

2 Samuel 15:1-37

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 another long chapter. It’s about the beginning of Absalom’s rebellion against his father, King David.

We’re going to focus on David’s response to this crisis and how it points us to God.

INTRO: Back in 2008, during the financial crisis, President Obama’s chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, made a statement in an interview that became famous.

You never want a serious crisis to go to waste. And what I mean by that, it’s an opportunity to do things that you think you could not before.

You might think using a crisis to push your political agenda is wrong, but in terms of your faith and walk with God, you should never let a crisis go to waste

A few years ago John Piper wrote a short devotional book titled:

Don’t Waste Your Cancer.

Let me read you the preface:

I originally wrote this on the eve of prostate-cancer surgery. I believed then, and I believe now, in God’s power to heal—by miracle and by medicine. I believe it is right and good to pray for both kinds of healing. Cancer is not wasted when it is healed by God. He gets the glory, and that is why cancer exists. So not to pray for healing may waste our cancer. But healing is not God’s plan for everyone in this life. And there are many other ways to waste our cancer. As I prayed for myself, and continue to do so, I also pray for you that [you] will not waste [your] pain. At this time (five years after my surgery) the evidence is that they “got it.” But I have learned that one day we think we are well, and the next day we find out we are not. So now when people ask me, “How’s your health?” I say, “I feel fine. And the doctors are pleased.” Which, being translated, means: “I don’t know how I am; only God knows.” That God knows, and cares, and rules, is enough. The passage of Scripture that came to my mind while I waited for the biopsy was 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10: “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.” That is enough. I am not destined for wrath, but to live with Christ. Until we see him, may God help us not waste our health or our cancer.

When followers of Christ have a crisis, whether health or anything else, one of our prayers should be: Lord, help me not to waste this.

A crisis can be an opportunity to do things in your walk with God that perhaps you haven’t done before, or an opportunity to do things better.

We’ve been really hard on David for the past few weeks.

We haven't spared him in describing the enormity of his crimes,
either his adultery and murder, or his failure as a father.

But in this chapter we see another side of David.

We see a man full of faith. We see a man worthy of imitation.
His response to this earthshaking crisis in his family and kingdom is nothing short
of amazing. This is what real faith looks like under pressure and it's grand.

David failed in many ways as a follower of the Lord, but he didn't waste this crisis.

He used it to move closer to God in some profound ways.

John Piper lists eleven ways not to waste your cancer.

Aren't you glad I'm not John Piper? He preaches 50 minute sermons.

I have just three faith lessons from this episode in David's life.

I'll give them to you as we go . . .

MP#1 Real faith responds to crisis by submitting to God's good plan

Try to imagine how disorienting this was for David.

This was a masterfully planned coup. Absalom laid the ground work for 4 years.

He had a loyal core group of followers who were committed to secrecy.

There were no leaks from his inner circle.

He tells David that he had promised if the LORD brought him back from exile to

Jerusalem, that he would worship the LORD by offering sacrifices in Hebron.

Just imagine how, as a parent, that must have thrilled David.

My boy is getting right with the Lord. The Holy Spirit is at work in heart.

Absalom was utterly convincing. David sent him with a blessing.

He invited 200 important men from Jerusalem who had no idea what he was planning to join him for this supposed worship service.

What could these men do but throw their support behind him?

If they didn't, their lives were in danger. A brilliant move by Absalom.

So when a messenger said: The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom, it fell on David like a bolt out of the blue.

But immediately you see the old warrior inside David coming out again.

Most people would have hunkered down but he knew staying in Jerusalem would be a military disaster.

So he ordered an evacuation of the city and he took along most of his staff and the army garrisoned in Jerusalem and his personal bodyguard—the Kerethites, the Pelethites and the Gittites.

Now here's the part of this evacuation I want us to focus on.

After David crossed the Kidron Valley, which separated Jerusalem from the Mt of Olives, he was met by the high priest Zadok and all the Levites.

They were prepared to follow him and they were carrying the ark of the covenant. There was no other religious object that had more powerful symbolism than the ark.

It signified the presence of God with Israel.

The presence of the ark would have announced to every Israelite who saw it:

David is the rightful king. David is God's man. God wants David, not Absalom.

It's easy to imagine David latching on to the presence of the ark to give him hope and vindication. But look at David's response:

Then he said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."

In this crisis David did not trust in religious symbolism or propaganda.

He didn't even pin his hopes on things working out the way he wanted them to. He submitted himself to God's good plan, even if that plan meant he had to die.

We have an old college friend named Marcy and a few years ago her home was hit by a tornado and a huge oak tree fell right on her son's room and crushed it.

He was in bed when it happened.

After Marcy pulled herself out of the debris, she saw the tree on her son's room and she knew he was dead. She started digging and calling his name, no response.

Then she knew for sure she had lost him.

But a few minutes later she heard his voice deep in the wreckage.

He wasn't dead and he wasn't even hurt.

A few days later she put a sign in front of their demolished house that said:

God is good.

You have to know Marcy to really appreciate what happened next.

She's of Cuban descent and she's the epitome of the passionate, expressive Latin.

That carries over into every part of her life, including her Christian faith.

She told us a woman stopped by and said: I have a question about your sign.

You mean God is good because he spared your son's life.

And Marcy said: No, God is good even if he had killed my son.

In fact, for a few moments that was exactly what I thought God had done.

And in those moments it was my faith in God's goodness that kept me strong.

We asked her how the woman responded. And Marcy said: It made her mad.

She said: God would never take a child's life!

But I told her: God is good and he's sovereign over every life and every death.

She's a Presbyterian Cuban.

Let me read you something I found this week. A comment about David submitting to God's good plan whether it meant returning to Jerusalem or his death

The world can easily enough understand a person believing in God because he or she thinks that good will come of it, that he or she will receive some personal advantage or help. But believe if there is no promise of such help? Believe when God makes life worse, much worse? This the world does not understand. To kiss the rod, to give God glory when your world is falling apart, this only those who know God and trust him will do or can do, only they understand why a person would do this.

If you're a believer you do understand David, don't you.

And you want to be able to respond in the same way.

So real faith responds to crisis by submitting to God's good plan

MP#2 Real faith responds to crisis with grief over the effects of sin

Verse 30: But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot.

Someone asked me a question recently that was very interesting.

They asked if it's wrong for believers to have regrets for sins they've committed if they have confessed those sins to God and asked his forgiveness.

The answer that immediately comes to mind is no.

If Christ has paid the price for our sins and God has forgiven us, then regret seems to be going backwards spiritually.

Doesn't Paul say: Forgetting what is behind, straining forward to what is ahead?

But this vivid image of King David climbing the Mount of Olives weeping, head covered, and barefoot makes me think it's more complicated.

This is clearly grief David is experiencing.

Weeping is a universal human expression of grief.

Covering your head and going barefoot, these are cultural expressions.

You wouldn't see someone doing that at a funeral in Cullman.

David was expressing his grief in a culturally specific way.

But why covering your head and going barefoot? Can we analyze that?

In American and in the Western culture, the traditional way of expressing grief is to wear black. We don't do it so much anymore, but generally at funerals people don't wear bright colors.

And I think what's being communicated by the widow who wears a black dress to her husband's funeral is—the color and joy has gone out of my life.

This is how my world feels right now, dark, sad.

The few other times covering the head and going barefoot appears in the Old Testament, the grief that is being expressed is not just that this was a painful loss, it's connected with the effects of sin.

Why has this terrible thing happened?

It's the effects of sin in my life or in the lives of other people or in the world.

Or a combination of those things.

David wasn't looking back and doubting God had forgiven him.

But he almost certainly was grieving the effects of his sins on his family.

And the sins in Absalom's life, this son he loved who was doing so much damage.

And certainly in the biggest sense, the effects of sin in a fallen world.

I don't know if regret is the right word or not, but when you go through a crisis as a believer, it's inevitable that certain sins will come to mind

That's just the way we think as Christians.

We see the world through this biblical prism of sin and grace.

Every circumstance is different, but it's a response of true faith in crisis to grieve in this way as long as this grief takes you to God.

If it takes you down the path of self-recrimination and doubt of your salvation, that's wrong. But if it takes you to God for assurance of pardon, that's good.

If it takes you to God with a promise that you'll never commit that sin again, that you see the ugliness and hatefulness of it, that's also good.

David wrote a Psalm about this experience. Psalm 3.

The intro says: A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom.

It's about his mental state and his spiritual struggles during this event.

One verse says:

Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."

So people were saying: David had been abandoned by God. God's paying him back for all his sins. I'm sure when David heard that he thought about the sins he had committed and regretted them deeply.

This obviously bothered him or he wouldn't have put it in the Psalm.

But listen to how he replies, the next verse:

But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

I call out to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy mountain.

So he used the grief over sin and the effects of sins to turn to God again.

And that's what you have to do too.

Those of you who are introverts, you're going to need to remember this, because in crisis you might tend toward self-recrimination and doubting God's grace.

Grieve in crisis, that's good. Grieve over the effects of sin in this broken world.

Grieve over your former sins if they are brought to mind and the sins of other people that have caused such pain and sadness.

But use that grief to turn to your heavenly Father who can comfort you.

Real faith responds to crisis by submitting to God's good plan

Real faith responds to crisis with grief over the effects of sin

Now, third . . .

I quoted a politician at the beginning of my sermon, Rahm Emanuel,
Never let a crisis go to waste.

For this third point I'm going to quote another politician
MP#3 Real faith responds to crisis by trusting God and "keeping your powder dry"

What politician said: Trust in God and keep your powder dry?
Oliver Cromwell.

He said it when he was addressing his army before a major battle.

Trust in God. That comes first. That's the most important thing.
But then you have to keep your powder dry.

Faith in God responds to crisis with planning and with action.
John Piper said God can heal by miracles or by medicine.
Well for God to heal by medicine, that means you have to take medicine and all taking medicine implies, learning about your condition, finding the right doctor, perhaps getting a second opinion, weighing treatment options following protocol

The main theme of my sermon last week was waiting for the Lord.

We saw how Joab and David should have left well enough alone.

By trying to force a happy ending they didn't wait for God's timing.
And we can do the same thing and try to fix things when we should be waiting for God's timing and for his work in hearts or situations.
That's certainly a dynamic in the Christian life that we need to know.

But here's another dimension of biblical teaching—

Faith in crisis means trusting God and then doing something and trying to the best of your ability to bring about a favorable outcome.
David covered his head and wept, he said whether I return to Jerusalem or die, whatever happens is part of God's good plan.
But then David didn't just sit down and wait.

For one thing he got out of Jerusalem as quickly as possible.

He didn't stick around for Absalom to come.
He knew that his survival depended on getting out of the city.
During the evacuation, the most unsettling news David heard was that his chief counselor Ahithophel had joined Absalom's rebellion.
This worried David because what he was certainly counting on was Absalom's lack of military experience.
David had fought many wars. He knew strategy.
He was thinking Absalom would make a brash move that David with his superior

experience could capitalize on.

But Ahithophel joining Absalom changed the equation dramatically.

Ahithophel was a master military strategist.

What did David do? The first thing he did was pray. Vs. 31.

So David prayed, "O LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness."

Right after that, who should appear but one of David's loyal counselors, Hushai.

David sent him back to the city and told him to pretend to be for Absalom and do all he could to contradict and frustrate Ahithophel's advice.

David also knew he needed intelligence, so he quickly set up a spy network.

He sent the priests Zadok and Abiathar back to the city, he told Hushai to communicate Absalom's plans to them.

And then they were to send their sons to David with important information.

In chapter 17, this plan for frustrating Ahithophel's advice and spying on Absalom is put into effect and it works perfectly.

What was David doing in crisis?

He was trusting in God and keeping his powder dry.

So when do you wait on the Lord and when do you pray and act?

There's not a formula I can give you, but the key is trusting the Lord.

When we should wait on the Lord but don't, it's a lack of faith.

And when we should pray and act but don't, that paralysis is also a lack of faith.

So keeping close to the Lord, praying, asking for his guidance and help,

making use of all the channels of wisdom God has given you in your life,

the wise people who love you, use those things and he will make the way clear.

This sermon is a lot of good advice for how we ought to respond to crises as faithful Christians.

But what about when we don't submit to God's good plan but instead respond with fear or anger?

Or what about when we don't respond with grief over sin, but all we can do is think selfish thought about how this is going to mess up our comfortable life and plans?

Or what if instead of praying and acting, we collapse and become despondent?

That's when we need Jesus to forgive us and carry us through.

Where is Jesus in this story?

That's our goal in studying the life of David, to know his Son.

So where is King Jesus?

Let me read again two verses from 2 Samuel 15.

The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.

But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot.

Does that remind you of anyone?

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. (And in that garden on the Mount of Olives) he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”

A weeping king on the Mount of Olives, sorrowful and troubled over what?

Over sin. Not his sin, he was sinless.

But over your sin and mine and the sins of the world.

He submitted himself to his Father’s good plan and then he did not passively wait for what was to come, he laid down his life for his sheep.

No one takes it from me, Jesus said, but I lay it down of my own accord.

King David’s life was spared, King Jesus gave his life for you, so that through every crisis you face, but especially the last crisis when you face death and eternity, you can know he has gone ahead of you and is waiting for you.

Believing that will certainly carry you through everything you face.