

1/25/26 - 2 Samuel 4:1-12 - "God Doesn't Need Our Help"

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[0 : 00] Again, that's 2 Samuel chapter 4, verses 1 to 12. A man of Benjamin from Beroth, for Beroth also is counted part of Benjamin.

The Berothites fled to Gideon and have been sojourners there to this day. 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. Now the sons of Reman, the Berothite, Rechab and Baena, set out.

And about the heat of the day, they came to the house of Ish-bosheth as he was taking his noonday rest. And when they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach.

[1 : 24] Then Rechab and Baena, his brother, escaped. 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.

They took his head and went by the way of the Arabah all night and brought his head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron.

And they said to the king, But David answered Rechab and Baena, his brother, the sons of Reman, the Berothite, As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity?

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.

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 this earth?

[2 : 59] 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. This is God's word. Thanks be to God.

Quite a surprising text that we have this morning. And we're continuing our 2 Samuel series, and we've reached quite a gruesome chapter.

I'd like to start us off by saying there's a difference between strength and borrowed strength. There's a difference between strength and borrowed strength.

You see, borrowed strength can look impressive for a while. Things can function. Problems can stay hidden. Systems can kind of hold together in a certain sense.

[4 : 06] And because nothing is obviously wrong, everything looks fine, we assume that everything is fine. However, borrowed strength actually has a weakness.

The moment the source is removed, everything goes wonky. I once heard about an organization that ran smoothly for years.

People assumed that it was well-structured and healthy. What they didn't realize is that almost everything depended upon a single individual.

And he didn't just lead, but he quietly absorbed things. Like, he fixed problems before things surfaced. He made decisions for others because others would avoid them anyhow.

But as long as he was there, things would work out right. But we ought to ask that organization, what happens when he steps away?

[5 : 12] You see, what was exposed in this organization was quite dramatic. And it was subtly dramatic.

The doors stayed open even after he'd left. The work still got done, but within days, there was tension. Small decisions stalled. People began stepping outside their roles just to keep things moving.

And shortcuts were taken. Rules were bent. And almost every questionable decision was justified. They wanted to keep things afloat.

But the problem was they were operating on borrowed strength. And so this exposes not a weakness of an organization, but the weakness of dependence.

And that's not just true for organizations. It's true of hearts. The Bible says that we don't just borrow strength from people to look strong.

[6 : 19] We're actually borrowing righteousness from other people. A facade to put upon ourselves, which means the real danger is actually not collapse, but it's self-deception.

We can look functional. We can look respectable, even faithful, while quietly depending on things that God never intended to carry our weight.

And that's exactly where 2 Samuel chapter 4 is at, and as gruesome as it is. This is what it looks like when a kingdom depends on human strength.

The moment the strong man with the plan is gone, everything unravels. If we want to be honest, it should unravel.

This is what happens when a church quietly organizes itself around a gifted leader rather than shared obedience to Christ. No one plans for collapse.

[7 : 24] No one intends idolatry. But when the leader falls, leaves, or fails, what's exposed is not just instability.

It's how much righteousness had been outsourced to this individual, to a person. And when that illusion of control collapses, people don't simply wait on God.

They reach for substitutes. Another strong man. And what we'll see in this passage, in a simple main point, God's kingdom advances by trust, not control.

Grasping corrupts righteousness. Waiting preserves it. We'll see all this in the passage today. And the sermon title today is God Doesn't Need Our Help.

God Doesn't Need Our Help. I'd like to invite you all to pray with me right now. And we'll dive into the three sections I have this morning.

[8 : 39] And hopefully allow it to be a heart check in our lives. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, we come to you this morning knowing that we can sometimes get our priorities dead wrong.

We can sometimes find ourselves depending on other people to do the work as we borrow their strength for our own use.

It's not only a rebuke to the one who's strong and holding on to all of the control, but it's also to those who allow it to happen.

Father, help us to check our hearts this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. The first section today is seeing a thematic structure.

We see in this first section the exposure of borrowed strength. So in verse 1 we see, When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed.

[10:14] And all Israel was dismayed in verse 1. You see, Ish-bosheth doesn't lose the kingdom in verse 1.

He loses his grip. The text actually literally says his hands became slack. And so the moment that Abner is gone, then this man who had propped him up as Abner did for Ish-bosheth, now Ish-bosheth, his courage collapses.

Not only is this personal, but all Israel is dismayed. This is a geographical dismay and discouragement.

And we see here that just as Ish-bosheth feared Abner, as we saw in previous verses and chapter, we see that when this strong man disappears, fear finds itself rushing in as well.

I mean, picture the scene for a minute. A king with no courage. People with no confidence. No visible strength. No clear plan.

[11:41] No sense of blessing at all. What a low time and collapse for this kingdom. This is not a kingdom on the brink of glory.

This is a kingdom holding its breath, hoping that their neighbors don't realize how fragile they really are. I mean, maybe Ish-bosheth is actually pitiable here, right?

Not because he is innocent, but because his reign has always depended on borrowed strength from Abner. In fact, it's pitiable for anyone who runs on borrowed strength, right?

You see, Ish-bosheth is a king who collapses when his support disappears. And later in the Bible, we'll meet another king whose strength does not fail when everyone leaves him.

In fact, he stands strongest when he is most abandoned. The author reinforces here that reality, almost painful here.

[13:03] When strength remains in the house of Saul, well, we see what that looks like. We see two captains of raiding bands rising up that appear strong.

Two raiders. But not only that, we see Jonathan's son, a crippled child, not even old enough to be of any use.

This is what the nation has on their side. This is the strength that remains. You see, that's it.

That is the future of the kingdom, humanly speaking. The moment the strong man with the plan Abner is gone, everything unravels as it actually should.

This is the same reality a church faces when the entire ministry depends on having the right leader in place, or when competence quietly outweighs character.

[14:13] There's been careful national estimates that suggest that around 2,000 United States Protestant pastors have been disqualified from ministry due to moral or ethical failure in just the last five years.

Most were actually never famous. Most never actually made the news, but every one of them left behind real people with real damage.

It is the same illusion a nation embraces when it believes the future is ultimately secured by the right election result, as we often tragically do in the United States every election year.

Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with a capable leader or having wise representatives, right? God uses means.

God's hope. But for God's people, those things were never meant to be our ultimate hope. They were never meant to be the thing that holds the kingdom together.

[15:42] That hope rests in God alone. Right, church? And when that illusion of control collapses, people don't just simply wait on God.

They start to reach for substitutes of someone comparable that can fill those shoes, which is why Rechab and Baena are not just villains in this story, church.

They're actually mirrors. I'd like to take a look in this second section. That's titled, Doing for God what he never needed.

And we see this in verse 5 all the way to verse 8. We turn to Rechab and Baena, and we have to notice that they are not dismayed at all.

Unlike Ish-bosheth and the nation, these two men are not paralyzed by fear. They are driven. They are decisive. They are calculated and moving.

[16:52] And in fact, they are confident, so confident, so calculated, that soon we will realize that their calculations weren't just practical for the replacement of a king, but they were theological.

You see, these raiders stepped into the vacuum left by Abner. And where others see uncertainty, they see opportunity.

The author's writing here is very deliberate. It's emphatic. You may have noticed that as I read this morning, the story feels as if it was told twice. Well, you're not crazy.

It was. But I want to ask you a question. Maybe it wasn't a mistake. Maybe it was intentional. Maybe it's actually mercy that we need to see in that second telling.

Let's walk through it. In verse 5 through 6, the first quick telling, it's fairly quick. It's restrained. They arrive at Ish-bosheth's house in the heat of the day.

[18:02] The king's resting. They enter under the pretense that they're in to get some wheat, just grabbing some eggs and butter. We'll be back. But under that pretense, they go and they stab him.

And then they escape. And that's it. That's the first account of this story. It happens quickly. It's clean. It's efficient.

And if you are like me, it kind of shocks you. What a shocking read on a Sunday morning as we're snowed in and gathered on the live stream.

It's sort of like out-of-nowhere success that we might think. But maybe that's the author's trap for us. I fell for that trap this week.

Maybe that's a trap. Maybe we need to realize success has a way of quieting our conscience.

[19:05] Because in verse 7, the author retells the story not as a mistake, but possibly for those of us who may be tempted to rationalize what we just heard.

And so the author slows down for a minute. Imagine the cameras kind of moving closer in verse 7. And we see the king is not just resting, but he is on his bed, sleeping, in his bedroom, in his own house.

And also, they didn't just stab him and like merely wound him. They killed him. Also, they didn't just kill him.

They beheaded him. Wow. In other words, there is no way that we can sanitize this act.

This was murder. It was premeditated. It was personal. It was wicked. It's almost as if the author tells the story twice because the first time, we actually might think about justifying it.

[20:30] But the second time the author retells it, he makes sure that we can't. I think we all know what happened the last time that someone acted in justified murder of God's king.

We might remember that encounter with David in chapter 1 and how that ended up. But church, this is really where the text presses us this morning.

Doesn't wickedness at times look acceptable? that we rationalize wickedness once in a while. We rationalize until we slow down a minute and actually begin to tell the truth about our actions.

If we're honest, this isn't just about murder. It's about the way we justify ourselves. I mean, think. Think about parents who lie for their children, excuse what they know is wrong or manipulate outcomes because the future feels too important to them to leave in God's hands.

And we don't call it unrighteousness. A parent might call that love, justified love. But righteousness is corrupted the moment truth becomes negotiable for the sake of results.

[22:02] You might think of it pragmatically. And this can be for anything. It could be for your career or employment at work. It could be for any relationships whether you're married or single.

We have the tendency of doing this to negotiate for the sake of results. And this is where we should examine ourselves very carefully, church.

not because we are tempted to assassinate kings. It's crazy that we live in a day that that is like something so like on the news with all the hatred in our world today.

We examine ourselves not because we're out to assassinate kings or tempted in that matter, but because we are tempted to cross moral lines when obedience feels too slow, or maybe too costly, of worrying about what everyone else around us thinks.

This is where people justify deception, justify manipulation, justify silence or coercion because the outcome feels necessary.

[23:20] We don't call it wickedness, church. We call it wisdom, call it urgency, or we call it responsibility, but we should see that when righteousness becomes negotiable for the sake of results, control has already replaced trust.

And for that, if that is us today, and we know it's us, we must repent. And even myself must repent even at this moment.

This last section, we see trusting God to preserve righteousness. It's almost as if all of these horrible things are leading and pointing to verse 9 through 12.

And it begins in verse 9 with, but David. But David. Two words and everything changes.

After all the grasping, after all the scheming, the violence, these words reframe the entire chapter.

[24:39] David does not respond the way that these men expected. Nor does he celebrate their outcome.

Not this king. This king is not like all the other nations. Instead, this David begins with some theology.

He says, as the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity. David doesn't say, God gave me the kingdom.

He says, God redeemed my life. And this distinction matters. Now, David is not boasting in his position.

He is confessing dependence. He reminds these men that he did not take the kingdom into his own hands. He waited. He trusted.

[25:42] He believed. He did all of that, that God did not need David to fulfill his purposes according to wickedness.

God did not need wickedness to fulfill his purposes. You see, David refuses to build God's kingdom in a way God himself would have to judge.

If it's building his kingdom rightly now, we'll see things get dicey shortly in a couple chapters. And he reaches back into his own history in verse 10.

He reminds him of the Amalekite of chapter 1 that we read, who once stood before David with similar confidence, similar theology, and that man believed the outcome justified the act, just as these two men.

And he believed that killing this imposter, killing the bad guy, would be rewarded. But according to Deuteronomy and the law of God for Israel, he was dead wrong.

[26 : 57] These men are dead wrong. David makes it clear that this is not a new standard. This is not a reaction in the moment.

God's law has always been clear. Murder is never baptized by success. It's wickedness. Wickedness is never excused by results.

There was no justification then with the Amalekite. There's no justification now with these two men. In verse 12, these two raiders who once grasped so confidently now lose their grip entirely.

Actually, just as Ish-bosheth lost his grip in verse one where his hands became slack.

the hands and the feet that carried out this crime were cut off and their bodies hanging dead displayed as a warning and their lives are taken in judgment, righteousness, and righteous judgment.

[28 : 22] this is not David securing his throne or his name, but this is David upholding righteousness, righteousness of God's law.

And in the same breath, Ish-bosheth is honored in burial. even the fallen rival is treated with dignity in David's kingdom that's built on righteousness.

You see, the kingdom moves forward, but not at the expense of righteousness. The moral of the story isn't, well, be righteous.

now, right? It's not about that, but it helps us understand why righteousness is preserved. Why is it preserved, church?

Because of trust. Of trust. Church, God's kingdom does not advance by grasping, nor are God's promises fragile and dependent upon circumstance.

[29 : 44] Obedience often always looks like patient, quiet, trust. And yes, at times, bold and engaged, but we see here through this situation, through David's life, obedience looks like patient, quiet, trust.

It looks like refusing to take shortcuts. It looks like restraining ourselves from sinful impulses. It looks like waiting when the world tells you to act.

And you see, where trust governs the heart, righteousness reigns. God doesn't need our help.

David is not the Savior, but David is the image of faith. David trusted God to give what he could not take, but David still needed redemption.

When David says, the Lord redeemed my life, he's confessing dependence, church. He's not confessing perfection, but dependence.

[31 : 12] But there is a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is greater than David. Not because he trusted better, because Jesus did things right, but, I mean, he did things right, but that's not because he trusted better.

It's because he succeeded where David and all humanity failed. Jesus didn't just refuse to grasp the kingdom, he laid down his life to give sinners a place in it, in his kingdom.

Becoming a Christian is not improving yourself, just being righteous, because we know we are not given a righteousness of our own.

It's because of Christ giving his righteousness to us on account of our faith. We turn from our sin and trust in Jesus Christ.

It's not about improving ourselves. It's saying with David, the Lord redeemed my life. And so that his righteousness, not yours, becomes your standing before God.

[32:28] God doesn't need our help. So what will it be for us, church? Patient trust or grasping control?

One corrupts righteousness, but the other one preserves it. And so the answer is clear. God's kingdom advances by trust, not control.

Because grasping corrupts righteousness, but waiting preserves it. Let's pray.