

The Life of David

David Flees from Absalom

2 Samuel 15:1-37

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Scripture

Kayla Mueller, 26 years old, was captured by ISIS, and on February 10, 2015 U.S. officials confirmed that Muslim extremists had murdered her while in captivity.

In the spring of 2014 as a captor, Kayla wrote to her family. The letter begins with Kayla's assurance that she has been treated well, and is "in a safe location, completely unharmed and healthy." The 26-year-old aid worker goes on to apologize touchingly to her family for the suffering that she has put them through because of her captivity. Then comes her central proposition: "I remember mom always telling me that all in all in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our creator because literally there was no else."

Kayla, who was involved in the campus ministry at Northern Arizona University, goes on to relate how "by God and by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in freefall." She adds: "I have been shown in darkness, light and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it."

She concluded, "Please be patient, give your pain to God. I know you would want me to remain strong. That is exactly what I am doing. Do not fear for me, continue to pray as will I. By God's will we will be together soon. All my everything, Kayla."¹

What an extraordinary expression of faith from Kayla!

As we follow the life of David, we see him trusting the Lord in a new way in the midst of trouble that came his way. Let's read about David fleeing from Absalom in 2 Samuel 15:1-37:

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2015/april/5040615.html>.

¹After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. ²And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," ³Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." ⁴Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." ⁵And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

⁷And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord, in Hebron. ⁸For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the Lord.'" ⁹The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. ¹⁰But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'" ¹¹With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. ¹²And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.

¹³And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." ¹⁴Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword." ¹⁵And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king

decides.”¹⁶ So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house.¹⁷ And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house.

¹⁸ And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king.¹⁹ Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home.”²⁰ You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you.”²¹ But Ittai answered the king, “As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.”²² And David said to Ittai, “Go then, pass on.” So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him.²³ And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.

²⁴ And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the city.²⁵ Then the king said to Zadok, “Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place.”²⁶ But if he says, ‘I have no pleasure in you,’ behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him.”²⁷ The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Are you not a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar.”²⁸ See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.”²⁹ So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.

³⁰ But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads,

and they went up, weeping as they went. ³¹ And it was told David, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” And David said, “O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.”

³² While David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head. ³³ David said to him, “If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. ³⁴ But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father’s servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,’ then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel. ³⁵ Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So whatever you hear from the king’s house, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. ³⁶ Behold, their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok’s son, and Jonathan, Abiathar’s son, and by them you shall send to me everything you hear.” ³⁷ So Hushai, David’s friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem. (2 Samuel 15:1-37)

Introduction

David’s sins of adultery and murder resulted in the Lord’s chastisement of him. The Lord decreed that “the sword shall never depart from your house” and “I will raise up evil against you out of your own house” (2 Samuel 12:10–11). After David’s son Absalom killed his other son Amnon, Absalom fled to Geshur. He remained there for three years. David’s chief military general, Joab, facilitated a reconciliation between David and Absalom. But after Absalom returned to Jerusalem, David would not see him for another two years. Then they met and David kissed Absalom (2 Samuel 14:33).

Now that Absalom was in Jerusalem, he conspired to overthrow his father as king over all Israel. This caused a real problem for David. But, we see David trusting the Lord as he faced trouble.

Lesson

Second Samuel 15:1-37 shows us how faith works when facing trouble.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Faith Is Challenged by the Enemies of God (15:1-12)
2. Faith Is Supported by the Gifts of God (15:13-23)
3. Faith Is Activated by the Will of God (15:24-29)
4. Faith Is Encouraged by the Providence of God (15:30-37)

I. Faith Is Challenged by the Enemies of God (15:1-12)

First, faith is challenged by the enemies of God.

After David reconciled with Absalom, weak as that reconciliation was, we read in verse 1, **“After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him.”** Imitating the showy display of ancient kings, Absalom rode in chariots and horses with men running ahead of him announcing his arrival. He also sat in the halls of justice and ingratiated himself with those seeking justice. He said to them that if he were judge, which in ancient times was the role of the king, he would grant them what they wanted. Then verse 6b says, **“So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.”**

Doesn't Absalom sound like a politician? He told the people what they wanted to hear. He said that he would give them what they wanted. Is it any wonder that he stole their hearts? But, we need to ask, “From whom did Absalom steal the hearts of the men of Israel?” Clearly, the answer is that he stole their hearts from David. And here is the problem. David was ordained by God to be his king over all Israel. David was God's anointed king. After being reconciled to David, Absalom should have supported King David's administration. But, by stealing the hearts of the people,

Absalom showed himself to be an enemy of God—and David.

After four years of manipulative ingratiating, Absalom asked David if he could go to his birthplace of Hebron to make good on a vow. David agreed for him to do this by saying to him, **“Go in peace”** (15:9). Interestingly, these are the last words that David would ever speak to his son Absalom. Absalom’s intention was clearly not peace but revolt. He sent messengers throughout all Israel telling those sympathetic to his cause that when they heard the sound of the trumpet, they would know that he was now king. Absalom also invited with him two hundred of Jerusalem’s leading citizens who were clueless about his real intention.

While offering sacrifices in Hebron, Absalom had Ahithophel come and join him. The significance of Ahithophel is that he was Bathsheba’s grandfather and also a very close advisor to David. However, after what David did to Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah, Ahithophel’s relationship with David apparently soured.

Verse 12b says, **“And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.”**

It is not clear how aware David was of what Absalom was plotting against him. David must have been aware of Absalom’s showy chariot displays. Perhaps he was even aware of Absalom’s statements to the people regarding justice. David surely knew that two hundred of Jerusalem’s leading citizens accompanied his son to Hebron.

David may not have done anything because he thought that all of this was part of God’s chastisement of him. Nevertheless, his son Absalom did not have David’s best interests at heart. David’s faith was about to be challenged by the enemies of God.

We are not always aware of God’s enemies conspiring against us. Of course, we are not in positions of significant leadership as David was. Nevertheless, unbelievers (who are enemies of God) will often oppose us, and we should not be surprised by that.

II. Faith Is Supported by the Gifts of God (15:13-23)

Second, faith is supported by the gifts of God.

Verse 13 says, **“And a messenger came to David, saying, ‘The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.’ ”** This must have been crushing news to David. He knew that to stay in Jerusalem would essentially mean suicide. So, he made preparations to flee from Jerusalem. Many years earlier, he had fled from King Saul, and so David had years of experience in escaping from those trying to take his life. David also wanted to spare Jerusalem.

After gathering together what little they needed for their escape, David and all his servants left Jerusalem, leaving ten concubines behind to keep the palace. As David got to Jerusalem’s last house, he stopped to inspect all his supporters as they passed by. He stopped **Ittai the Gittite**, a mercenary from the Philistine city of Gath, and said to him, **“Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you”** (15:19-20). The word for **“yesterday”** also means “recently.” David did not mean for Ittai to share in David’s troubles. David released Ittai to return home and enjoy a normal life.

But Ittai would have none of it. He answered David, **“As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be”** (15:21). Ittai exclaims a wonderful loyalty to David. This must have been heart-warming news to David. At a time when David’s own son, all the men of Israel, and even his close advisor had turned against him, he must have felt wonderfully supported by this gift of God.

God sometimes gives us someone to encourage and support

us when we face trials and troubles. Itta is God's gift to us.

As David and his retinue of followers left Jerusalem, we read in verse 23, **“And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.”**

III. Faith Is Activated by the Will of God (15:24-29)

Third, faith is activated by the will of God.

Among those who supported David were the clergy. The priests Abiathar and Zadok, along with all the Levites, brought the ark of the covenant with them out of Jerusalem. They may have thought that Absalom may have the city but he would not have the ark of the covenant, which represented the presence of God.

Some people superstitiously believe that the ark of God would indicate that God was on their side. But David would have none of it. He said to Zadok, **“Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. But if he says, ‘I have no pleasure in you,’ behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him”** (15:25-26). Commentator Dale Ralph Davis writes, “David says his restoration (should there be such) does not depend on whether he has Yahweh's furniture but on whether he has Yahweh's favor.”²

There are also people who say that if you really believe in God's sovereignty, then you just need to sit back and let God act on your behalf. But that is not true. Faith is not *abated* but *activated* by a knowledge of God's sovereignty.

As soon as David submitted himself completely to the sovereign will of God, he also took action to plant a spy in the city of Jerusalem. He said to Zadok, **“Are you not a seer? Go back to**

² Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 193.

the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me” (15:27-28). And that is exactly what they did.

Friends, true faith is always an active faith. It is a working faith. It is not inactive. Faith is activated by the will of God.

IV. Faith Is Encouraged by the Providence of God (15:30-37)

And fourth, faith is encouraged by the providence of God.

Having crossed the brook Kidron, we read in verse 30, **“But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.”** Before David reached the summit of the Mount of Olives, he received news that his friend had deserted him and joined Absalom. Knowing Ahithophel’s brilliant counsel, David prayed an arrow prayer, **“O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness”** (15:31b).

David had hardly finished his prayer, when God sent an answer in the person of **Hushai the Archite** who **came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head** (15:32). Verse 37 describes Hushai as **“David’s friend.”** Some commentators note that **“friend”** refers to an official counselor and not only to a personal acquaintance. In any event, David believed that God had providentially provided him with encouragement, as his statement to Hushai suggests, **“If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father’s servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,’ then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel”** (15:33-34). And that is exactly what Hushai did. Davis notes, “Hushai was not needed for

companionship but for espionage.”³

God’s providence usually works in ordinary ways. He did not strike down Absalom or give Ahithophel a stroke. David prayed. A short while later David bumped into a friend. David asked his friend to work behind the scenes for him. Of course, much uncertainty still lay ahead. Many dark days lay before David. But surely David’s faith was encouraged by the providence of God.

When you face a trial or difficulty, pray. Then open your eyes to providential circumstances God brings your way.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed David fleeing from Absalom in 2 Samuel 15:1-37, let us trust God even when facing trouble.

We are aware that David was still suffering God’s chastisement for his sin. But he was trusting God and taking action to obey and follow the Lord.

David was God’s rightful king. He was still God’s anointed king as he crossed the brook Kidron and ascended the Mount of Olives. He was betrayed by a close counselor. And he went up the Mount of Olives weeping.

About one thousand years later, the scene was repeated. This time it was repeated by David’s Greater Son, Jesus Christ. He is the rightful king, according to 2 Samuel 7:12-16. He is God’s anointed king as he crossed the brook Kidron and ascended the Mount of Olives (Luke 19:37). He was betrayed by one of his twelve disciples (Luke 22:3-4). And Jesus wept on the Mount of Olives (Luke 19:41-44), not so much over his rejection but over the doom of those who reject him.

If you have never done so, repent of your sin and turn to Jesus in faith today. Amen.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 195.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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