

2 Samuel 2:1-32

SI: Back in November of 2017 I finished preaching through 1 Samuel.

We actually ended with the first chapter of 2 Samuel, the death of King Saul. Today we’re going to start 2 Samuel and I am excited.

I love the historical books of the Old Testament. The Old Testament narratives.

I love the way they are so true to life.

Even though the time and setting is different, the people are the same as the people we know and encounter today. So they can be applied to our lives. But the big thing I love is the way these stories foreshadow Jesus Christ.

All of the heroic men and women of faith in the Old Testament foreshadow Jesus Christ in different ways. We could say they are prototypes of Christ. But David is the greatest of all prototypes of Christ.

Many of the ways we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior and relate to him is through our understanding of David.

Jesus was not a shepherd, he was a carpenter’s son.

But we know Jesus and relate to him as our shepherd because David was a shepherd, and out of his experience, he wrote the 23rd Psalm.

Jesus was not a king in the common sense, he didn’t wield a sword and lead armies into battle and conquer kingdoms.

But we can sing *Crown Him With Many Crowns, Jesus Shall Reign*

because he has inherited the crown and throne that King David established.

The significance of David to our experience of the Christian life is immense.

In 2 Samuel David takes up the kingship of all Israel and gives us a glimpse, even though it’s imperfect, of how his greater son Jesus will reign.

INTRO: There's a news app on my iPhone.

When you open it you can scroll down pages and pages of news,
it seems to never end.

At the very top is what you might call hard news.

It's political news in America and around the world,
the President, Congress, Supreme court, North Korea, the Middle East,
big issues like immigration, big events like the recent wildfires in California
and the stock market fluctuation, crimes stories, court cases.

Then you get to sports—of course right now there are stories about the
college football championship game, NFL games, speculations on Super Bowl
In all these sports stories are the people who matter, great athletes, coaches.

Then you get to entertainment—movies and movie stars, musicians, actors,
celebrities, the British royal family, the Kardashians, every detail about their
their lifestyles and romances, their clothes and opinions,

If you keep going you get to science news—the Chinese landing a rover on the dark
side of the moon, a new drug that might cure male pattern baldness.

And on and on it goes.

But you'll never find news about the church and concerns of the church in world.

None of the world leaders ever say in press conference concerned how this
particular political issue or crisis will affect the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

News stories don't analyze what these things will mean for the church.

How will immigration affect the spread of the Gospel?

There are numerous articles about everything imaginable, dining and travel and
automobiles and technology and fashion but none on sinful condition
of the human soul and the reality of Christ's salvation.

On rare occasions something of importance to the church will momentarily come to
popular attention—Billy Graham's recent funeral, Tim Keller NYT interview

But it's just a blip on the screen. Most people don't notice.

Do you know what the Roman historian Tacitus said about Judea during the
reign of Emperor Tiberius? In Judea nothing much happened.

Those are his exact words.

The Savior of the world died and rose again and Tacitus says:

Nothing much happened.

The great men and women of the world, the mover and shakers,
use their influence and energies to pursue their own agendas and ambitions.

That's what grabs the headlines and imaginations of people.

The Bible may say that Jesus Christ is head over all things for the church,

it may say that his kingdom is spreading throughout the whole world but it's certainly not obvious that Christ's church is the center of everything and the pivot on which world history turns.

When it comes to Christ's kingdom, we have to live by faith, not by sight.

By sight there are many things that seem more important than the church—terrorism, the economy, even football games.

And there are many people who seem much more influential than almost any Christian we can think of.

But faith knows that what really matters in this world is the salvation of human beings one by one, and the fortunes of Christ's church, up and down, and all that the Lord is doing in the world to gather and perfect his people.

In this chapter David and the kingdom of God is overshadowed by big events that everyone in Israel is talking about. A civil war. Feuds. Bloodshed.

The big headlines and the big events are being generated by the movers and shakers the men with power and ego—Joab, Asahel, and Abner.

These are not particularly good men or faithful men, but men the world notices.

Because they are the sort of men who get things done and impose their will on governments and policies.

But where is David? What's he doing in this chapter?

Not much. He's behind the scenes.

He doesn't seem to do anything heroic or noteworthy while the civil war is raging in Israel. Or does he?

He obeys the Lord and waits upon the Lord.

And as he does, God's kingdom advances.

The purpose of this chapter is to teach us how to see God's kingdom when it's overshadowed by big events and important people.

We need this biblical perspective so we aren't mesmerized but what seems to be important and miss the truly important story that is unfolding before us.

That's the growth of the kingdom of God and the reign of King Jesus.

Three points. Three perspectives we need to have. I'll give them to you as we go.

MP#1 Christ's kingdom always starts small and humble

Jesus himself makes this point in the parables we read earlier.

He compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds.

And he compares it to yeast or leaven which actually seems to disappear as it is kneaded into the dough.

I think Christ is describing both how God's kingdom works in individual lives and how it works in the world.

In time the seed grows into a tree birds perch in.

And eventually the leaven works its way through the dough, it rises.

But at first it's small.

And that's how it is in this chapter.

David was anointed by Samuel when he was a teenager, back when Saul king.

He served Saul, fought Saul's battles, but then you remember Saul became homicidally jealous, tried to kill David.

And for 12 years David lived on the run with his band of warriors.

Now Saul is dead, it seems time for David to step on the big stage, to unite Israel, become king over the whole land.

But he asks the Lord and the Lord says the time isn't right. Wait.

Go to Hebron and rule from there.

Hebron was not a very auspicious place if you wanted to reign over north and south.

David was unable to extend his influence much from there.

And for seven and a half years he's stuck in this backwater.

It's a small and humble beginning for the greatest king of Israel.

That's how it mostly is with God's work on earth.

Things start small. Sometimes so small, and so weak they seem ridiculous compared to the big people and big things going on around them.

Two summers ago I taught a Sunday school series on famous missionaries.

If you attended you may remember the class on Mary Slessor.

She was a mill girl from Dundee, Scotland, raised in poverty.

She loved Jesus and people.

In 1876, when she was 28 years old, she went to Nigeria with the Scottish

Presbyterian mission. Her work there over a lifetime had immense impact.

At the time, the only place missionary work was done was in a city on the coast.

That's because inland tribes were so powerful and violent.

Even the British colonial powers were careful when they went there.

Lots of bloodshed and brutality.

But Mary wanted those tribes to hear about God's love, so after 12 years of serving

in the missionary station in the coastal city, she finally got permission to go. She was the very first missionary to go to the inland tribes of Nigeria. So what did this look like, this brave pioneer missionary venture?

This first advance of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ into new territory?

For one thing, Mary had to go by herself, without a missionary partner. The mission board wouldn't send a man with Mary because the tribe would almost certainly have killed a white man, but they might leave a woman alone. And there were no other female missionaries capable of going with her. But Mary wasn't totally alone, she had adopted five abandoned children.

So she packed all she and the children could carry and she took a boat up river, then they got out and gathered their stuff in the pouring rain and as it was getting dark they set out walking on a jungle path into territory of the tribe. One man who had come with them on the boat said with a sob in his voice: "I will constantly pray for you, but you are courting death."

Here's how her biographer describes the scene:

Surely no stranger procession had footed it through the African forest. First came a boy, about eleven years of age, tired and afraid, a box containing tea, sugar, and bread upon his head, his garments soaked with the rain, clinging to his body, his feet slipping in the black mud. Behind him was another boy, eight years old, in tears, bearing a kettle and pots. With these a little fellow of three, weeping loudly, tried hard to keep up, and close at his heels trotted a maiden of five, also shaken with sobs. Their white mother formed the rear. On one arm was slung a bundle, and astride her shoulders sat a baby girl, no light burden, so that she had to pull herself along with the aid of branches and twigs. She was singing nonsense-snatches to lighten the way for the little ones, but the tears were perilously near her own eyes. Had ever such a company marched out against the entrenched forces of evil? Surely God had made a mistake in going to Okoyong in such a guise? And yet He often chooses the weakest things of this world to confound and defeat the mighty.

That last line is the faith lesson. God uses small things and small beginnings to build his kingdom. It magnifies the power of grace and the Gospel, because eventually these small things outlast and confound the strong and mighty. Sometimes, you get to see that. Mary saw it by the end of her life.

Sometimes things stay small for generations. But God's at work. The prophet Zechariah said: Do not despise the day of small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin. Find encouragement in the small things. God is at work.

Christ's kingdom always starts small and humble.

MP#2 Christ's kingdom grows through gentle means

David was a warrior king.

He never held back from taking the fight to the enemies of Israel.

When he was a young teenager and fought Goliath in the Valley of Elah, there's a detail that says a lot about how fierce David was.

After Goliath challenged him and said I defy you and the armies of Israel and your God. Come to me and I'll feed your body to the buzzards.

After he said that it says:

David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.

As he was running he put his stone in the sling and the rest is history.

But in this chapter, David never lifts a sword.

That's because there is conflict with fellow Israelites.

Abner was King Saul's military commander.

Even though Saul is dead, he doesn't want to give up his power.

So he installs one of Saul's surviving sons, Ishbosheth as a puppet king.

Abner is the real power behind the throne.

And there was still enough loyalty to the house of Saul in the north.

So for this seven and a half year period, there is war.

On the southern side, on the side of Judah there are the sons of Zeruah.

She was one of David's sisters, so Joab, Abishai, and Asahel nephews—but as old as David or maybe older.

They are the ones who keep the military pressure on the north.

In the next chapter you'll see how willing they are to use deception and violence against their fellow Israelites.

Not David. He refuses to lift a sword.

But there is one thing David does to try to expand his kingdom.

He sends a message of commendation to the men of the city of Jabesh Gilead for honoring Saul's body.

After the battle on Mt. Gilboa, the Philistines took the bodies of King Saul and his three sons, striped them and hung them on the wall of one of their cities.

The men of Jabesh Gilead, a city in the north, heard about it.

They traveled through the night, took the bodies down, cremated them, and gave their bones an honorable burial in a meaningful place.

It was an act of bravery and honor. David commends them for it.

He says: I'll show you favor like Saul did.

And then he says: Continue to be brave. I've been anointed king over Judah.

What he's doing in a low key way? He's inviting them to give him their loyalty and come under his reign for the good of the kingdom.
Join me. Fight for me. I'll be a your king. It's an invitation to men of the north.
We don't know what they decided.
Whether they followed David or stuck with Abner's puppet king Ishbosheth.
But David didn't violently force them, he appealed to them.

And that's a beautiful picture of how Christ's kingdom grows.
It grows by the gentlest means possible—by invitation.
Through Christians sharing the Gospel Jesus says; I'm King, follow me.
Be brave and follow me. I'm not going to coerce you.
He wants willing hearts to respond to his gracious invitation.

Our neighbor in the white house here next to the church passed away this week.
Tom Szilagi.
I got to visit him a number of times during his illness and what I tried to do every time was extend to him Jesus' invitation to eternal life.
Tom was so sick he had a hard time talking, sometimes all I could do was pray for him. But when he was able, I would read the Bible and talk about it.
We read Romans 6:23,
For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
I asked him: What's a wage. He said, It's something you earn.
I said you're right, and we earn death for our sin. You're going to die, I am.
What's a gift? He said: It's something you get for free. You just take it.
So I said: That's right, and this says eternal life, forgiveness of our sins, life in heaven with God and resurrection, that's all free if you trust Jesus and ask him.
I said: Tom, isn't that good news. He said: That's great news.
Then his eyes closed and he couldn't talk any more.

Only God knows the heart, but Tom heard the gentle invitation of King Jesus just like the men of Jabesh Gilead heard King David's gracious invitation.
That's how the kingdom grows.
Great thing is that as Christians, this is our privilege, to invite people to follow him.
Tell them the Good News of salvation, invite them to pray to receive him.
That's how the kingdom grows.

Christ's kingdom always starts small and humble.
Christ's kingdom grows through gentle means

MP#3 Christ's kingdom uses and overcomes all the forces of this world

These early chapters of 2 Samuel are dominated by the actions of these powerful men—Joab, Abishai, and Abner. They scheme, plot, maneuver, kill in order to position themselves.

But the result of all this struggle between powerful men, all this grabbing for power and all this killing and revenge is at last that David becomes king of Israel.

And then, that Jesus, his descendent would be revealed as the King of kings.

God used all those powerful people and events for his purposes.

Where are they now? They're gone. But his kingdom is still here.

You can trace this out time and again through history.

Think of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Who was the great man of that day?

It was Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, most powerful empire in world.

If there had been iPhones then, if you opened the news app, he would be at top.

What was God's city Jerusalem back then?

Compared to Babylon it was a small town.

And the kingdom of Judah had shrunk down to Jerusalem and its suburbs.

The Babylonians ate little cities and countries like that for lunch.

And that's exactly what they did. Conquered. Took people into exile.

But unbeknownst to the Babylonians, God was using them.

They were his instrument to deal with his people to purify them from idolatry and restore them as a people ready for Christ's coming.

And now Babylon is gone. It's just sand and rubble.

Nobody worships Marduk anymore, the god of Babylon.

But Jerusalem, the city of God, still with us. I mean the church, New Jerusalem.

And it's larger than Babylon ever dreamed of being.

And the God of Abraham is worshipped by men and women, boys and girls, of every tribe, language, people, and nation.

Last Sunday I told you about the New Rain Covenant Church in China, attacked and closed by the government, pastor and officers arrested.

It's part of a major effort by the communist party to control religious belief.

The pastor, Wang Yi knew he would be arrested, so he wrote a paper he gave to friends to be published on the internet when it happened.

It's called *A Declaration of Faithful Disobedience* and I read you a rather lengthy portion last week. I'm not going to do that again.

But I want to read just two sentences.

He talks about the policies of the Chinese government and how unjust they are, depriving people of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion,

then he says this . . .

All . . . unrighteous politics, and arbitrary laws manifest the cross of Jesus Christ, the only means by which every Chinese person must be saved. They also manifest the fact that true hope and a perfect society will never be found in the transformation of any earthly institution or culture but only in our sins being freely forgiven by Christ and in the hope of eternal life .

He's saying that God will use unjust governments that persecute people to advance Christ's kingdom.

The leaders of China are motivated by power and ambition, like Joab and Abner. But they're just stepping stones for King Jesus.

He will use these men and their decisions to grow his kingdom and bring people to faith.

Here's the thing, it's already happened once in China.

The Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976, a concerted effort to stamp out Christianity.

There were estimated to be 500,000 Christians in China at the time and the persecution seemed to work. The visible church disappeared.

But then that exercise in human power ended and the church reappeared in the tens of millions in China. It's the biggest untold story of our time.

Now here it is again, an attempt to exert power, and Pastor Wang Yi says—it will magnify the cross of Christ. And he's right.

I realize this is a big view sermon.

Some sermons are more immediate and practical, some are more big view.

We need the big view. We need to see the whole landscape the world can't see.

They are mesmerized by the news they think is important.

We know what's important.

It's the small beginnings of new works of God's grace,

It's the gentle invitation of Christ bringing people in,

And it's Christ's rule over all things for the good of his church.

So live according to what his true and not according to the appearance of things that so mesmerizes the world around us.