

## Redemptive Failure | Fall and Rise of the House of David

### Return of the King

Second Samuel 19.1-10, 18b-23, ch.20:1-2

9.25.22

*Then it was told Joab, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourns for Absalom." <sup>2</sup> The victory that day was turned to mourning for all the people, for the people heard it said that day, "The king is grieved for his son." <sup>3</sup> So the people went by stealth into the city that day, as people who are humiliated steal away when they flee in battle. <sup>4</sup> The king covered his face and cried out with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" <sup>5</sup> Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who today have saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines, <sup>6</sup> by loving those who hate you, and by hating those who love you. For you have shown today that princes and servants are nothing to you; for I know this day that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. <sup>7</sup> "Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, surely not a man will pass the night with you, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." <sup>8</sup> So the king arose and sat in the gate. When they told all the people, saying, "Behold, the king is sitting in the gate," then all the people came before the king.*

*Now Israel had fled, each to his tent. <sup>9</sup> All the people were quarreling throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, but now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. <sup>10</sup> "However, Absalom, whom we anointed over us, has died in battle. Now then, why are you silent about bringing the king back?"*

*<sup>18b</sup> And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king as he was about to cross the Jordan. <sup>19</sup> So he said to the king, "Let not my lord consider me guilty, nor remember what your servant did wrong on the day when my lord the king came out from Jerusalem, so that the king would take it to heart. <sup>20</sup> "For your servant knows that I have sinned; therefore behold, I have come today, the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king." <sup>21</sup> But Abishai the son of Zeruiah said, "Should not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD'S anointed?" <sup>22</sup> David then said, "What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be an adversary to me? Should any man be put to death in Israel today? For do I not know that I am king over Israel today?" <sup>23</sup> The king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." Thus the king swore to him.*

*<sup>20.1-2</sup> Now a worthless fellow happened to be there whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite; and he blew the trumpet and said, "We have no portion in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!" <sup>2</sup> So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem.*

David is now the king of the Jews again... He's aging ...and undergoing the kind of conflicts that make a person age quickly! His cherished son, the handsome, charismatic Absalom, had attempted a coup d'état against his father. And it failed.

And IN that war, David's troops won the day, but David lost the son: Absalom is dead. Israel remains divided...in civil war: pro-Absalom versus pro-David.

And now David, deeply damaged and broken, still mourning, is confronted by his nephew and general, Joab. Joab is fuming! "Uncle David, your highness, enough with the grief... You have to get up now and reunite this great nation..."

If there's a power vacuum in the ancient Near East -- that's big trouble and Joab sees the danger.

And so, inconsolable, and witness to the death of yet another beloved child, timeworn David gets up and attempts to rule this nation. He has to get back to Jerusalem to reclaim the throne. He has to try and heal this deep national wound while he himself is so wounded. It's really a very tragic scene, like so many scenes in David's latter years.

And YET, it's the return of the King! it's a moment to celebrate victory. And, for US, a parallel: it reminds us and informs us of something very important to the Christian and that is the impending return of the King and how to live in this interim period... when the king seems to be away.

Today, something a little different: I want to isolate two features in this decisive and dangerous moment of tragic victory. And I want to show how these two features mirror our own experience of living, while anticipating the return of a King.

**1) Lost In Love**

**2) Rebels' Response**

The first feature I'd like to highlight in this story is the very vivid depiction of a father's love for his son... an almost irrational love for his son. We saw it last week and now a few more details emerge.

In the aftermath of the great uprising, everything was up for grabs. Would David remain king? Would this be a "winner take all" situation? Could he return to Jerusalem? Could he reclaim his home, his place in the world? Would the nation remain intact? Some would live; some would die; everything was uncertain. The dust settles and questions have to be answered.

But questions don't matter to David. In fact, nothing matters to David... All those troops... his wives, his concubines, his servants, his friends, his properties and position -- nothing mattered.

"Sire, we've come from the front; with news. The good news is you're free: we won!"

But none of that matters. Like a broken record, like someone in a trance, like someone fixated: David He keeps repeating only one question.: "Is it well with the young man Absalom? Is it well with my son? Is it well with Absalom?"

And when David learns, it is not well with Absalom, everything goes away and nothing else exists. "I would gladly give it all, lose it all, just to have Absalom back... I would rather die myself than to lose Absalom."

And the people around David are stunned: it's just excessive, obsessive, just way overboard and out of proportion. Joab is furious: "You've covered us all in shame, you've shown that WE mean nothing and Absalom your pampered, beautiful betrayer, Absalom means everything! If Absalom were alive and all of us were dead, I think you'd be happy!"

Today, we'd call this kind of parental relationship, dysfunctional. You could probably find a book called *Parents Who Love Too Much*. It'd be rightly labeled a mania, a complex or fixation or, at least, extreme favoritism. Absalom is David's darling son.

Now, the Bible says, that God Himself is a Father and that God, the Father, has His own Darling. David was obsessed, but there IS, in God, the Father, a magnificent Obsession... a favored Child. God says of this Child: "*Thou art fairer than all the sons of men. Grace anoints Your lips.*" (Ps 45.2)

The Book of Hebrews says about this favored Son "*He is the radiance of (the Father's) glory and the exact representation of (the Father's) nature.*" (Heb 1.3)

And (same chapter) the Father says "*let all the angels of God worship Him*" (Heb 1.6) and the Father says about this Dearest and Best Son, "*Thy throne, oh God, is forever and ever*"... And again, "*sit at my right hand and I will make all your enemies a footstool for your feet.*"

God the Father is the very essence of Beauty and Jesus Christ is the exact representation of the Father – NO WONDER the Father loves to look upon the Son He loves infinitely – the Son is the perfect reflection of Beauty, Truth and Goodness.

When Jesus was on the Mountain with His students, God, the Father let the students see Jesus Christ IN His Radiance and the Father's joy in the Son is shared with those students when God says admiringly, "*This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!*" (Matt. 17.5) We see that radiance again in Revelation CH 1.

John Piper's fantastic book, *The Pleasures of God*, begins with a chapter titled, "The Pleasures of God in His Son" – I highly recommend it; a gamechanger! In that CH Piper quotes St. Paul (Colossians CH 1 - QUOTE) "*For by (the Son) all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created on account of Him and for Him.*" (Col. 1.16) Did you get that? All things were created on account of the Son AND FOR the Son. If you ever wondered why the Universe is so big... it's because God the Father gave it to God the Son – big love calls for a big gift – the size of the Universe!

Do you suppose David loved his favorite, his beloved, murderous, traitor? Do you suppose David loved his favorite more than God loves His favorite? His fairest of all whose lips drip with grace and truth and who's heart is altogether lovely?

The point is: David's love for the rebel son even though he's a turncoat and hateful is so strong that Joab thinks it's reckless.

Well, how much deeper and vaster, like a trillion oceans, like the universe itself is the love of God the Father for His darling delightful Son, Jesus Christ? Even David, didn't tell people: "worship my son". But God calls all creation to worship His Son. Hebrews 1.6 *"and let all God's angels worship Him."*

And this is the Son, indescribably beloved, as the Apple of the Father's eye, this is the Son whom the Father gave to be crushed for me. Think how beloved you must be to God, if God would give His Son for you, "Jesus, Oh Jesus, My Son My Son, Jesus!"

How beloved YOU must be if God exchanged His darling Son for you AND how wrecked you must be *if that's what it took for God* to actually reclaim you?

And that twin-truth (that God loves you that deeply and that you are that sinful) is central to the Christian message and the Christian understanding of life. It's the Christian's self-image.

And that love isn't only a theory, a cold fact, it's a living, burning reality; God wants us to receive this love by faith.

In fact, Jesus prayed for every believer when He said to the Father in John chapter 17, "that You, Father, have loved THEM even as You have loved Me and in order that the love You have for Me may be in them."

No wonder Paul prayed that believers *"may have power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love for us in Christ."* (Paraphrase of Eph 3.18)

The clear implication is: we talk about it, the love of God, but we really don't *comprehend* it. If we did, all the vain things we run after to make us happy full and satisfied they would all look like tinsel and Styrofoam (Philippians 3.8) Only the love of God can fill the hole you have in your heart.

We so little see it, know it and believe it. So, Paul prays that the eyes of our hearts be flooded with this light. That's the key to growth and freedom.

Now, the second picture in today's passage is David's transition back to the throne. In this transition, we meet several different characters in chapters 19-21. These are characters who are having to reckon with a king who's apparently been absent but is now returning.

Let me just point to two of these situations. First, a guy named Shimei; we met him, unnamed, last week. When David was forced to leave Jerusalem, Shimei violently opposes David. He stood above the road cursing and screaming "Murderer! Scoundrel! Get out!" (2 Sam 16.8)

He threw rocks at David's entourage – a real pest. And when David's guards want to kill him, David defends Shimei saying, "he knows more about me than you do."

Well, now the king is returning, it didn't go the way Shimei thought it would! King David is returning.

And now, Shimei is wondering how wise it was to have cursed the king. So the rebel runs out to meet the king. He falls prostrate before David and cries, "please forgive me for throwing rocks and for cursing you."

Once again David's bodyguards say, "let me at 'im, boss!" But David says, "You boneheads!... always want to get tough with people and show how loyal and serious you are... I know I'm the king. I don't have to punish this guy to make myself feel... royal... or secure."

"Shimei, you shall not die!" (2 Sam 19.18-23) And that's it: David forgives... a very merciful king. (We'll meet Shimei – in the time of Solomon – the rest of the story!)

A second character introduced in chapter 20, is Sheba, son of Bichri. Sheba has seen that David is merciful with former opponents (like Shimei the cursing rock-thrower). He'd probably seen David's love for Absalom and thought, "this guy's weak!"

So Sheba rolls the dice. He figures he has nothing to lose and tries to get another rebellion going. And when David catches up with this worthless fellow Sheba... He has him beheaded without mercy.

Now, what do these pictures (Sheba the stranger who rebelled against the true king and Shimei, the former enemy who surrendered) what do these have to do with us living, as we are, in very different circumstances?

Well, 'turns out, these times are NOT so different in at least one respect: we too await the return of the King. In this moment in history, people are responding to the news of Jesus Christ.

And the takeaway of that parallel, simply put, is this: be like Shimei and don't be like Sheba.

If what the Bible says is true, if the disciples of Jesus Christ really did witness Him crushed, dead... and then, three days later, alive (somehow the same and somehow new) the same Person but now indestructible and magnificent and glorious AND IF the eyewitnesses stuck to their story even when it cost them everything, if Jesus Christ IS indeed alive and IS the true king and IS returning, then we had better come out with our hands up NOW while there's time.

God, the Father says of the Son in Psalm 2: "Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" (10-12)

We'd better not do our own thing! Because the True King has mercy on anyone who repents and asks for mercy and walks in the light in openness and honesty.

But the returning King opposes the proud. Everyone who tries to be his own king He will give to them what they want: they will be their own tyrants for all eternity consumed by their own regret and shame forever.

On the other hand for everyone who does like Shimei say “OK, what was I thinking? Please forgive me and please be my King” – to them, the true king says, “You shall NOT die!”

And even though at this point, Shimei may have just been trying to save his own skin... at least he DID recognize the true King, David. (Our repentance is far from perfect!)

I can’t help thinking that Shimei walked away forgiven and thought, “Wow! I was wrong about David – he’s not the scoundrel murderer I thought – he’s merciful even to a maniac rebel like I am! I wish I could know this king!”

It's like this for most Christians. Our first turning to the Lord of grace may be as a kind of fire-insurance... but in time as we continue to bask in His mercy.... We repeat the repent and trust way by which we first received Jesus (Col 2.6-7) And eventually we begin to get established in Christ, to trust His love...and we begin to hear, the Sovereign King pray for us “as the father loves Me, His darling, His favored so He also loves you...” And it will take a lifetime to think about that in fact you will be thinking about it for all eternity.

Think now – everyone – don’t give a quick answer: how are you responding to the True King? Do you see Him for who He really is? Do you see Him as absent? Do you see Him as coming... to receive everyone who repents and believes...to judge all who insist on being IN control. God’s blood-bought people will not only share in God’s infinite love and in Jesus Christ’s victory over death. His Beloved people will hear an even better declaration than what David made to Shimei the repenting rebel.

**We will hear, NOT simply, “You shall not die.” (19.23) but “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11.25-26)**

So when we say that God loves his son, we are not talking about a love that is self-denying, sacrificial, or merciful. We are talking about a love of delight and pleasure. God is not stooping to pity the undeserving when he loves his Son. This is how God loves *us*. It is not how he loves his Son. He is well-pleased with his Son. His soul delights in the Son! When he looks at his Son he enjoys and admires and cherishes and prizes and relish is what he sees. The first great pleasure of God is his pleasure in the Son.

God is the most glorious of all beings. Not to love him and delight in him is a great loss to us and insult him.

But the same is true for God. How shall God not insult what is infinitely beautiful and glorious? How shall God not commit idolatry? There is only one possible answer God must love and delight in his own beauty and perfection above all things. For us to do this in front of the mirror is the essence of vanity; for God to do it in front of his son is the essence of righteousness.

-John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight In Being God* (CH 1; 1991)

