third thing he does is to sprinkle in a little religion to show off his piety. Notice what he says to David: **“Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, ‘If the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the Lord’”** (vv. 7–8) But as is so often the case, religion was being used as a prop to get the people to shout out, **“Absalom is king at Hebron!”** (v. 10) And it worked then and it works now! The end of verse 12 drives it home in terms any pollster would love: **And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing** (v. 12).

A Wrestling Heart

So Absalom is using power, politics, and piety to steal the hearts of the people of Israel and to seize the king’s throne. Now it’s time for David to mount his white hero’s horse and come to the rescue. Wait, where is he? Children, the Old Testament people like David are not meant for us to think of them like

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superheroes. There's no Mr. Incredible, no Superman, no Optimus Prime here. Instead, what we see in David is that while he is a believer in the Lord he is also a sinner like Absalom. And what happens in us who believe but who are also sinful? We struggle with doubt and temptation in our hearts. What we see in David is a *wrestling heart*, a believing yet struggling heart. In other words, David is not Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is still to come.

Wrestling with Faith

So Absalom is doing his thing but where is David and what is he doing? He's told of the people's change in loyalty in verse 13 and what does he say in response? **"Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword"** (v. 14). Then the narrator adds: **So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house** (vv. 16–17). Where is the faithful young man who stood toe-to-toe with Philistia's champion? Where is the brave and faithful leader of Saul's special ops? Where is the triumphant king who conquered Jerusalem? He seems to be faithless here.

But look at who is full of faith. As he stood at the last house on the way out of Jerusalem and watched his followers pass him by, we read that there were many Gentiles: **and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six**

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hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king (v. 18). And David says to **Ittai the Gittite**, “**Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home,**” and again he says, “**Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you**” (vv. 19, 20). Notice the faith of this foreigner: “**As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be**” (v. 21). The ironic thing is that while David’s son rejects David, a Gentile clings to David. While David’s own reject him, outsiders stick close to him. I’ll come back to this in a moment.

Expressing Faith

And then we do see David’s faith as evidenced by his works. Notice who also decided to leave the city of God and the house of God: **Abiathar** the high priest and **Zadok...with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God** (v. 24). Uh oh! Remember 1 Samuel 4 and how Hophni and Phinehas the high priest’s sons took the Ark out of the tabernacle to use it as a magic rabbit’s foot against the Philistines? What happened as a result? It was taken by the Philistines and not recovered until 2 Samuel 6 under David. The priests are doing the same thing! But David shows us that he is a man of faith in telling them, “**Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place**” (v. 25). If the Lord

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wants David in the city with the Ark, the Lord will make it happen. That's faith, trusting in the Lord despite your present circumstances. And while we are seeing the Lord's judgment on his house as 2 Samuel 12 said would come, and while we see David wrestling with doubt and temptation, he is living out his faith. So the Ark goes back down into the city while **David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered** (v. 30).

Conclusion

So here we see wicked Absalom and wrestling David. We see evil triumphing over good. But I thought David was a type of Jesus Christ, his greater Son? It's important to understand that men like David who point forward to Christ do so not only in positive ways but also in negative ways. It's not just that David was a king but Jesus is a greater king or that David defeated Goliath but Jesus defeated the Devil. When David sins, we see that he is not the Christ, and in his sin we are pointed to the Sinless One.

So the once brave and faith-full David now admits defeat and retreats. But in this we see Jesus Christ for us. Jesus Christ is a king who protects and preserves us against every enemy. We know the hymn of Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." After describing how Satan is the greatest enemy on earth, a modern translation says this of Jesus in stanza 2:

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One,

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Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this?
Jesus Christ it is.
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.

And who are we that Jesus protects and preserves? We also see a type of the work of Jesus Christ here in that like David, when Jesus came to his own, his own did not receive him as John 1 says. Yet, like the Gentiles in this story who stick close to David, when the Greater David would come he would be received by the nations did.

Whose heart do you have today, Absalom's or David's? If you are rebelling against God like Absalom, God warns you that your judgment is coming but he also commands you to repent and believe that Jesus Christ will protect you from that judgment. If you are wrestling like David, our Lord Jesus Christ promises to continue defending you from all your accusers and to bring you one day into his eternal presence where there is no doubt, where there is no sin, where there is no wrestling, only embracing. Amen.