
Paving the Way to Kingship

2 Samuel 4¹

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Tonight's text is not one most people would run to for comfort. And most modern day Christians probably wouldn't see this as gospel either. It doesn't fit the Jesus loves everyone mantra that seems to permeate the Christian landscape. No, this text contains deceit, murder, the crippling of a child, capital punishment, in one instance, our modern day laws would consider an abuse of a corpse. We will read of the burial of a body part that will be considered dignified in one instance and a hanging of a dismembered corpse in another that will not be considered dignified. In fact, if this text were a movie or a TV show I would bet most parents would not allow their children to watch it. It's that bad. But the Bible doesn't always read in a way we would like. The Word is never hesitant to tell stories that are real. Real people with real lives in the real world and that includes murder, deceit, evil, and death. We see this every day of our lives. Wake up and turn on the news. You'll see it. Murder, death, sickness, catastrophes, destruction, and gross injustices and the list goes on and on. We know the cause, its sin. Sin corrupts, defiles, separates, and kills. Yet, God is still orchestrating all events with purpose and precision. So even in this text tonight there is purpose because as 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 says,

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Let's remember this as we journey in the text tonight. I want you to feel this story even in all its sin and remember, there is a divine hand working in the midst of it all. Let's pray and get started.

Open your bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 4. Let's read verse one.

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A Dismal Situation (v.1)

1 When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed.

The situation is dire. Abner, who was in the process of uniting the tribes under David, is now dead. Ish-bosheth is on his own. This is not good news. Just ask Ish-bosheth himself! He knows with Abner gone there is no hope. Everyone knew Abner was the true leader. And now, scripture tells us even Ish-bosheth feels this blow to the northern tribes. It says, "his courage failed." The King James puts it this way, "His hands were feeble." He became weak when he heard Abner had died. Think about that. Abner, who made him king and then was in the process of handing over and uniting the 10 others tribes under David no less, still gave him a sense of security. Now, Ish-bosheth is fearful and weak. When your leader loses all courage, let me tell you, that's not a good sign. We know from last week how spineless he was. In one instance, Ish-bosheth sees Abner with one of Saul's concubines and questions him about it². He is basically accusing Abner of disloyalty and treason. After confronting him, Abner becomes so offended that he tells him he's going to give the kingdom to David! What's Ish-bosheth's response? He doesn't say a word! Nothing! Abner is saying, "I am going to take everything that is yours and give it to your enemy." And in essence, by his no-response, his response is, "Okay." He is terrified of Abner. In another instance we read of David sending a message to Ish-bosheth to hand over David's wife, Michal who at this point is married to someone else in the northern territory. What does he do? He goes and takes Michal from her current husband and gives her over to David without a single hesitation! Ish-bosheth doesn't have the courage to resist David's demands. Not only is he afraid of Abner but here we see he is scared to death of David too! So everyone knows there is no hope with Ish-bosheth at the helm.

Scripture also tells us the people of Israel are dismayed but a better term here might be terrified. When you lose a good leader and there is no one in the batter's circle being trained or waiting to step in, people panic. You get this sense of hopelessness. These people feel completely naked and vulnerable. They may be thinking because Abner was murdered by one of David's own commanders that David did not want to unite with them and they are left with no leader surrounded by their gentile enemies and possibly waiting for an invasion from David. Completely naked and vulnerable. Let's read on.

² 2 Samuel 3:7-11

A Deceiving Bloodline (v.2-3)

2 Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon a man of Benjamin from Beeroth (for Beeroth also is counted part of Benjamin; 3 the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been sojourners there to this day).

We see here two new characters being introduced, Baanah and Rechab. Scripture tells us these two guys are captains of raiding bands. These bands were not for faint of heart I'm sure. I think of them as very corrupt marines. And I emphasize corrupt for we'll see this deceiving and corruptive behavior play out later. But for now, we can gather some evidence of who they were by looking at their past. You noticed here the verse says two times they were from Beeroth and from the tribe of Benjamin. This must be important if it's written twice. Let's look at Beeroth. It was one of the four cities of the Gibeonites we read about in Joshua chapter 9. As Joshua was beginning his southern military campaign the Gibeonites, who were located about 25 miles away from Joshua's camp, sent some representatives to him and they disguised themselves as weary and worn travelers from a distant country. They even took worn-out sacks, wineskins, and patched sandals in order to appear to have been traveling for miles. They didn't want to look like any of the local enemies Joshua was after. He wasn't convinced they were the sojourners they claimed to be and proceeded to ask them more pointed questions in order determine if they were deceiving him. But they answered those questions well enough to finally convince Joshua to enter into a covenant with them so that he would not harm them. Joshua soon found out the truth. The truth was they were from just around the corner and they had deceived him. It was too late the covenant was already established. So these two men came from deceptive people. You could say it was in their blood. Now this ties into the mention of Benjamin as their tribe. Ish-bosheth was from the tribe of Benjamin. Keep this in mind as we read the rest of this text. If they were from the tribe of Benjamin and Saul and Ish-bosheth were from the same tribe you would think they would be loyal to their tribe, right? Let's see if this happens. This verse mentions they fled to Gittaim. There is not a clear reason why they fled there. Some believe the reason for their escape to Gittaim was due to King Saul's attempt to annihilate them during his reign which may explain their betrayal later but there is not enough evidence to confirm this. Let's read on.

A Debilitated Child (v.4)

4 Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

In a panic, a nurse takes the child to flee to safety. But in their haste the child falls and becomes crippled. This is the only time in this chapter Mephibosheth is mentioned. In fact, we will not read any more about him in this chapter and won't hear anything else about him until we reach chapter 9 and his story and outcome is a beautiful picture of the gospel. So, why is he mentioned here? Think kingly throne. Who would succeed Saul after his death? It would be his sons. We know from 1 Samuel 31:2 that the Philistines killed all his sons except Ish-bosheth. Therefore, the next in line besides Ish-bosheth would be a son of King Saul's eldest son, Jonathan. This would be Mephibosheth. But, he becomes crippled. This means he would be out of line of the throne. A crippled child probably wouldn't be a king in their day. They weren't afraid to discriminate back then nor were they very politically correct. Here is a suffering child. In summary, we have a dire situation where both the king and people are weak and fearful, we have two deceptive characters, Baanah and Rechab, both from the tribe of Benjamin – the same tribe as Ish-bosheth, and now the only other heir to the throne becomes crippled trying to escape to safety. This leaves Ish-bosheth as the king of the northern tribes and no heir to follow him in case he would die. This would have been a prime opportunity for David to take over the tribes. This would have been beyond easy. Ish-bosheth probably would just handed the throne over to him without any hesitation or resistance. This was David's opportunity! But that doesn't happen. Why? Because of a promise he made to Saul back in 1 Samuel 24. We'll get to that later. Let's read on.

A Devious Murder (v.5-7a)

5 Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-bosheth as he was taking his noonday rest. 6 And they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. 7 When they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him.

We now read of this devious murder. When you read these two verses it almost reads like there were two different killings here. But as is the case in much of the Old Testament what we get

in verse 6 is a summary of what happened and then in verse 7 we read a more detailed account. Think of Genesis 1 when we read of male and female being created but later in chapter 2 we read the details of that event. They weren't two separate events. These two guys come to Ish-bosheth when he is sleeping. On one hand this is a little surprising due to Ish-bosheth's cowardice but on the other hand not so much due to the character of these two. Why did these guys have to sneak in when he was sleeping? They worked for Ish-bosheth and they were from the same tribe. So you would think they would be loyal to him. But obviously this is not the case. And Ish-bosheth was far from being any kind of military leader or fighter. Notice they killed him while he slept. They probably could have walked right in to his room, confronted him, and just killed him with no real fight. In fact, as cowardly as Ish-bosheth was, they probably could have scared him into surrendering to David. This act again proves how deceiving and evil these guys were and it gets worse in the next verses. So they kill him while he is sleeping by stabbing him in the stomach and then cutting off his head. Here is the murder. I know in those times, cutting off a head was a way of providing proof of death. But in our modern day, we would consider this abuse of a corpse. I told you this wasn't a pretty chapter. Let's move on.

A Deceiving Presentation (v.7b-8)

They took his head and went by the way of the Arabah all night, 8 and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring."

Think of how these guys must have felt. They had just snuck in the midst of a king's camp, walked into his room, and killed him. Now they have his head and they are going right into the camp of another king with the head of this king's so called enemy. You think they may have thought, "David will love this!" Recalling the defeat of Goliath when David stood over Goliath's dead body and cut off his head. We have to ask ourselves, "Why are they doing this to begin with?" Remember the evidence of their deceitfulness, I would guess they think they will gain something from this murder of Ish-bosheth. Maybe they think David will give them some special place of honor or rule. Let's look at another detail. They say, "*Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. **The LORD** has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring.*" I hope you heard the emphasis. *The LORD has avenged my lord the king.* They invoke the name of the LORD. Why? Do *they*, and I stress *they*, really think God has done this? I don't think so. Based on the evidence of their deceptiveness again, they were invoking the name of the Lord for personal gain. If they truly loved the Lord and wanted

to please Him and His anointed one, they wouldn't have killed this man in the first place. On a side note, don't we see this very act in politics every day? Watch for this in the upcoming primaries. Candidates will invoke the name of God for votes. They will say they attend church and they will hold speaking engagements in churches all in the name of God. How many have we seen do this and in a matter of weeks they are dropping out due to some sort of infidelity or corruption. You rarely hear them invoking the name of Jesus. God yes, Jesus, no. There's something about that name...sounds like a song. Let's get back to our historic event. Up to this point, we are reading about a dismal situation and deceptive men. Now we'll read about a different reaction.

A Deserving Sentence (v.9-11)

9 But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, 10 when one told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. 11 How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth?"

Here is how David views their act. From the onset he gives God glory when he says, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity." David knows the Lord. David has trusted the Lord. David has witnessed time and time again of the Lord's faithfulness. David knows there is blessing in obedience and waiting on the Lord. He knows it's been the LORD who has rescued him from every dangerous situation. It has been the Lord who has done it. No one else. David knows this. We get an insight into the heart of David and one of the reasons we look at him and remember he was "a man after God's own heart." Next David refers back to when he had heard of Saul's death. In God's divine plan, the pronouncement of both deaths of Saul and Ish-bosheth have some parallels. In both deaths the messengers were seeking some personal gain. In both instances the messengers stated they were the ones who killed the king. The man who announced he killed Saul made it sound like it was a mercy killing. But the Beerothites made it clear their murder was intentional and premeditated. The man who killed Saul received his just reward, death. But the Beerothites' murder of Ish-bosheth is worse in that they killed a righteous man intentionally. The text doesn't say exactly what they told David but they must have given him the details for him to say, "How much more, when a wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed." This may have been the reason these

men received a dishonorable death by being executed and then having their hands and feet cut off and hung by a pool. In Saul's death, you would have thought David would have rejoiced because the man who had sought his life was finally dead. But instead he wept and mourned. In the same way, when the Beerothites told David of Ish-bosheth's death, he didn't rejoice either but rather carried out justice. In each instance, when David heard of their deaths he could have rejoiced but didn't. He could have seen the death of Ish-bosheth and Saul as his opportunity to step right in and be king. David could have said, "Well Lord, I didn't kill either of these men so it's not my fault. But the throne is mine now. Thanks!" But that's not the sense here. David displayed his character. He carries out justice to the unrighteous. Murder is not the way to the throne. David wanted the LORD to put him on the throne. Not these two guys nor anyone else. One other thing to note here. When he looks at the Beerothites says something amazing. He says, "*How much more, when wicked men have killed a **righteous man** in his own house on his bed.*" Did you hear the surprising words? He calls Ish-bosheth a righteous man! Would you have called him righteous? I wouldn't have! I would have called him a coward. In fact, I would have said, "Do us all a favor and just quit now! We are doomed with you at the helm! You are worthless and helpless!" Ish-bosheth was a coward and everyone knew it. He wasn't a leader at all. Yet David didn't see it that way. David saw it as Ish-bosheth was the right man for the throne because he was the descendent of Saul. That's how it works in the kingdom. Offspring get the throne when the king dies. David sees the killing of Ish-bosheth for what it is, they killed the king therefore they must die! So he carries out the corporal punishment, the death penalty. A righteous judgment. And now we will have two opposing burials. Let's read on.

A Dishonorable and a Dignified Burial (v.12)

12 And David commanded his young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron.

After he kills these 2 men he cuts off their hands and feet, and hangs them for everyone to see. While that was not uncommon at that time, we would shudder at this brutality today. This was not an honorable death. We treat inmates on the day before their execution with little more dignity than this. But in contrast he takes the head of Ish-bosheth and buries it in the tomb of Abner, a man he mourned over in his death. He gives Ish-bosheth an honorable burial. This is a sad moment for David. He wants and does give honor the family line of Saul. All of this running, hiding, and fighting with and from Saul has ended with Saul's last descendent, last

heir to the throne gone. This end paved the way for David to unite the tribes and end the civil war. It was all over.

Reflect and Respond

What do we derive from all this? This chapter started with fear, moved to the crippling of a child, then deceitful men murdering a man in his sleep and then cutting off his head bringing it to the king. The king then delivers punishment upon them by cutting their hands and feet off and then hanging their bodies by a pool. This is bloody chapter. Remember, I said this doesn't sound like the "Jesus loves me" most people want to hear in a sermon yet there is a gospel message in it.

First of all, we must look at David, who was and is a picture of our true king. We see here David judges the wicked. David carried out just judgment and so will Christ. Remember it was the sin of the Beerothites is what caused their judgement. This mirrors the scripture, "The wages of sin is death". And Christ will judge and does judge sinners every day. In fact, we see the sin in the world and judgement upon it every day. Maybe not in the way we would think but God, is carrying out justice against the evil in some form or another, therefore vindicating us, the just.

Secondly, David, like Christ, honors the Father by trusting in Him even in the midst of chaos and sinful actions of others. David is waiting for the Lord to carry out His plan. You get a sense he becomes angry when people are trying to move things along to get him to the throne. Do you trust in the Father this way? Are willing to publicly declare, you are waiting on the Father in the midst of this world and its chaos and sinfulness? Or are you trying to make things happen yourself? Are you trying to directly or indirectly manipulate people and situations to get things you want? Or are you trying to carry out your own justice on sinful man? Wait, wait on the Lord and obey Him while you are waiting.

Thirdly, in this chapter we see how David determines what makes one righteous. What David believes makes one righteous is probably not the same as what we determine makes one righteous. You see Ish-bosheth was righteous by position. He was king therefore he had the power even though his character didn't show it. David mirrors our King Jesus. He makes those that are weak, timid, and separated righteous by position too. We all have failings, weaknesses, and shortcomings that we hide and cover up so that no one will see them. Some of us are not very good actors and everyone sees your weakness, just like Ish-bosheth. None of us are righteous,

no not one! But the king sees us differently due to what He accomplished on the cross and it was all on our behalf and we are seated with Him and in Him therefore, by our position, in Christ, we are made righteous.

[2Corinthians 5:21 ESV] 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[Philippians 3:9 ESV] 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith –

Our position, in Christ and righteous, is based on faith. What do you believe about Christ? Are you in Christ? Are you sitting in here tonight pondering that same question? Who is Christ? Seek out someone here tonight and ask them this very question. Ask them why do they believe He is the Christ. Eternal consequences are at stake.

Maybe you are sitting here tonight, a confessing believer, saying to yourself, "I don't feel righteous. I am laden with sin and I feel defeated." And I would answer, it is not based on your feelings but on your position! Remember, it is by faith in Christ that we are made righteous not on feeling.

Here is another point to ponder, believer, do you see each other in this light? Or are you wanting to criticize others for maybe their lack of maturity and praising yourself for over-abundance of maturity? What would our church look like or be like if we could see each other as Christ see each of us? Yes, we should be growing up and maturing in Christ and based on numbers, there are probably some in this church who do need to grow up and mature based on what they know. But in the meantime, you do what you need to do in order to mature. Sitting around criticizing them is not the way of our King.

Finally, once again we see God using sinful man and sinful acts to carry out His sovereign plan. David had made a promise to Saul he would not harm his family in 1 Samuel 24. This is Saul speaking to David.

[1Sa 24:18-22 ESV] 18 And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. 19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. 20 And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 21 Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off

my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." 22 And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

We will see David established as king in the next chapter. And we saw David keeping his promise here by not cutting off Saul's offspring. That's why David didn't take advantage of Ish-bosheth after Abner died. God used it all. He used David's promising keeping, deceitful murderous men, and righteous judgment to carry out His plans. Remember where we started? Wake up tomorrow. Read the news or watch it on TV. You'll see parts of this story being played out in our world. How will you see it now? Will you see it as God orchestrating His divine plan in bringing all His children to glory? Maybe you or someone you know is in the midst of similar situations. Murder, deceit, suffering, injustice. What will you tell yourself and your friend now? Hopefully you can point to this section and remind yourself and others, there is purpose in the midst of these situations. But do this with wisdom, because unbelievers will look at you with complete and utter disgust. And there may be some believers who will do the same. The world doesn't understand this, right? How can a good God allow such tragedies occur and then say they have a purpose? What kind of God would do such a thing? A God who would allow the biggest injustice to occur to His own son in order to secure for Himself a people He forgives and makes new and righteous in His own eyes. A God who has secured our future so that at the proper time when he deems the time is right, He will return and make all things new and there will no longer be sin in this world. This is our hope. God knows what he is doing, trust Him in the midst and He will show Himself to be more than you will ever need. Let's pray.

