

## 2 Samuel 20

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[ 0 : 00 ] Do you turn to 2 Samuel chapter 20? And 2 Samuel chapter 20.!

More tragedy. More murder. More consequences of David's sin. It's not a chapter that gets preached on very often.

And when it does, I can assure you the sermons I've listened to this week haven't helped me very much either. It's not in children's story Bibles. Isn't that surprising? Blood and guts and beheading. If you wanted to draw that children, it would make an interesting drawing, wouldn't it? But it doesn't make it into children's Bibles. And so here's today's sermon in a nutshell.

It's God's deliverance often comes in unexpected ways. God's deliverance often comes in unexpected ways. So there's three big characters. There's a weary monarch, King David.

[ 1 : 17 ] You've got a kind of Machiavellian general. You've got a wise woman. And so God's deliverance often comes in unexpected ways. First, then a weary monarch. I look at verse 1.

And it gives us some bearings as to what's going on. Now, there happened to be there a worthless man whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, of Benjamite.

And the narrator tells us this kind of scoundrel, Sheba. And we'll get to Sheba in a moment. But we should ask, where is there? Where is there?

There happened to be there. Where's there? And that takes us back to chapter 19, where we finished up last week, where David is devastated by the loss of his son Absalom. But he's been cajoled, isn't he, by his commander, Joab, to pull himself together, to get in front of the troops, to go to the victorious army, even if you don't feel like it.

And the big question through chapter 19 is, now that Absalom was dead, who will bring David out of exile back to Jerusalem?

[ 2 : 25 ] Who's the man that's going to lead, kind of, David back to God's city? David is from the southern tribe of Judah, and his army's been led by Joab. Joab is the guy who defeated Absalom's army.

It consisted, by and large, of tribes from the northern tribes of Israel. And the men of Israel have returned home, and now they're in a bit of a quandary.

What are they going to do? Should they join back with David? Should they join in the party or the celebration, the entourage of people bringing David back?

There were good reasons for going out to greet King David. It's better, by far, to participate in the celebration of his victory than to sulk in defeat.

But on the other hand, Absalom's army, they lost family members, hadn't they? Friends amongst the 20,000 people who died in battle.

[ 3 : 23 ] So to celebrate the king, whose army have just slaughtered your cousin, I think it's a little bit distasteful, isn't it? And their indecision leads to the majority of them staying put.

Meanwhile, David appeals to the tribe of Judah, his tribe, to come and escort him across the Jordan to Jerusalem. And so that brings us up to verse 1. There's Gilgal on the west side of the River Jordan, where they gather to welcome David.

But it's in Gilgal where there's this tension between the two tribes. Kind of civil war. It comes to boil. And what should have been a reunion of all the tribes, everyone's back together again, under the restored rule of King David, falls apart.

And there's adolescent squabbling. The men of Judah and the men of Israel dispute who should be at the front. Who should be given the lead position in escorting David back to Jerusalem?

And we know, don't we, from chapter 12, remember Nathan said, if you can remember, that the consequence of David's sin of adultery and murder is that there would be division. There'd be a sort of division. And it would not only be in David's family, but it would be in the entire kingdom.

[ 4 : 38 ] And so here in Gilgal, there's fulfillment of that. We're told, it's this worthless man, Sheba. And if you track the reading, you'll see really the whole chapter is about Sheba.

1 to 2 is the introduction. In 4 to 13, we're pursuing Sheba. And then in 14 to the end, we're eliminating Sheba. But after these initial verses, Sheba actually is very much in the background of the chapter.

But here in this opening verse, he lights the fuse, doesn't he, of everything that's to follow. Look at verse 1. There happened to be a worthless man whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, of Benjamite.

And he blew the trumpet and he said, We have no portion in David. We've no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, O Israel.

So all the men of Israel withdrew from David, followed Sheba, the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from Jordan to Jerusalem. Sheba was a Benjamite.

[ 5 : 42 ] King Saul's tribe. He probably still bore allegiance to the old regime. And Loretta leaves you in no doubt what kind of man he is. Can you look at verse 1, children, what kind of man is he?

He's worthless. And the reason he's a scoundrel is because Sheba wasn't simply attempting to revolt against David. He's feeding off the fuel of the squabbling.

Between the men of Judah and the men of Israel. And he brashly calls for secession. He says, let's break away. Let's become a separate country.

The north become separate from the southerners. And Sheba is seeking his need to go one better than Absalom. And not only overthrow the kingdom, not only overthrow the king, but also the kingdom.

And he concluded from the attitude of the men of Judah that there's nothing stopping them from seceding. Sheba, can you see what he's doing? He's rejecting God's king. And in doing so, he's rejecting God himself.

[ 6 : 52 ] So put your feet in David's sandals for a minute. And imagine how he's feeling about all this. In a sense, we don't have to imagine. Because in verse 6, do you see what he says there? In verse 6, David said to Abishai, Now Sheba, the son of Bichri, will do us more harm than Absalom.

I'm willing to bet that behind that comment is another thought, really. And the thought is this. Not again. Not another rebellion. I'm not even back in Jerusalem. And yet there's another uprising. A worse one than the one before. And Lord, you told me that the ramifications of my sin would be serious. They'd impact my family and the nation. But after the whole Absalom thing, can't you just give me a little bit of a break?

You don't have to be the struggling monarch of an ancient Middle Eastern king to know what that feels like, isn't it? Some of you maybe feel like that tonight. I expect each of us has felt it at times. Whether we've been explicit in praying it to God or we've muttered under our breath, Not again, really. Give me a break. There's a verse in 1 Corinthians, and it gets quoted an awful lot by Christians.

[ 8 : 07 ] In fact, I want to say to you tonight, it's often misquoted. It's about the trials and the difficulties that God brings into our lives.

Why don't you come with me to 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 13. And so you're going through a tough time. And in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 13, people say this.

Paul says this. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.

But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it. And I think what is often said is something like this, isn't it?

They've tried to encourage you in the middle of a particular trial, and they will say something like this to you. They will say, God never gives us more than we can handle. God never gives us more than we can handle.

[ 9 : 09 ] God must think you're such a strong person with such a strong faith, because he never gives us more than we can cope with. So here in 2 Samuel 20, we could say to David maybe, it seems like you've got another uprising on your hand, but you mustn't think, David, that you can't handle it, because God never gives you more than you can handle.

Isn't that what Paul promises? Apart from that isn't what Paul promises at all. Paul's focus in that verse that I read to you is on those times when we're tempted to sin, when we're tempted to run to those other gods, to idols of satisfaction, for happiness.

And Paul says, God will always give you a way out so that you need never sin. So think back with me, when David saw Bathsheba on the rooftop, David had an exit route he could have taken to escape adultery.

The problem was David decided not to take it. There's always a way out of temptation for you tonight. That's what Paul is saying. Not what it's misquoted as.

Because I think we do great harm to each other when we say to each other, well, God never gives you more than you can handle. Because the reality is this, the reality is this, God has never promised to not give you more than you can handle.

[10:38] And you and I will know from experience all the time that there's stuff that comes into your life, and what do you say? You say, I just can't handle this.

And so some of you listening to me tonight, all the sufferings and all the struggles and all the trials, and it's more than you can handle. And so here's the truth that I'm painfully aware of.

I am not enough. And neither are you, isn't it? So the gospel of self-help that's preached to you young people in school that you are all you need and you are enough, you know actually that that's not true.

You just need to grow up a little bit and you'll see it. Because I am not enough, and I don't have the resources needed in and of myself, and you don't either. But here's the message. The Bible comes through over and over again with bold letters, all capitals, a thousand-sized font, and it says God is enough.

God is enough. And because you are made in the image of God and you are made for a relationship with God, in that relationship with God, you will always find Him to be enough. So that for me and for you, what does God do with us?

[11:54] God purposely puts tests into our lives that are more than we can handle. For the express purpose of bringing us to an end of ourselves so that we will rely on Him and that we'll trust Him.

And when we do that, what do we find? What have you found? You have found He is enough, isn't He? He is so-so enough. Just as he seems to be doing with this weary monarch, King David.

And that brings us secondly to this kind of Machiavellian general. He's cunning, he's manipulative, he's unscrupulous. Joab has popped up on numerous occasions through to Samuel.

He's the de facto leader of David's army. And Joab probably obtained his position as a leader of David's army probably through family connections. As David's nephew, he probably had an inside track to positions of authority.

But you may have noticed, as we've read through Joab, he's a pretty complicated individual. He's both intensely loyal to David and he's completely uncontrollable.

[13:10] So he never revolts like Sheba does or like Absalom does. He doesn't seek David's throne. In that sense, he's faithful to David. But while he doesn't seek to become king, the problem is the way that he acts, he always acts as if he's his own king.

Extremely loyal to David, extremely unsubmitive to David. And as a result, he's never really got David's confidence. He's a loose cannon.

As we follow the story of 2 Samuel, by this point, he's gone rogue at least twice. He butchered Abner in chapter 3 and as we saw last week, he's responsible for the execution of David's son Absalom.

And as a consequence of what Joab did to Absalom, David replaces Joab as the commander with Absalom's nephew.

With his nephew. This guy, Amasa. Amasa had been the leader of Absalom's army. I think it's trying to placate the northern tribes. And David replaces Joab with this guy, Amasa.

[14:22] And Amasa was the one who was going to be given the job to organize the army. He says, you've got three days and then you're going to pursue Sheba, the worthless man. And then you will pursue him and you will eliminate him.

Amasa is unable to get the job together in the allocated time. And David still doesn't fall back on Joab. Instead, he calls on Joab's brother Abishai to take command.

And yet, as the story goes on, the narrator tells us the army is still Joab's army. Joab's name is no longer on the letterhead of commander of chief.

But he's still the one pulling the strings. And that's why it's not surprising that when Amasa catches up to Abishai and Joab, Joab decides it's in his own interest to take things into his own hands.

So we pick it up in verses 8 to 10. 2 Samuel 20, 8 to 10. And when they were at the great stone, that is at Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them.

[15:26] 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, the sword falls out.

Joab said to Amasa, Is it well with you, my brother? Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.

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, he died. Joab hasn't uttered a word in this chapter until he greets Amasa.

He's not blinked. He hasn't missed a step. And now swiftly, silently, mercilessly, he eliminates his rival, his cousin. And if anyone had any doubt about what Joab's intentions were with this act, it's made explicit in verse 11.

Joab is there, isn't he? And he says, whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab.

[16:38] He says it with the bloody courts of this guy lying beside him. Do you see what he says? He says, whoever favors who? Joab.

Joab comes first. It's interesting, as the story of David kind of comes to an end in 1 Kings, as David is on his deathbed giving instructions to his son Solomon, he tells Solomon, finish Joab off.

Something that he wasn't willing to do himself. Because at every point when Joab ignored the king and did his own thing, David turned a blind eye. He was apparently more concerned with Joab's effectiveness on the battlefield than he was with Joab's sin.

And so a number of commentators make the point in 2 Samuel 20 that there's a double rebellion. There's of course Sheba who wants to lead a succession, but there's also Joab who refuses to be controlled within the kingdom.

And he's forever picking and slicing away to keep his position. And so the Joabs of this world, they pay leadership, don't they, to those who exercise oversight over them.

[17:50] but their actions show that there's only one thing ruling their lives. On the one hand, they say they're loyal, but in the way that they live, they show they're not loyal to God the king.

And I think there are scores of Joabs on the membership roles of churches. Those are not the people that kind of ask, why are you doing what you're doing as church leaders?

But there are people who are interested in promoting their own agenda whatever the cost. Come hell or high water. I've seen it. I've seen people destroy churches through a Joab spirit, a kind of scheming, a manipulative spirit.

And we see it, don't we, in this Machiavellian journal. And so we in the church, I think, we are aware, aren't we, of the attacks of the enemy on the outside.

We can see that in a hostile culture. But the reality in the UK is this. Most churches are not destroyed by enemies attacking them from the outside, but by enemies attacking them from the inside.

[19:03] Right? Not unlike Joab. So it is the pursuit of this Machiavellian general and after the scoundrel, Sheba, and that brings us to the third character.

There's a wise woman. Let me pick up the story in verse 14. And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel at Beth Maka and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in.

Here's what the narrator wants us to understand and pick up from that statement that Sheba has not been successful in his efforts for succession. In verse 2, we're told that all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri.

But by the time he reaches the city of Abel in verse 14, in the far north, he's travelled hundreds of miles on his campaign.

The only support he's got at this point is his own little clan. But he arrives at this walled city of Abel and he seeks along with his tribe to take refuge in that city. And Sheba thinks, I've travelled far enough to be out of reach of David, but he's not got beyond the reach of Joab.

[20:19] Who's now firmly in charge of the pursuit. Joab arrives with his troops to assault the city. They build a siege ramp up to the walls as a battering ram. And the only option seems to be that Joab will pulverize Sheba and that city to death.

And the city will be destroyed in the process. But then all of a sudden there's a woman. And you've got to love her, she's a wise woman. And so with Joab's troops battering the walls, she boldly cries

out to Joab.

Look at her. You've got to love her, verse 16. Then a wise woman. Contrast her with the worthless man in verse 1. There's a wise woman, verse 16.

She called from the city, listen, listen, tell Joab, come here, for I want to speak that I may speak to you. And he came near her and the woman said, are you Joab?

He answered, I am. Then she said to him, listen to the words of your servant. And he answered, I'm listening. And then she said, they used to say in former times, let them ask for counsel. Don't you know what kind of place this is, Joab?

[ 21 : 27 ] This is the kind of place where they settled matters. And I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. And you are seeking to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel.

Don't you realize what you're doing? Why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord? So here's this wise woman who's seeking intently to save the city. So she enters into negotiation.

She reminds him that Abel is an old and venerated city. Indeed, it's a mother in Israel. It's a place of great importance. It's a place where people went for guidance and well-being and compelling words.

And so can you see the contrast between the wise woman and the ruthless Joab? She describes herself. She says, I'm peaceable and faithful. It's a mother's voice in a mothering city.

Joab, do you realize what you're going to do to advance your own interest? You'll swallow up the heritage of the Lord. So you can tell that Joab suddenly realizes and he's horrified by this. Verse 20.

[ 22 : 28 ] Joab answered, far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy. 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 him up alone and I'll withdraw.

And the woman said to Joab, behold, his head will be thrown over the wall. They've got smartphones to take a photo of proof that he's dead. It's the kind of proof they gave. And so Sheba is beheaded.

His head is thrown over the wall, proves he's dead, and the troops return to Jerusalem. It's a stunning climax to a brutal story.

And not for the first time or the last time, it's a woman who saves the day for Israel. Let's have an amen for the woman. Amen.

Pushes against, doesn't it, the misogynistic and the kind of Bible is anti-women, God is anti-women. A woman saves the day, not through violence, but through wisdom. Similarly, last week, we saw the wise woman of Tekoa.

[ 23 : 35 ] Her wise words contrast with the ruthless policy. We need more wise women, don't we? And more wise men who can use words to help us see the futility of our ways.

We've got a few more chapters to go in this book, but structurally, this chapter is the kind of conclusion of the 50 chapters of 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel.

And that's why it ends with this report. Can you see verses 23 and 24? Now Job was in command and all the army of Israel and Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, was in command of the Charithites and the Perlothites and Adoram was in charge of the forced labor.

Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, was the recorder. Sheba was secretary. Zadok and Abiath were priests. And Ahira, the Jarite, was also David's priest. And you think, again, deja vu. Because keep a finger there and come with me to 2 Samuel chapter 8 and verses 15 to 18.

We're nearly finished, I promise. And I want you to place what the difference between 1 Samuel 20, 23 to 26 and 2 Samuel 8, 15 to 18.

[ 24 : 48 ] So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people. And Joab, the son of Zariah, was over the army. Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, the recorder.

Zadok, the son of Ahedab. And Ahimelech, the son of Abiathar, were priests. And Zariah was secretary. And Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, was over the Chemites and the Perlothites. And David's sons were priests. And so the names are different, but what's the big difference?

The one glaring difference is that David isn't mentioned as the one who is ruling like he is in chapter 8. David is still on the throne, but effectively there's no kingly rule now.

There's no kingly rule bringing justice for the people. In contrast, there is now someone to oversee the division of forced labor. And so the list of officials begins in chapter 20 with Joab.

And his name stands where you would expect David's name to be. And the bottom line is this, if there was ever any doubt that David isn't the king that we were hoping for and longing for, it's now. [ 26 : 03 ] It's that the consequences of David's sin have undermined his kingdom so that his kingdom now in chapter 20 just resembles the kingdoms of this world, held together with tape by the likes of Joab.

And David's kingdom would never recover, but the hope of the world was never meant to be David, was it? It was the promise made to David by God back in chapter 7 of a future king in his line who would bring in a future kingdom that would last forever.

A king, of course, would be Jesus who would usher in an eternal kingdom. Not through the failed ways of David or the Machiavellian ways of Joab, but ironically through what we might call the willing Sheba.

And I need to be really careful here. The two characters of Sheba and Jesus could not be more different, but there is significant overlap. That in both the death of one man, the people were saved. For Sheba, it was an unwilling death, wasn't it? It was a beheading. It was an execution. The result of which meant that the people of Abel were spared, but for Jesus, it was a willing death.

[ 27 : 22 ] Jesus went to die a willing victim knowing that his death would not just save a town in the northernmost part of Israel, but it would save every single person in history who put their trust in him. So that God's deliverance comes to us in the most unexpected way.

Through the loving, sacrificial death of God's own son. And with his death and resurrection from the dead, Jesus ushers in a kingdom which the Apostle Paul describes as a kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy.

And it is to that kingdom that every single one of you are invited. And in his kingdom, we discover that no matter how many times trials and difficulties come into our life, God is enough.

In any and every situation, God is always enough. Let's pray. God is ending ending ending ending ending!

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