

2 Samuel 14:1-33

SI: We’re studying the life of King David because we want to know David’s Son.

In the life of David we see our need for King Jesus.

This is a long and complicated chapter, so before I read it, let me set the stage.

David’s oldest son and the heir to the throne was Amnon.

Amnon’s mother was David’s first wife.

Amnon became infatuated with his half-sister Tamar and he raped her.

David was furious when he found out, but he did nothing.

He should have removed Amnon as crown prince, but he didn’t.

Two years later, Absalom, another son of David by a different wife and Tamar’s full brother, murdered Amnon to get revenge for his sister.

After committing the murder, Absalom fled to a neighboring kingdom where he was in exile three years.

Here’s an important detail that will help you understand this chapter:

Since Amnon was dead, Absalom was the next son of David in line for the throne.

It was unsettling for the people of Israel to have the crown prince in exile.

So one man tried to fix it.

INTRO: You’ve all heard the expression “Leave well enough alone.”

It means not to try to change or fix something or you’re likely to make it worse.

One time Allison had a hairdryer and it looked like the intake end was clogged with hair and lint. I wanted to clean it but she said it was still working fine.

I cleaned it anyway and then I noticed more stuff stuck inside, on the little fan,

so I took it apart to give it a really good cleaning and I couldn’t get it back

together again and had to throw it away and buy her a new one.

I should have left well enough alone.

There are times when we find ourselves in unresolved and unsettled situations

that involve big and important things, people, relationships, sins, hard hearts.

There’s no immediate resolution in sight, but we want to rush in and force a happy ending. Sometimes when we do that, we get in the way of what God is doing.

In the Psalms there’s an expression that often appears:

Wait on the Lord. Wait on the Lord.

It’s a positive version of leave well enough alone.

Wait on the Lord doesn’t mean to be passive in life.

There are plenty of places the Bible itself tells us to work to change bad and hard

situations for the better.

For example, Paul tells Christians who are slaves that if it is at all possible for them to gain their freedom, to do so. You can imagine the planning and effort and even setbacks you might experience in something like that.

Wait on the Lord does mean that sometimes there are situations where we might see a way to fix things or force a happy ending, but God wants us to leave well enough alone.

It might be that the Bible itself doesn't give us permission to do it, or it might be our consciences are warning us, even though we really feel unsettled and desperately want a resolution, our consciences are saying no. Or maybe it's clearly unwise to move ahead and force things.

In all those ways God might be saying: Wait. Wait for me to work.
Let's see what we can learn from this episode.

We'll look at it under three points:

1. Some reasons we try to fix things instead of waiting on the Lord.
2. How we can get in God's way when we try to fix things.
3. Why trusting Jesus is best when we want to fix things.

MP#1 Some reasons we try to fix things instead of waiting on the Lord

This was a painful and difficult situation with Absalom exiled and estranged from his father. It was personally painful for David, and as I mentioned, this was very unsettling to the people of Israel.

But bringing back Absalom this way would prove to be disastrous for Israel.

And there were plenty of warnings that this was not the right thing to do or the right time to do it. We'll look at those a little bit later.

But for now let's ask: Why did David do it? Why didn't he wait on the Lord?

One reason was expediency.

This is a reason we ourselves sometimes don't wait on God.

We see what seems to be a quick and easy way to resolve things and move on.

Joab wanted Absalom back because he was concerned about succession.

He thought this would be the best thing long-term for David's kingdom.

And he figured out a way to get it done and patch things up and move on.

It says Joab knew King David's heart longed for Absalom.

That doesn't mean Joab was concerned about David's broken heart and wanted to somehow reconcile him with his son.

It means he knew he could use David's broken heart to get Absalom back and that's what he did. He played on David's emotions.

He recruited a woman to go to King David and tell him a story about a crime that was tearing her family apart, and then and then to turn the tables on him.

Who does this remind you of? It reminds you of Nathan the prophet.

And how he went to David with the story about the rich man who stole the lamb, when he was confronting David about his sins.

Joab probably knew about Nathan confronting David so he tries to imitate Nathan.

But it's very different from Nathan. Nathan appealed to David's conscience.

His goal was to get David to repent.

Joab sent this woman not to appeal to David's conscience, but to manipulate his emotions and break down his resistance to bringing Absalom back.

Joab tells this woman how to dress and act. Lots of tears.

She tells this heart-wrenching story about her sons fighting and how one killed another and now the relative want to put him to death so they can get their hands on her property and leave her a destitute, childless widow.

David's first response to her is the right one.

He tells her, I'll issue an order to look into this matter.

There was a killing involved. Was it the result of a fight as the woman said,

or was it premeditated? David promised an investigation. He was just and fair. But she presses him, Please, please. That's not enough. That's not going to stop these relatives from tracking down my son and executing him.

So David says, if these relatives say that to you, send them to me.

Please, please, that's still not enough. That's not going to stop their vengeance. So without any investigation, without looking into whether this was a crime of passion or premeditated murder, David just exonerates her son.

It's an unwise, emotionally motivated decision, and it weakens David so that he concedes to Joab's request and sends for Absalom to come back to Israel.

It illustrates another reason we often don't wait on the Lord—

a desire to escape our painful emotions as quickly as possible,

a sentimental desire to gloss things over and make them appear normal again.

Expediency, painful emotions and sentimentality.

A third reason we sometimes don't wait on the Lord is spiritualizing.

God told me. God wants me to be happy and this will make me happy so this is God's will. Talk that way enough and you will convince yourself.

The woman tells David: God doesn't want Absalom banished:

He devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him.

Which is true. God is gracious. But there are other important considerations.

Another reason for not waiting on the Lord is fear. She says to David:

And now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid.

People are talking. They're talking about this banishment of the crown prince and they're getting upset with your reign. I'm afraid for you David.

I don't know if this one worked on David or not, but we're all susceptible to it.

People are talking. Fear of public opinion. Fear of the unknown.

Fear can push us to fix things that we should leave well enough alone.

One more reason is simply exhaustion.

When David realizes Joab is behind this ploy, he doesn't get angry and resist.

You can hear in his words that Joab has finally worn him down.

David has resisted bringing Absalom back, Joab has argued and argued,

and now this interaction with this woman, the emotional energy expended hearing her story, the fear of people talking, maybe wondering God is for bringing the banished son home, David just resigns himself and say: Do it. Bring him back.

The significance of this decision will come into sharper focus when we examine

MP#2 How we can get in God's way when we try to fix things

Let me ask you a question about this story.

Why had David resisted for three years sending word for Absalom to come back? Joab was pushing David to bring him back.

There was obviously a popular sentiment for Absalom to come back. He had murdered his brother but I'm sure many people were sympathetic, because he was avenging a horrible crime committed against his sister.

He was the handsome, well-liked crown prince. Seeing him back in Jerusalem would give a sense of political stability to David's kingdom.

And on top of it all, David's heart longed for his son. He was grieved over exile.

Why was David resisting his own strong emotional desires to bring him back? And the advice of his senior official Joab? And the sentiments of the people?

Well guess what, this story doesn't tell us.

And that's one thing I love about the historical books of the OT.

Lots of times they don't explain to us the moral and spiritual significance of particular events. We're supposed to figure things out, like the way we have to do it in real life.

So let me give you two ideas and then connect them to our lives.

I think the main reason David had resisted sending word for Absalom to come back is that Absalom himself had not asked to come back.

David was looking for some sign of repentance, no matter how small.

He was waiting for Absalom to show some regret for murdering Amnon.

For him to say, I want to come home and I'm willing to face the music.

Until that happened, I think David knew it made no sense for him to come home, But maybe in exile his heart might be softened.

When David finally gave in and brought him home anyway, not only does Absalom not speak a word of repentance, he's hard and prideful.

You see that in the way he burned Joab's fields to get his attention, and then when

Joab protested, Absalom reversed the pressure and backed Joab himself down.

Tell the king to put me on trial and put me to death. He knows he's won.

The second reason I think David resisted was that even though he longed for his son he still hadn't deal with the anger in his own heart over what Absalom had done.

That's evident in the way David responded with Absalom did return.

David sent word that he didn't want to see Absalom's face and for Absalom to confine himself to his house. David cut him off from life in the palace.

So look at this situation they were in.

Absalom wasn't ready to ask forgiveness.

David wasn't ready to forgive Absalom.

While they were apart there was the room for God to work on each of their hearts, but by trying to rush things, it froze each of them in a bad place spiritually.

The last scene of this chapter is really tragic.

Absalom finds a way to force himself into David's presence, but not because he wants to reconcile or repent. It's because he needs to be publicly out of the doghouse to get access to the perks of the palace.

And David, he kisses his son, but it's not a kiss of reconciliation.

It's a formality that once again sweeps ugly stuff under the rug.

It would have been far better if they had tolerated the painful emotions and fears and weariness of the exile and waited on the Lord. It was too rushed.

Some of you may be too quick to forgive and pardon someone, before they've even asked for forgiveness.

Or you may be too quick to forgive, before God is done working in that person's heart. You aren't willing to wait for evidences of change.

Maybe you're too quick to forgive yourself. You waste the pain God is using to sanctify you.

Maybe you have a savior complex, and you pretend people and circumstances are a certain way because you want them to be that way and it's too uncomfortable for you to wait and see what God might be doing.

And it's really too uncomfortable for you to admit you have no idea what God's timeframe might be for bringing a resolution and it might take years!

You would rather rush in and try to make things right.

Maybe you're thinking of a situation in life and you want me to get more specific.

How long do I wait? What exactly am I looking for God to do?

What if I don't see the changes I'm hoping to see?

I can't answer those questions in a general way in this sermon.

David's situation was complicated and yours probably is too.

Use the wise people God has put in your life, seek out the Nathans, not the Joabs.

I wonder what might have happened if David had sent Nathan to meet with Absalom and then listened to Nathan's assessment of his son's heart, instead of listening to Joab who was pushing to fix things.

All these stories of David bring us ultimately to Christ.

MP#3 Why trusting Jesus is best when we want to fix things.

I was talking to someone about a person they know in an unhappy marriage.

This husband is a Christian and he's miserable.

Of course, the thing he wants most is for his marriage to be healed and peaceful.

But things don't seem to be getting better so he's contemplating divorce.

He doesn't have biblical grounds for divorce. His wife has not been unfaithful. And yet it's the uncertainty, his inability to see the future, the unsettled feeling he has in this in-between place that makes divorce so appealing.

The thought that things might never change and that he would be stuck in this marriage for years—that's unbearable for him.

A divorce would be less than ideal, but it would be a resolution of sorts.

It would be a way to fix things if God doesn't bring healing.

Our New Testament reading this morning was Matthew's account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness.

This is one of those passages we come back to over and over in the Christian life. We'll probably never read 2 Samuel 14 in church again, but we'll read Christ's temptation many times through the years.

It occurred to me as I was preparing my sermon that one way we could look at Christ's wilderness temptation is the Devil giving him ways to fix things.

He shows Jesus ways he can quickly and cleanly get through painful, difficult, and uncertain circumstances.

Jesus had fasted 40 days and was hungry.

Satan says, If you are the Son of God, make these stones bread.

There's nothing wrong with eating in and of itself.

Jesus knows he must eat very soon. He's at the outer limit of physical endurance. What's wrong with fixing things by making one or two loaves of bread?

But it's a matter of trusting that what God has provided is best.

Calvin says: This would be to distrust God, and I have no reason to expect that he will support me in a different manner from what he has promised in his word.

That's what Jesus does, he trusts God's word.

The second temptation, Throw yourself off the temple and God will send angels.

I've often thought that making bread would be a hard temptation for me to resist, but I could never be tempted to jump off a building.

But when you realize it's another fix it temptation, that changes things.

What Satan was proposing was a way to hurry things along. Expediency.

Create a spectacle and the people will flock to you.

James Boice imagined Devil saying:

It will make a great impression and get your ministry off to a rip-roaring start.

When Jesus replies and says he will not put the Lord God to the test,

what he means is that God's promises can't be misused.
We can't claim God's promises if we're not trusting him and his timing.
Which Jesus did for us. He trusted God's timing for us.

His third temptation, Bow down to me and I'll give you all the kingdoms of world.
Kind of like jumping off a tall building, the thought of bowing down to the Devil
doesn't seem like an appealing temptation.

You wonder why the Devil even thought it might work. Who's going to do that?
But when you see this as another fix-it temptation, you realize how strong it is.

It's a temptation to resolve things without pain.

Jesus, this is a way you can inherit the nations without the pain of the cross.
Isn't that really the hardest temptation of all?

It's not lack of things we want,
or uncertainly of timing, hard as those are, but it's when we hurt we want it fixed.
But Jesus didn't take the fix it route, he took the hurt for us.

So what's the bottom line.

In these tough life situations, when we're agonizing over unhappiness and
uncertainty and timing and decisions, we do need our Nathans.

We do need to seek the wisdom and encouragement of wise fellow believers.
But we need more than that. We need divine help.

We need Christ who not only saves us and forgives us when we fail,
but who also strengthens us and empowers us through his Spirit.

My times are in thy hand, whatever they may be;
Pleasing or painful, dark or bight, as best may seem to thee.

My times are in thy hand, Jesus the Crucified.
Those hands my cruel sins had pierced are now my guard and guide.