

The King Defeats Sheba - 2 Samuel 20:1-26

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Introduction

The rumblings of an earthquake are being felt in the land of the Jews. The men of Israel feel they have been slighted by the men of Judah. When they brought their complaint it was met with a fierce reply. The paragraph just before our text this evening says this,

41 Then all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, "Why have our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, and all David's men with him?" 42 All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king is our close relative. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?" 43 And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, "We have ten shares in the king, and in David also we have more than you. Why then did you despise us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?" But the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

Israel and Judah are standing face to face and the crackling earthquake is rumbling beneath them. David's example of forgiveness and grace is being ignored. The cracks in the pavement have become deep crevasse's. Will men from either side recall the 20,000 dead they just buried from Absalom's rebellion? Will David be able to calm the people on either side? Or will the kingdom finally be brought together to stand with one another before God and against his enemies?

With these questions in mind we look down into our Bible's at the book of 2 Samuel, Chapter 20 and verse 1. God's word says this,

Worthless

20 Now there happened to be there a worthless man, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said,

"We have no portion in David,

and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse;

every man to his tents, O Israel!"

2 So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

We have our answer don't we? Out of the trouble in our last chapter Sheba, the son of Bichri arises as the man of action. He starts his rebellion the same way Saul (1 Sam 13:3) and Absalom (2 Sam 15:10) did theirs, by trumpets call. His one detractor that his followers might want to consider...he is worthless.

After all of the arguing over who owned, or had rights to, what part of David, his invitation to rebellion is strange at best. "We have no portion" or "inheritance" in David. What? This is classic, "if I can't have my way, I'm taking my ball and going home". Bearing with on another is definitely not on his list. What happened to unity and love? Forgiveness and grace? There will be none found here with Sheba. Every

man to his tent...If we can't have all of the king, we'll have none of him. Somewhat more surprising is the reaction of the men of Israel. They go right along with him. Leaving God's anointed king to follow one more to their liking. Perhaps one who will pander to their needs instead of Judah's. Maybe this one will invite all of us to walk across the Jordan with him.

Cracks in the kingdom are being revealed.

But our men from Judah, followed God's anointed king back to Jerusalem. David is the rightful king and he will take his place on the throne in Jerusalem. He has been gone too long and needs to set some things straight.

God's word says this in verse three,

Widowed

3 And David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.

These passage seems strange at first read, doesn't it? Why here at the beginning of Sheba's rebellion are we hearing about ten of David's concubines? Why are they important to our story? And last, but not least, why have they but "shut up" or "put away" until the day of their death? You have to go back in our story a little way to see what's going on here.

Remember, Absalom's counselor Ahithophel? Remember the counsel he gave Absalom after he set himself up as king in Jerusalem? He said this in chapter 16,

"Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened." 22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

David had left these women "to keep the house" and Absalom had used them to show he was now in control of Jerusalem. Not only had he done this, but he had made it known to all by doing so on the roof. David has come back to Jerusalem to his throne and the first order of business is to set things right with his concubines. He can no longer go in to them himself and neither will anyone else. He has them shut up. One of the many sad consequences of his sin with Bathsheba is that these women will live out the rest of their days alone.

We have seen a new rebellion by a worthless man and now we see women forced to live out their lives as widows. Some cracks in the kingdom are being healed and still more are being revealed.

God's word says this in verse four,

Waylaid

4 Then the king said to Amasa, "Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself." 5 So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him.

Amasa had been given command over all of David's armies to ensure the support of Judah and possibly to get back at Joab for killing Absalom against the king's wishes. Here David gives his first order to his new commander. Gather the troops in three days and be here with them. It seems he took the order somewhat seriously and left to do the king's bidding. However, he was not willing, or possibly able to gather the men. It's not clear if this was poor leadership on his part or insubordination on the part of the men of Judah, but as we know from looking around in our own world, the military is not a place where coming up short is recommended. Amasa has, and David is not one to sit around and let things correct themselves.

God's word says this in verse 6,

6 And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself to fortified cities and escape from us." 7 And there went out after him Joab's men and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men. They went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

We don't know much about this Sheba the son of Bichri, but I wonder if he has any idea who is on his tail. If he does, he should be afraid, very afraid. Due to Amasa's failure to muster the troops, the task is handed off to Abishai. He now takes off after Sheba, the worthless, with all the king's servants, Joab's men, the mercenary Cherethites and Pelethites, and worst of all I would imagine, all the mighty men. These are the same mighty men who have risked their lives for as little as a cup of water in order to serve God's anointed and they are well practiced at the art of war. I hope Sheba knows what he has gotten himself into and what he will face if he ever stops running.

During our chase, other action is going on in the pack. God's word says this in verse 8-10,

8 When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened on his thigh, and as he went forward it fell out. 9 And Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. 10 But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died.

David's army has been known to be vicious and we can see that this viciousness is top down. Joab likely has two things going on in his mind at this point. Number one being that Amasa did not serve the king in any way as Joab would have. Joab may be violent, but he is also extremely faithful to God's anointed king and Amasa, in Joab's eyes, has not been as evidence by his tardiness in raising the troops. Joab has put his life at risk time and time again for the king, and Amasa can't even be on time. Number two, is there a little jealousy here for the roll of commander that was taken away from Joab? Perhaps. In either

instance Joab remedies the situation in the most extreme way possible. Leaving Amasa Dead in the middle of the road with his inside on the outside.

And just a note while we're here. Isn't it unsettling, and prophetic, that the way he gets close enough to Amasa to kill him is to ask about his well being, hold on to his beard and then lean in to greet him with a kiss. Did Judas know this story?

Worthless men are on the run, widows are shut up, and commanders of army's are being waylaid by "friendly's". Cracks are widening and cracks are being repaired.

The chase is still on and we take in the next scene in verses 11-13. God's word says this,

Wallowing

Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. 11 And one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab." 12 And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway. And anyone who came by, seeing him, stopped. And when the man saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field and threw a garment over him. 13 When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

Our brothers have quickly continued on in their race to catch Sheba the worthless. And just to be safe they have left a man behind to let others know they should continue the chase as well even though the body of their commander, and likely their friend, is "wallowing in his blood in the highway". It was shocking to me how they just left this man in the middle of the road dead. No care was given to his remains, no prayers said, no pause taken to commemorate his life. Just killed and left. It seems like almost an afterthought to leave someone behind with him. And when we hit this word "wallow" it makes me wonder if Joab died instantly or lay there dying for sometime after the cruel blow. The initiator to do something with his body ends up being the traffic jam on the highway of men involved in the chase stopping to witness this gruesome scene. Imagine this left behind man's predicament. He has been told to stay and direct traffic around the body and people aren't listening. He knows his bosses penchant for violence and he can only imagine what might happen if it's his fault that some of the troops don't follow! What does he do. Drags him off the side of the road and covers him with a garment. Is Amasa dead at this point, or still just lying there waiting for death to arrive as other leave him behind off the side of the road like refuse?

Worthless men on the run, widowed women, and wallowing commanders. We have reached the end of the cracks. These are deep, deep cracks and some will not close so easily. Our tribes are in danger, but the most important task of the moment is still looking for a fortified city in which to hide.

God's word says this in verse 14-15,

Wise

14 And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in. 15 And all the men who were with Joab came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maacah. They cast up a mound against the

city, and it stood against the rampart, and they were battering the wall to throw it down.

Sheba has made it to his fortified city. Abel of Beth-maacah will be where he and the other Bichrites will take their stand. Notice who's not with him. The text says he passed through "all the tribes of Israel". They watched and left him unhindered, but they did not follow him. Only his familial tribe, the Bichrites, followed him. It seems the men of Israel were serious when he sent them back to their tents after announcing their zero percent portion with David. They went to their tents, and they are staying.

I can only imagine they were all too happy to stay nice and cozy in their tents when all of Joab's men began their siege against the city. Trained, experienced warriors building a mound to reach out and batter the walls of the city while Sheba the worthless and his small tribe of followers sit inside. Together, but alone. Listening for the moment the walls will give and their pursuers will come in and find them. They don't even seem to have put up any kind of fight. Just sat there waiting while their worthless leader did nothing.

God's word says this in verses 16-17,

16 Then a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'" 17 And he came near her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am."

How does she know Joab is there? How does she know his name? Has she been speaking with Sheba the worthless? We don't know, but we do know that she is wise. That wisdom could change the course of life for her and many others.

God's word says the last part of 17

Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your servant." And he answered, "I am listening." 18 Then she said, "They used to say in former times, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel,' and so they settled a matter. 19 I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the heritage of the LORD?"

Notice, wisdom often comes in the form of a question. This woman is in no position to make demands of or counsel Joab on the violence he intends to visit upon Sheba. She has likely been sitting and waiting as the sounds of attack build up outside. Her family, friends and neighbors are at risk here since this Sheba the worthless has arrived. So, she appeals to something higher and does so in the form of a question. Abel of Beth-Macaah was the mother city some others surrounding. It had been there longer and was likely somewhat larger (Why pick little if your Sheba). She appeals to this historical significance and asks, "Why will you swallow up the heritage of the LORD?"

God's word says this in verse 20-21,

20 Joab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! 21 That is not true. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David. Give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city."

Of all that Joab is prepared to do to remedy this situation, swallowing up and destroying "the heritage of the Lord is not one of them. So he explain the wrong done to the king and asks for her assistance in getting Sheba the worthless out of the city. Her startling and decisive answer comes quickly.

God's word says this at the end of 21-22,

*And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall."
22 Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king.*

Yes, you heard that right! This wise woman is not going to mess around trying to get Sheba out of the city and into Joab's hands. She also does not seem to be interested in letting Joab's men into the city to do their own dirty work. She just have his head thrown over the wall. My question as I read this was, "How does she know the others inside will be on board with her plan". Perhaps she is not only wise, but rather persuasive in all her dealings because we see that she persuaded "all the people" to go with her plan. What must this have been like for "all the Bichrites"? Remember as you read your Bible, these are real people in real situations with real and sometimes eternal consequences. Some of the Sheba's tribe were there to witness his beheading. That would be a strong disuader for the next guy who thought he might want to "[lift] up his hand against King David". Lift up your hand and someone, even he wise old lady of the town, might lift off your head.

Satisfied with only having two lives lost, Joab ends this rebellion in the same way it was begun. He blows the trumpet and the men go home and return the people at Abel of Beth-maacah to their normal lives.

Worthless men have been stopped, widows provided for, tardy commanders relieved of duty and wisdom has taken the day. The cracks in Israel's pavement are still there, but things are being repaired as well. As if to show us that order has been restored to the Kingdom, the chapter ends this way,

God's word says this in verses 23-26,

23 Now Joab was in command of all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was in command of the Cherethites and the Pelethites; 24 and Adoram was in charge of the forced labor; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder; 25 and Sheva was secretary; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests; 26 and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest.

We can almost see the camera fading back from close up to view all of Jerusalem waking up to new day. People mill about as they used. The King is on his throne. Joab is in command of all the army and various roles and positions are being taken up as they should be. Life in Israel has returned, if not for good at least for now, to normal. Then as you watch through the camera's lens you see a slight shaking. Is that just an aftershock, or the beginning of new, more significant rumblings...

Conclusion

What themes do you see running through our passage this evening? What is the overall picture you are given of God's chosen people, Israel. Disunity runs throughout our text like a disease destroying it's host from the inside out. Men like Sheba the worthless stand only to lead themselves and their followers to a

cowards death, hidden amongst women and children. Women have been used as a sick tool of "one upmanship" in the battle for power over the kingdom. Men have been killed for bitterness over past slights and current failings. The image of God in the face of another has been all but forgotten in these strivings. God's people do not look like God's people. Psalm 133 starts out "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" What happened to that!?

We speak often here at Clearcreek of the already/not yet of the Bible. We'll do so a bit here tonight as well. What happened to dwelling in unity? Peoples wants and desires trumped their worship of the God of Heaven. They chose a self-centered, not God-centered path to walk. We, here on the other side of the cross have a path to choose as well. We, believers in Christ, are God's people here on earth. He no longer dwells "with", but "in" us. That alone should tell us that there is Grace amazing to help us along our path of unity. The Scriptures have much to say to us about our unity and I would implore you this evening, do not let disunity create cracks here at Clearcreek Chapel. We are called in the book of Ephesians to, "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And this we must do. When you feel the rumble of disunity, call out to your Savior and pray for the grace of God to give you "all humility and gentleness, with patience" that you might "[bear] with one another in love".

For when we do, the rest of Psalm 133 will be true of us. Our unity,

"It is like the precious oil on the head,

running down on the beard,

on the beard of Aaron,

running down on the collar of his robes!

3 It is like the dew of Hermon,

which falls on the mountains of Zion!

For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,

life forevermore.

He, Jesus Christ, will be our reward and in him we will have "life forevermore". Live for Christ Clearcreek Chapel and in him be unified.

If you are here tonight and this unity in Christ is a foreign idea to you, please come talk with me or your neighbor sitting next to you about life in Christ. It would be our pleasure to talk and pray with you over your relationship with him.